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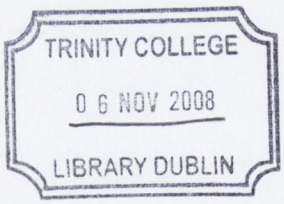
How does the rhetoric of drama shed light on truth and reason in *Hamlet*?

A thesis submitted to the School of English
in the University of Dublin, Trinity College
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Zehanne Kenny



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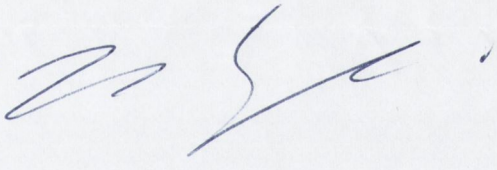
Signed: 

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Summary

This thesis will examine how speech can be used or abused once disembedded from the Judaeo/Christian ontological framework which normally sustained and validated it.

Chapter one looks at speech being used to express, describe and ultimately influence emotion; examples are Polonius' treatment of Ophelia, Claudius' propagandist address to his new court and the ghost's interaction with Hamlet. These manoeuvres seem successful, since Polonius achieves as much control over his daughter as Claudius over the court and Hamlet readily agrees to become an avenger, making a series of promises, in a semi-incantatory attempt to bind his future self to the task. These promises, like much of the ghost's speech are replete with religious references and imagery, although neither speaker demonstrates any adherence to the spirit of Christianity. (Also examined is Gertrude's "if it be" which recurs as a thematically influential leitmotif throughout the play). Finally the surreal oath swearing conclusion to act one will be discussed in the light of a subversive technique, whereby Shakespeare deliberately mocks the solemnity of what has gone before, foreshadowing, I believe, his treatment of the play's ending.

Chapter two concentrates on the 'sullied flesh' (I.ii.129) and 'To be' (III.i.56) soliloquies, as the former contains, embryonically, many of the preoccupations which inform, not only the latter soliloquy but a great deal of the play's thematic substructure. Hamlet is seen as a vehicle designed to embody Shakespeare's investigative strategy, and is compared to the hero of the earlier *Everyman*, arguing that although both characters eventually abandon soliloquising, Everyman's ultimate fate is far more clearly defined than Hamlet's. In 'To be' the dozen to sixteen lines for insertion to 'The Mousetrap' are, I suggest, being considered, but soon the speech evolves into a stream of unconstrained speculation, as reason searches for truth in the absence of the Judaeo/Christian background which would have provided answers to major questions regarding life, death and morality.

Chapter three examines two views of theatre's value, the first aims at morally improving the audience, but is undermined by juxtaposition with a great deal of highly subjective, attitudinal material, revealing Hamlet as a university rather than a universal man. The second view, voiced by the player King, suggests representation rather than ethically enhancing life is theatre's role. The player King also makes a speech which ironically Hamlet will utter in modified form by act five. Thus the author of "some dozen to sixteen lines" (which we never actually hear) will be deeply influenced by a speech of almost the same length. This can be seen as analogous to the older mystery and morality play strategy of personifying certain mental and moral attributes, which, in Hamlet's case are reassimilated, and re-externalized verbally.

Chapter four examines the prayer and closet scenes. In the former, Claudius is depicted as a truly fascinating sinner whose entrapment within the constraints of an orthodox world-view

prevent him reasoning himself out of his dilemna. He has broken the rules to which he subscribes, hence his faith seems less a matter of free will than an awareness of inescapable and negative judgement. He distorts the entire ethical framework upon which religion rests, being unable to apprehend any positive or comforting aspects of faith, merely writhing in torments of self-condemnation. In the closet scene Hamlet manages to produce a disciplined if misogynistic harangue designed to convert Gertrude into a compliant, rather than informed, ally. The killing of Polonius is even woven into his hyperbolic rant, as be becomes the self-ordained "scourge and minister" of Elsinore.

Chapter five contrasts the "non-sense" of Ophelia's madness with the deliberate "nonsense" of Hamlet's antic-disposition. Ophelia's speeches do not show possession of a voice with which to articulate her situation, and use much material which she verbalizes without customizing. Her madness is foreshadowed in her description of Hamlet's clandestine closet visit, and the text of a letter which he allegedly wrote, both seen as products of her fantasy. Later, during her mad scenes she does achieve originality as her utterances, due to their idiosyncratic patchwork construction, come to represent something which is creatively and autobiographically appropriate.

Unlike in *Hamlet*'s sources, the antic disposition makes little strategic sense, and provides Claudius with a legitimate reason to exile Hamlet. I suggest an alternative rationale which leads to parallels with the vice or fool figure of traditional mystery and morality plays and is set against the refusal of Claudius to interact or even spar verbally, instead remaining totally within the dramatic boundaries of the playworld, as do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who, it will be argued are more servile than vile.

The last chapter examines the enigma of a Hamlet who ceases soliloquising after his surreal encounter with the gravediggers, seen as a parodic version of the medieval 'Dance of Death', albeit without the traditional accompaniment of a call to repentance. Also, rather than twisting and contradicting the speech of his adversaries, his interactional strategy amounts to augmentation, not subversion. The leitmotif originally introduced by Gertrude is reiterated, even permed, in an incantatory fashion, which I argue, represents Hamlet's attempt to somehow verbally solve, or at least suppress the potentially terrifying mysteries which were activated by "To be'. The *Everyman* comparison highlights Hamlet's lacking any of the constraints or comforts orthodoxy would have provided.

A close examination of the punctuation in Hamlet's final utterances raises some issues regarding the status of truth and reason, and how Shakespeare uses the rhetoric of drama to illumine and interrogate both, and leads to a consideration of possible future work, seeing the themes of *Hamlet* as continuing and being partly resolved in *King Lear* and *The Tempest*.

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and

Mum and Dad

(who occasionally ask me what exactly I'm doing in college?)

To Amanda

Introduction

The initial proposal for this thesis centred on the relationship between thought, reason and speech, tracing the ways in which the last is interrogated throughout the play, portrayed as an inadequate mode of communication. Among the main reasons for this are dissimilarities in the perceptions of speaker and hearer, which Shakespeare deliberately exploits, especially when Hamlet plays word games with the other characters, largely to the latters' detriment. Ghose[1] provides an insightful survey of exactly this theme.

Hamlet's eloquence, however, was seen by some as largely misguided, despite its brilliance, which, as Margolies points out,[2] often involves the stylistic, rather than semantic contradiction of his victims. In soliloquies he pursues a tortuous linguistic route, articulating thought's process rather than its product, and constructing a complex but ultimately self-deluding portrayal of reality and his relationship to it. As Calderwood notes[3], Hamlet creates an audience for himself within the framework of his discourse becoming, in Belsey's terms, the subject of both enunciation and utterance.[4]

As C.S. Lewis demonstrates,[5] words are powerful and ambiguous entities capable of producing illusions of order and rationality, often setting up resonances which are virtually impossible to negate or even diminish. That this is so could be attributed to humanity's fallen state, a key issue in Shakespeare's time, when, as Shapiro notes, theatre was filling a cultural vacuum previously occupied by Roman Catholic ritual and worship.[6] Battenhouse and Sims have commented on the quantity of religious material available to lay readers[7] and Noble on the abundance of doctrinally

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[1] Zulfikar Ghose, *Shakespeare's Mortal Knowledge : A Reading Of The Tragedies* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1993).

[2] David Margolies, *Monsters of the Deep : Social Dissolution in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 45.

[3] James L. Calderwood, *To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in Hamlet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 156.

[4] Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy : Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen and Co., 1985), 48.

[5] C.S. Lewis, "Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?", Annual Shakespeare Lecture of the British Academy, 1942, in *Notes on Hamlet*, ed. David Philips (London: Ginn and Co., 1969).

[6] James Shapiro, *1599 A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 171.

[7] Roy W. Battenhouse, *Shakespearean Tragedy : its art and its Christian premises* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1969), 380; James H. Sims, *Dramatic Uses of Biblical Allusions in Marlowe and Shakespeare*, University of Florida Monographs, No.24 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966), 77; see also Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2005), 52, Peter Milward S.J., The *Medieval Dimension in Shakespeare's Plays* (Lewiston, New York:

related references in the Shakespeare canon, which are more subtly introduced in the later plays.[8] As Chaudhuri observes,[9] Roman Catholic and Protestant alike were dealing with very similar preoccupations, and in fact coming to similar conclusions, rendering the Renaissance a time of great expansion in outlook, but also of deep pessimism regarding humanity's capabilities.[10]

Bearing this in mind it seemed appropriate to ask what role speech – the fallen tool of a fallen species – could play in the quest for salvation.

My argument was to have been that speech did indeed play a crucial role because it revealed the limitations of human reason – a lesson necessary for the individual to learn as a prerequisite for achieving the humility that allows grace to operate on the soul.

The method Shakespeare uses to demonstrate this maturational process is his portrayal of Hamlet gradually coming to a realisation that the truths which lead to salvation transcend any human ability to understand or express them verbally. I see this as taking place through a series of developmental stages which must be negotiated before a final level of awareness is reached. These stages are documented throughout the play in the form of a metaphysical subtext which forms an interactive commentary on the action of the play.

Such an argument would examine various techniques used by Shakespeare in exploring the relationship between consciousness, notions of the 'self' and speech in *Hamlet*. As Collins has observed,[11] 'self' as socially constructed and hierarchically realised, was current in the sixteenth century. Speech maintains this stratification, so that knowledge, as Belsey points out,[12] utimately becomes a means to reach God as the highest point of this structure, and reality depends on a system of learned discourses which constrains one's reality and endows it with meaning.[13] Margolies has noted that

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The Edward Mellen Press Ltd., 1990), and Milward, *The Catholicism of Shakespeare's Plays* (Southampton: The St. Austin Press, 1997).

[8] Richmond Noble, *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge and Use of the Book of Common Prayer : as exemplified in the plays of the First folio* (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1935), 41.

[9] Sukanta Chaudhuri, *Infirm Glory : Shakespeare and the Renaissance Image of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 50.

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] Stephen L. Collins, *From Divine Cosmos to Sovereign State : An Intellectual History of Consciousness and the Idea of Orders in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 24.

[12] Belsey (1985). 56.

[13] Ibid., 65.

alterations in such a system often preceded the current verbal methods of articulation[14] and, as Hanson argues, the changes come about as individuals are forced to transcend verbal barriers in order to negotiate novel situations successfully. The resultant alterations in speech therefore precede the linguistic apparatus which would be needed to codify and analyze them.[15]

Hamlet seems the perfect microcosmic exemplar of exactly this process, as he displays what amounts to a psychological exoskeleton, uttering great, but at times undisciplined, streams of soliloquy,[16] and indulging in puns, ambiguities and riddles, plus numerous classical and theological references.[17] All of this needs to be examined in the light of my stated conclusion, giving particular attention to identifying alterations in words which have occurred since Shakespeare was writing, and using both quartos and the folio to make appropriate comparisons and lessen the danger of retrospective misinterpretation.

Act one, scene five was to have provided an introduction to the themes of spirituality and intellect which recur throughout the play. The point of entry was to have been via the persona of the ghost, a figure whose ontological status remains mysterious, since although no longer alive he wields the power of speech and can therefore exert an influence over the living; Bowers[18] highlights the fact that only God can release a spirit from a place of confinement, such as hell or purgatory, and therefore the mission he entrusts to Hamlet must be divinely sanctioned.[19] Conversely, as McGee points out,[20] the stricture "Vengeance is mine" applies to ghosts as much as to the living, therefore Hamlet's father, like Hamlet himself, can be seen as an idiosyncratic occupant of the play's world, overstepping yet inadequately occupying their roles. As Greenblatt notes, the very origins of this particular spirit are deeply uncertain,[21] and like

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[14] Margolies, 62-4.

[15] Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

[16] Ackroyd, 374; see also Alex Newell, *The Soliloquies in Hamlet: the Structural Design* (London: Associated University Press, 1991), 19.

[17] Wolfgang Clemen, "The Imagery of Hamlet" in *Shakespeare: Hamlet, a Casebook* ed. John Davies Jump (London: Macmillan, 1986), 64-5; Calderwood, 128; Phyllis Gorfain, "Towards a Theory of the Carnivalesque in Hamlet." in Donald Keesey ed., *Contexts for Criticism* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1994), 307; Margaret W. Ferguson, "Hamlet: Letters and Spirits" in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* eds. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 293.

[18] Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1959), 15.

[19] Ibid., 43.

[20] Arthur MacGee, *The Elizabethan Hamlet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 23.

[21] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 102.

the spirits in Macbeth, he seems to exist partly as an adjunct to the heroes' own desires[22] – a concept I initially took as evidence of a symbolic function, making him a powerful yet unstable device for providing a linkage to the play's spiritual and intellectual domains, as mentioned above.

Hamlet himself, as Barker argues, lacks a fully fleshed-out subjectivity[23] - again a fact I initially accepted, partly because as Maus observes,[24] the whole modern concept of subjectivity was simply not analogous to that current in Shakespeare's time, and partly because Hamlet to my thinking represents yet another powerful and unstable device – a 'type' specifically constructed by Shakespeare for the exegetical purposes of the play. Hamlet's antic disposition furnishes a prime example of Shakespeare's experimental forcing of speech to perform in unconventional ways, overturning accepted communication models and introducing the question of whether speech can, in some sense, function independently of either speaker or hearer. This, at first, seemed a more plausible rationale for the whole antic scenario, since, as Greenblatt notes, it makes no real sense in terms of the plot, unlike the sense it makes in Shakespeare's sources, and seems instead a deliberate use of "strategic opacity" designed to serve aesthetic rather than logical ends.[25] Previous attempts to confer some acceptable explanatory framework for its inclusion include; a necessary emotional outlet for Hamlet,[26] a route to enlightenment via folly[27] or a search for truth.[28] Coupled with my reading of the play as a verbal experiment, all of these could be accommodated and allied to Ophelia's version of antic behaviour – behaviour which, with Ghose,[29] I took to have emerged embryonically earlier in the play, as she manufactures Hamlet's highly implausible and stereotypically romance genre closet visit and love letter. I see Ophelia's mad scenes as forming part of an ongoing investigation into whether speech

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[22] John S. Wilks, *The Idea of Conscience in Renaissance Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), 101, 127-8.

[23] Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body : Essays On Subjection* (London: Methuen and Co., 1984), 37-8.

[24] Katherine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and the English Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3.

[25] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World : How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004), 324.

[26] John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 92; T.S. Eliot, "Essays of Generalisation. 1918 – 1930: Hamlet," in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 49.

[27] Willard Farnham, *The Shakespearean Grotesque : Its Genesis and Transformations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 152.

[28] Peter Mercer, *Hamlet and the Acting of Revenge* (London: Macmillan, 1987). 180.

[29] Ghose, 54-5.

can be made to carry enough meaning to persuade the listeners that they are in the presence of rational thought, although in Ophelia's case this is patently not the case.

In the same way that Hamlet could be read as a microcosmic exemplar of how fallen man struggles to articulate and comprehend his reality, so 'conscience' seemed the ideal choice for a word which encapsulated this procedure, due to its now largely obsolete supplementary meaning 'consciousness'. It seemed plausible to question how the two notions interacted and how this interaction was verbally mediated. One instance of the word's usage occurs in the 'To be' soliloquy: "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all" (III.i.83). Most modern editors gloss this as meaning 'consciousness', but, it could be asked, why would Shakespeare not have merely chosen a less ambiguous term if he had wished to curtail the potential exploitability of the utterance?

Wilks has treated the subject of conscience in Renaissance drama at length, and, while acknowledging the wealth of useful material he provides, I take issue with his concentration on only the moral sense of the word. Bradley, however, accords with him[30] and R.M. Frye[31] points out that the contemporary idea of conscience was unlike the modern one, which seems to present its views to awareness automatically. In Shakespeare's day conscience had to be accessed voluntarily and rigorously by anyone seeking its advice.

Hamlet and his conscience were to have driven and dominated my original thesis, culminating in a crucial reading of act five, where we lose the sub-textual accompaniment of Hamlet's soliloquies and the insight they provided to his inner life.[32] (Additionally his verbal subversion technique is usurped by the grave digger, a figure Farnham sees as death personified.[33]) Shortly thereafter, Hamlet announces himself as "the Dane" accepting an integrated role within the confines of Elsinore's political system as its scourge and minister, and finally setting about the task of destroying Claudius.[34]

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[30] A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy,* 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1961), 77.

[31] Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance 'Hamlet': Issues and Responses in 1600* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 180.

[32] Maurice Charney, *Hamlet's Fictions* (London: Routledge, 1988), 75; Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Tragic Imagination* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1992), 58; Ronald Levao, *Renaissance Minds and their Fictions : Cusanus, Sidney, Shakespeare* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 356.

[33] Farnham, 116.

[34] Levao, 359.

Based on this reading, I ultimately saw the play as optimistic. Hamlet, like *Everyman* leaving off soliloquizing and turning to prayer,[35]dies firmly back in the fold from which speculation had caused him to stray,[36] and achieves that unity of spirit and purpose which Berry[37] sees epitomised in the phrase "to say 'one'" (V.ii.74). The larger message, for humanity in general, would seem to be that we are not left alone to face the ambiguity and irrationality of existence armed only with our inferior reason,[38] but are upheld and underwritten by a providential scheme created and maintained by the will of God[39] – albeit a scheme unknowable to, and inexpressible by, God's creatures.

Problems began to appear when the stage was reached of erecting this tidy hypothetical edifice over Shakespeare's play. It is a philosophical truism that foremost in any enquiry, formulating the right question is paramount. The original thesis seemed, on reflection, to have concerned itself with questions generated outside of the play, and consequently with answers which were equally external. Accordingly, the next strategy was to search the text and allow it to generate its own controversies.

The result of this revised approach was a *Hamlet* which seemed indeed to pose questions – but not necessarily to suggest how they might be resolved. In order to comprehend Shakespeare's design fully it was important to query whether or not he could be seen as concurring with contemporary orthodoxy.[40] My initial reading had relied totally on a Shakespeare whose experiments were certainly with speech – but which operated very firmly within the Judaeo/Christian framework, coloured and constrained by its tenets, and concluding in an orthodox view of transcendence leading to salvation. The text, supportive of certain aspects of my thesis, failed to provide evidence for the overall design. One criticism I found particularly interesting was Margolies' repeated insistence that Shakespeare tried and failed in *Hamlet* to *show* that which he had instead to spell out laboriously.[41] Provocative though this position undoubtedly is, it also seems a sophisticated version of condemning the misunderstood. It is far likelier that Shakespeare is trying and largely succeeding in experimentally

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[35] Richard Hillman, *Self-Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama : Subjectivity, Discourse and the Stage* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 46-7.
[36] Belsey (1985), 41; Barker, 40.
[37] Francis Berry, *The Shakespearean Inset : Word and Picture* (London: Routledge, 1965), 62.
[38] Collins, 24.
[39] Wilks, 123-4, 265.
[40] Newell, 54.
[41] Margolies, 52, 64.

pushing speech to its logical limits and beyond in a variety of test situations – all within the circumference of the main experiment which is the play itself.

Hodges' work on published anatomies in sixteenth-century England[42] suggested a way of seeing *Hamlet* as a dissecting device for unpacking contemporary preconceptions in order to open the debate about the scope and limits of speech when speech is no longer subject to the constraints or justifications of orthodoxy. Truth, according to this way of reading the play, seemed far more an invention of human reason than something awaiting discovery and acceptance. Further, once this 'truth' was manufactured, speech was required in order to maintain its existence. Similarly, the religion present in the play could be seen as arbitrarily summoned – and dismissed – in line with particular characters' momentary needs. Scriptural and clerical allusions spill freely from the mouths of Hamlet and the ghost, without, as Battenhouse points out, any evidence of adherence to their spirit.[43]

The ghost in fact seems fixated at the level of what Ghose describes as his own "petty vanity",[44] and seems incapable of any genuine love for Gertrude[45] instead speaking as one obsessed with the "incestuous" violation of his chattel.[46] Also – with Greenblatt[47] it must be noted that Gertrude apparently loves her second husband enough to protect him physically from the vengeful Laertes. Claudius himself, rather than a figure of one-dimensional evil, is depicted as a complex and brilliant man,[48] who, although unable to pray genuinely,[49] or envisage any goods higher than those earthly ones for which he killed his brother, may, we feel, be hoping that a sincere deathbed repentance will save him from hellfire,[50] while Hamlet, watching him try to pray, has to use a formulaic investigation in logic in order to understand the word 'revenge'.[51] As both Kernan[52] and Levao[53] have noted, Shakespeare often undermines by juxtaposition,

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[42] Devon L. Hodges, *Renaissance Fictions of Anatomy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).
[43] Battenhouse, 243-4.
[44] Ghose, 19-20.
[45] Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), 113.
[46] Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, 2nd ed. (London: Abacus, 1983), 147.
[47] Greenblatt (2004), 137.
[48] A.P. Rossiter, *Angels with Horns* (London: Longman, 1961), 184.
[49] Battenhouse, 243-4.
[50] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars : Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 341.
[51] Ghose, 49.
[52] Alvin B. Kernan, *The Playwright as Magician : Shakespeare's Image of the Poet in the English Public Theater* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 109.
[53] Levao, 367.

thus many apparently orthodox statements are framed by ironic and contradictory material. Hamlet for one does not behave in accord with his spoken principles,[54] and his attack on Gertrude during the closet scene, for all its Biblical borrowings, emerges as an hysterical and misogynistic rant.[55] All of this suggests that Shakespeare is standing back – in a moral sense – from his material and allowing an almost organic impetus to carry it beyond the scope of contemporary doctrinal positions.

The 'To be' soliloquy, thus read, seems like a collection of the kind of speculations which an adventurous but unorthodox stance might well pose.[56] In Calderwood's term "To be *and* not to be"[57] describes the uncertainty of a mind armed with superb intelligence – as it gropes toward comprehending the great mysteries of life, death and the position of the individual with regard to the cosmos. My interpretation of this material is that Hamlet, attempting to compose "some dozen to sixteen lines" for insertion in 'The Mousetrap' is placing himself in the position of Lucianus – assassin and pagan – and in so doing, opens whole vistas of potentiality. Throughout the play I am able to trace this expansion of awareness by means of a leitmotif – 'To be' summoned as a quasi-incantatory device in various permutations and used as an antidote to the fears aroused in the soliloquy.

The word 'conscience' no longer seems pivotal to this revised reading and in fact, the locus of interest now resides in the whole notion of playing and of how drama's rhetoric illumines the notions of truth and reason within the play. As Mercer observes,[58] the Hamlet of act one makes an elaborately theatrical display of his mourning, then goes on to create an aesthetic object out of his inner turmoil.[59] Hamlet's own speech on the subject of acting seems inadequate as a representation of Shakespeare's own views, being, as Marcus observes, both narrow and elitist.[60] Shakespeare seems rather to be investigating possible roles for theatre, which besides Hamlet's classically influenced views, include those of the player King in 'The Mousetrap'. This latter view – of drama as a means of representing life – was

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[54] Louis Adrian Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing : Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43
[55] Mercer, 150, 197, 205.
[56] C.S. Lewis (1969), 126.
[57] Calderwood, 197.
[58] Mercer, 144.
[59] Chaudhuri, 136.
[60] Leah S. Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance : Shakespeare, Marlowe and Milton* (London: Routledge, 1996), 13; Montrose, 42.

contemporarily current[61] and seems, on consideration, to voice an alternative but not necessarily superior position. However, it seems possible that Shakespeare is experimentally utilizing the mechanics of an older tradition, one current before theatre left off using external personifications of vices, virtues and specific mental attributes in order to situate drama within the minds of the characters themselves.[62] This technique, which allows a limited if loquacious perspective to emerge is, I believe, evidenced by the player King in 'The Mousetrap' uttering a speech which Hamlet will paraphrase in act five, having attained a level of awareness not demonstrated previously. As Colie notes, philosophy in this play is translated into behaviour and back into words.[63] In this light it is plausible to go even as far as Calderwood and see the play as a whole dramatizing the creative process itself.[64]

Returning to the mystery and morality play tradition, Weimann's work[65] provides an erudite avenue linking *Hamlet* to this older genre, casting new light on the vice/folly figure and suggesting a plausible if surreal framing device whereby Hamlet appears as a highly sophisticated trickster, with connotations of the "solitary man" which Dillon identifies as his successor.[66] This role enables Hamlet to cavort on-stage in a way which, as Weimann notes, can easily be mistaken for mere comic relief[67] (although in certain aspects, 'comic' seems inadequate to describe Hamlet's pranks – for example his vice-like gloating over the body of Polonius).[68] This role also gives Hamlet the freedom to step repeatedly outside of Elsinore's cramped reality in order to comment,[69] and, when necessary, to distance himself from even this antically dispositional mode,[70] thus suggesting the even more radical departure of leaving the audience's own Judaeo/Christian schema. This seems to go far beyond the scope of traditional vice and fool figures who certainly addressed the audience directly – but not from a position outside orthodoxy. As Danby observes,[71] these traditional plays could

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[61] Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 60-76.
[62] Belsey (1985), 43.
[63] Rosalie L. Colie, *Shakespeare's Living Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 240,
[64] Calderwood, 158.
[65] Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition in the Theater* ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
[66] Janette Dillon, *Shakespeare and the Solitary Man* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 59.
[67] Weimann (1978), 20.
[68] Levao, 354.
[69] Weimann (1978), 150; Joan Rees, *Shakespeare and the Story : Aspects Of Creation* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), 222.
[70] Weimann (1978), 132.
[71] John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear* (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), 18.

not represent change or growth, since however ingeniously their protagonists made the journey from beginning to conclusion, an orthodox framework was maintained throughout. I decided that 'evolving psychomachia' might thus be appropriate to describe *Hamlet*'s category, since its hero remains in a dynamically unstable situation for most of the play.

A shift of perspective occurs in act five as previously noted, when Hamlet encounters the gravediggers, becomes the victim of a trickster and abandons both soliloquies and subversion. His subsequent sparring with Laertes and Osric, as Grene notes,[72] are certainly in antic and anarchic mode, but, I believe, represent augmentation rather than subversion of their words, as though Hamlet seeks to engage with the playworld instead of undermining it.

My original reading of a Hamlet who transcends speech remains accurate, then, but not my initial perception of this transcended goal. Comparisons with *Everyman* seem valid up to a point, but Hamlet's ultimate fate is, in contrast, far less clearly defined. I fail to find any sense of good closure in the play's ending, since it seems cut-off rather than completed and as Bloom says, "There is an end to *Hamlet* but not to Hamlet."[73] Hillman queries whether suicidal fatalism might be a more appropriate term than transcendence for the dying hero's state of mind,[74] and Levao highlights the fact that Hamlet's final preoccupation seems concerned with the danger of leaving a "wounded name"[75] rather than making provision for the state of his soul. (This is a preoccupation which, as Calderwood laments, will be served by Horatio's inferior version of the story).[76]

Charney sees Hamlet's questions in act five as being radically different from those he struggled with previously, [77] and it is with this aspect I wish to make my final comment – as Keast[78] has said, speaking of *King Lear* but in a way totally applicable to *Hamlet*, the philosophical yield of the play, extracted from the overall body, is meagre; yet this is not an appropriate criterion by which to judge, because we are dealing with an experimental artwork, not a philosophical treatise. The artwork has, in my opinion,

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[72] Grene, 58.
[73] Bloom (2003), 120.
[74] Richard Hillman, *Shakespearean Subversions : The Trickster and the Play-Text.* (London: Routledge, 1992), 184.
[75] Levao, 361.
[76] Calderwood, xii.
[77] Charney, 74.
[78] William R. Keast, "The 'New Criticism'" in *Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1945-2000* ed. Ross MacDonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 75.

concluded where the next phase of the experiment will begin, a theme I will return to and elaborate on in my conclusion.

Chapter 1

Order, language and power: the manipulation of intellect and emotion by speech.

> There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.[1]
>
> I do not know, my lord, what I should think. (I.ii.104)[2]

During the Renaissance the notion of order was viewed as a status quo, and an eminently desirable one. The very term order referred to a universe ordained and maintained in accordance with a divine plan. Disorder, in contrast, as Collins notes: "...was unnatural. It was merely a negation of what was good and natural and had no definable existence of its own."[3] This notion could be applied to both society and the individual, so that "A virtuous soul was an ordered soul; a corrupt soul was disordered or diseased."[4] In *Hamlet*, however, these concepts are enigmatically obscure. For example, one important locus of order in the play is the family, yet those families depicted seem to operate according to strictly Foucauldian power/knowledge lines, as will be illustrated by examining the interaction of Polonius and Ophelia. Another source of order is the apparent Golden Age of Old Hamlet's reign. However, his ghost is presented as one of the figures Vickers refers to as "subversive, anarchic, or – in that aestheticization of disorder mechanically borrowed from Bakhtin – 'carnivalesque' characters."[5] Certainly his appearance heralds the onset of surreality within the play, as witnessed by the bizarre oath swearing scene to which Hamlet insists the others submit. Order and disorder, therefore, in act one, are as "wild and whirling" as Hamlet's words to Horatio. (Order, it might be noted, would seem to be that version of the status quo which Claudius is responsible for, a version which legitimized his taking control of

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[1] Michel Foucault, "Discipline and Punish", in *Shakespeare, the Critical Heritage 1623-1801*, ed. Brian Vickers (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 276, note 53.
[2] All references to *Hamlet* apart from those to the "three text" version are from Harold Jenkins ed., *Hamlet.* The Arden Shakespeare (London and New York: Methuen, 1982) (2nd series).
[3] Collins, 24.
[4] Ibid., 23.
[5] Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare : Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 221.

Elsinore and maintaining that control, suborning the entire mechanism of the judicial system, and apparently, the hearts and minds of the court.)

The ghost looks like Old Hamlet, who, according to his son, was a paragon of regal virtue. The ghost's speeches however, are a mean and manipulative parody of this ideal, and, since no objective means of judging the late King is provided, a sense of uneasiness is effectively created. Some, at least, of this uncertainty might be resolved by trying to ascribe some place of origin to this tormented and tormenting figure.

One concept which the appearance of the ghost suggests is that of Purgatory, where, according to Catholic doctrine, souls were temporarily detained, sometimes for hundreds of years, while the sins of their earthly lives were purged or cleansed. However, 'temporarily' does indicate that, unlike Hell, the torments endured were not permanent, and, in fact, could be mitigated by the prayerful efforts of those left behind. The notion of Purgatory can thus be seen to function as a highly effective method of consolation for both the bereaved and those for whom the thoughts of death, and possible damnation, were a terrifying prospect.

Greenblatt attributes the lasting appeal of this doctrine to the fact that it had "...institutional control over ineradicable folk beliefs"[6] and, crucially, that it engaged with feelings, such as guilt, over the way one had treated or mis-treated a departed friend or family member, which, due to this doctrine, could be partly assuaged by reciting prayers, or having masses said for them.

Those responsible for the initiation and maintenance of the purgatorial tradition were not, according to Greenblatt, propounding a doctrine so much as "...shaping and colonizing the imagination."[7] Their detailed descriptions of the place constituted "...a set of instructions for fashioning an image of the afterworld."[8] Once this image was fashioned, it could involve a whole range of associated attitudes and beliefs. Purgatory, then, could be seen as a temporary location, a place where the soul is purified, leading to the final paradisical fitness.[9]

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[6] Greenblatt (2001), 102.
[7] Ibid., 85.
[8] Ibid., 88.
[9] Duffy lists some of the venial sins which could condemn a soul to Purgatory: "All who had forgotten or concealed such sins in confession, all who had not yet fulfilled every part of the penance imposed in confession for sins repented, confessed and absolved, all who had insufficient penance imposed on them by over-indulgent confessors, all who fell short of that fullness of charity which lay at the root of salvation..." (Duffy, 341).

It must be remembered, however, that England at the time of *Hamlet's* composition was a Protestant country, whereas the purgatorial system was a Catholic doctrine. Jones concedes this fact, but observes that, despite the removal of most outward symbols of Catholicism "...inward mental habits, unanalysed assumptions which were part of the older order, would surely give way far more slowly. They would survive as forms and patterns of thought and feeling, a largely unconscious and unfocussed inheritance from pre-Reformation England."[10] He goes on to claim that in drama, this undercurrent of popular psychology becomes even more important, since, in order to work at all, drama "...must establish a more or less instantly recognizable relation to traditional expected forms; however innovative in detail, it must in essence work through a modification of what is already known."[11] Shapiro refers to new cultural forms, helping to fill the vacuum inevitably left by the withdrawal of "...the sights and sounds of the old communal celebration."[12]

Dramatists, therefore, could be expected, directly or by allusion, to avail themselves of this repertoire of iconography which would reliably evoke much of the pre-Reformation inheritance, juxtaposing, as Shakespeare does, elements of the old order with much that is radically innovative. For example, it can be seen, as McGee notes, that in the minds of any Christian audience there was an awareness of the Divine stricture "Vengeance is mine". "Ghosts were subject to it as much as men – and there was no disagreement between Protestant and Catholic on this central issue."[13]

The ghost in *Hamlet* carries connotations of the older morality tradition, where the location of Hell was underneath the stage. Purgatory had few antecedents in English theatre, and its novelty value adds to the ghost's ambiguity, apparent from act one, scene one of the play,[14] to which I will now turn.

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[10] Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 33.

[11] Ibid., 37. See also Ackroyd, who mentions ecclesiastical vestments being sold to the players after the Reformation (Ackroyd, 346).

[12] Shapiro, 171.

[13] McGee, 4.

[14] Ibid., 23. Bowers sees the situation as more complex. He notes that although "the Elizabethans firmly believed the law of God to forbid private vengeance," there also existed "a very real tradition existing in favour of revenge under certain circumstances." These include revenge for dishonourable murders – when one's victim lay sleeping for example, or revenge for a crime which like Claudius' was difficult to prove, and indeed, since Claudius now held the reins of government, difficult if not impossible to bring before any legal body (Bowers (1959), 40). There were also national exceptions to the official anti-revenge stance. Gardner notes that, in 1584, thousands of Englishmen signed the 'Bond of Association'. This Bond obliged them, under oath, to agree that, should any attack be made upon Queen Elizabeth, they would do their utmost to destroy not only the attacker but also anyone who stood to benefit by Elizabeth's death. Helen Gardner, "The Historical Approach to *Hamlet,*" in *Shakespeare: Hamlet, a Casebook*, ed. John Davies Jump (London: Macmillan, 1986), 138.

This opening of the play has been rightly praised by Eliot, who notes that the initial twenty or so lines are simple, even homely. Thus, Eliot claims, something so "transparent" as this scene could only occur after a long playwriting apprenticeship. "You are consciously attending, not to the poetry, but to the meaning of the poetry… in the immediate impact of this scene we are unconscious of the medium of its expression." He compares it to a musical design, which "…has checked and accelerated the pulse of our emotion without our knowing it."[15]

The interaction which takes place between the soldiers is, indeed, a paragon of economical information exchange, and as Lewis observes, with regard to writing in general: "If we do justice to the complexity, the time the reader must take over the passage will destroy the feeling of suddenness. If we get in the suddenness we shall not be able to get in the complexity."[16]

It might be argued that, in the opening of the scene, suddenness abounds, and justice is indeed done to it, but there is not very much complexity. The large amounts of complex information will come later, when, for example, Horatio explains the meaning of war-like preparations throughout the land. This is so, but it is also the case that in order to lure the audience into the playworld, a great deal of relevant information must be conveyed in this deceptively simple opening. Ghose, for example, sees an all-important theme, that of communication by speech as a cure for ignorance, being established at this moment: "From the beginning of *Hamlet*, there is a cry for answers to mysteries."[17]

Despite this verbal emphasis, as Jacobus notes, there is also detectable an emphasis on words related to vision – although this is easier to spot when reading the text, rather than seeing the play in performance: "There are just short of twenty references to eyes, sight, watch, and seeing in the ninety-eight lines beginning with the entrance of Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo in I.ii.159."[18]

Seeing and sight could plausibly stand as metaphors for gaining knowledge and understanding, for solving or penetrating mysteries. Mystery and darkness are easily linked, as are light and enlightenment. Barker, in fact, comments on a darkness which pervades the play as a whole: "In *Hamlet* social life is a succession of brightly lit tableaux set against black backgrounds." He sees this as evidence of a

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[15] Eliot, 135-6.
[16] C.S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 314.
[17] Ghose, 3.
[18] Lee A. Jacobus, *Shakespeare and the Dialectic of Certainty* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 81.

meaninglessness, a void consistently present below "...the surface of signification itself."[19] Interestingly, as Ghose observes, this visual orientation changes, and becomes one of hearing once Hamlet and the ghost have actually begun talking in I.v. "...including the obvious reference to the poison poured into the elder Hamlet's ear."[20]

I will return to this later, but for the moment will concentrate on the first scene, and look at Ghose's remark about "a cry for answers to mysteries". One of the problems about seeking to answer mysteries is the use of words themselves. Mysteries may be, in fact usually are, word-independent or word-transcendent, unlike riddles, which are artificial mysteries, made up of words. The words refer to a world beyond themselves, but, essentially, a world translated into manageable terms. The answer to a riddle can be similarly circumscribed. The riddle's 'mystery' abides in nothing more than a combination of words, whose answer can be quite satisfactorily expressed in those words.

Real life mysteries are more elusive. The mystery of death, for example, is not going to be solved or eliminated by words, although words can and do have roles to play, such as being used to administer and receive the sacraments – those last rites which the ghost claims were denied him due to the manner of his death (I.v.76-9). Purgatory can also be seen as a way in which words are used, a means whereby those whose sins were not properly dealt with can have them removed, even after death, a procedure assisted, as already mentioned, by having the living recite prayers or have Masses said on their behalf.

The question to ask is, whether a mystery requires translation into words before becoming soluble. One answer might be, that yes, it does, that a mystery can be shown to exist, in a non-verbal sense, but it must undergo the rigorous transformation, the taming of its disorder, which only codification into some verbal form can effect. This then would seem a plausible answer to the question, one which would appeal to anyone who possesses a disciplined mind. Words without philosophical method are not sufficient to transform mystery; only disciplined words can do that. However, it is now becoming apparent that, in the absence of discipline, the attempt to solve mysteries by way of verbalization could well fail, and fail in a most spectacular way, i.e. by creating even more mysteries.

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[19] Barker, 26.
[20] Ghose, 82.

Ghose sees this very much in evidence during the words of Horatio in the first scene. By this time Marcellus, having detailed the story of the war-like preparations, asks: "Who is't that can inform me?" (82) Horatio responds "That can I." (83) This Ghose labels as "...the scholar's glib assertion."[21] It might be more accurate to call this type of assertion "the immature scholar's". Horatio is after all only a student, not a fully-fledged scholar. He seems someone who is anxious to demonstrate his knowledge, particularly so to a receptive audience, and Marcellus has, by his question, already placed himself in the position of one who seeks information. Horatio quickly moves to occupy the vacant role. It should also be noted that at this point in the play the knowledge sought is not really scholastic. Anyone who was closer to the social centre of the court than a mere sentry would be able to impart the required information. The amount of 'mystery' involved in this interaction is slight, and can be seen to function merely as a device to point towards the more intractable mysteries which will shortly be encountered, and to provide an introduction to the theme of questioning and answering on a verbal level which will be returned to repeatedly throughout the play.

Horatio, besides being an immature scholar, is also a poet, switching between both modes of speech as occasion demands, or as he perceives occasion demands. Ghose notes: "...a rhetorical reversal of two distinct languages each of which sets out to define reality."[22] Reality is thus defined, but in a subjective way.

Moving into scene two, the inaugural speech of King Claudius provides yet another attempt to define reality in subjective terms. The king is not speaking in order to enlighten. He is speaking in order to project a specific image of both himself and the benefits of living under his reign. The speech is designed with a target audience in mind – the court of Elsinore. On one level the speech does exactly what is required, and Barker refers to it as "...the accomplished palliative speech of an adept politician reassuring anxieties at home. He is convincing, genial, magnanimous, clearly adroit in managing councils of state."[23] Claudius succeeds, in fact, in sounding both sorrowing and festive at the same time, yet on examination, his phrases are shallow. Shallow phrases are the hallmark of popular orators. Shallow phrases appeal to emotions rather than intellect and serve to create impressions only. Claudius is at pains to appear both caring and capable, because he is a word-master, because as Ghose says, he can

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[21] Ghose, 4.
[22] Ibid., 8.
[23] Barker, 29.

"...establish as truth that appearance which serves his own political or personal end. Indeed, he is not only an interpreter of appearances who broadcasts convenient distortions of the truth but is also sometimes their creator, engineering reality for popular consumption."[24]

As a propagandist, Claudius succeeds in manufacturing the kind of material that resonates appropriately with his audience and answers their unasked questions. In this scene he is a totally successful performer. Later, however, in the prayer scene, Claudius again performs, but this time his performance fails. It fails because Claudius applies the same strategies he has successfully used previously, but applies them to a very different target audience. In the prayer scene he is not talking to some external person or group of persons; he is talking to himself, and to his notion of God. For perhaps the first time in his life, Claudius will speak without first having satisfied himself that he understands his audience, or even that knows this audience at all. Thus, although Claudius can satisfy an onstage audience, he fails to convince those external to the play.

Claudius has always used language pragmatically, to affect the world around him, a point neatly clarified by Ghose, who says "...epistemological enquiry is not an interest of Claudius."[25] One might add that someone who has achieved the mastery over language displayed by Claudius must have at some time in his life studied its mechanisms. A tool can hardly be mastered until one has reached a full appreciation of its potentialities, therefore, a plausible explanation might be that Claudius has learned not only to manipulate words but also to discipline himself. Like a great swordsman, he knows both the value and the danger of the weapon he wields, how a careless handling of it, a moment's neglect could lead to self-wounding. In contrast Hamlet displays no such discipline. At this point in the play, he cannot, in Ghose's words "...talk without becoming involved in definitions, in the fine meanings of language."[26]

Although the mastery here displayed by Claudius will not be revealed as inadequate until the prayer scene, a foreshadowing of this does occur when he attempts to reason with Hamlet.

Claudius has been lulled into complacency. Politically he has just achieved a coup with regard to Fortinbras, and on a more personal level he has graciously allowed the son of his chief minister to leave for France. Everything is going well, except that

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[24] Ghose, 54.
[25] Ibid., 9.
[26] Ibid., 10.

the picture is spoiled by Hamlet. Claudius makes a mistake, although, unlike Hamlet, Claudius learns from every mistake. He addresses Hamlet in the wrong tone. "But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son." (64)

Claudius has made the mistake of thinking he could, with a few well chosen words or a show of fatherly concern, make Hamlet conform to the pattern which he is at pains to establish. The negative result of his miscalculation will constitute a valuable learning experience for the King, as it would not for the hyper-intellectual, sceptical Hamlet.[27]

Claudius, wisely, backs off and permits Gertrude to take over the conversation with Hamlet, thus allowing for the sounding of a leitmotif that will recur throughout the entire play. Gertrude, perhaps hoping that Hamlet might respond to her entreaties, makes a neat little speech, combining a request to cease mourning with the trite observation that:

> Thou knowest 'tis common, all that lives must die. (72)

He agrees. She continues:

> If it be,
> Why seems it so particular with thee? (74-5) [28]

'Seems' is the word Hamlet instantly leaps upon, making a forceful protestation that there exists an unseen essence of which all outward signs are but symptoms. The speech is so exciting and dynamic that it catches and sustains our attention, allowing the "if it be" to pass unnoticed, as if Gertrude's words were merely an incitement to Hamlet to strive towards ever greater rhetorical heights.[29]

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[27] Maus has an interesting comment on scepticism, and the near impossibility of ever really knowing another person: "Each consciousness is constrained by its own particular limitations, by quirks of which it has no way of becoming aware, even while these peculiarities shelter it from the inquisitiveness of others. We are trapped, as it were, inside our own heads" (Maus, 8). This comment is apt to describe both the scope and limits of Hamlet's self-awareness, characterized, as will be demonstrated, by a lack of self-discipline which allows spectacular metaphysical leaps, but also a lack of impulse control verging on the juvenile.

[28] An injunction against excessive mourning, did, in fact, have firm scriptural foundation; "Make a grievous lamentation, and be earnest in mourning, and use lamentation as he is worthy, and that, a day or two, lest thou be evil spoken of, and then comfort thyself for thine heaviness. For of heaviness cometh death, and the heaviness of the heart breaketh thy strength." (*Ecclesiasticus* Chapter 28, Verse 17-18). (All scriptural citations are from *The Geneva Bible, A Facsimile of the 1560 ed.*, introduction by Lloyd E. Berry (Milwaukee and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).) Noble, however, notes: "Observance of mourning for the dead depends on national and local custom and not on any scriptural injunction" (Noble, 200).

[29] Mercer notes that Hamlet's entire descriptive list of the elements of grieving behaviour "belongs to the impersonation of sorrow; they have to do with the art of acting." Hamlet thus foreshadows both his antic disposition and his theatrical mode of thinking, both of which will be examined in later chapters (Mercer, 144).

It might seem ironic that the leitmotif which, it could be argued, drives the entire play, and reaches a crescendo in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, should originate in the mouth of Gertrude. Gertrude, however, is Hamlet's mother. Hamlet within the playworld has his origins within her and, therefore, in this supremely ironic parallel the "if it be" stands in direct verbal relation to Hamlet's supposed physical generation. Gertrude's utterance, like Gertrude's womb, has produced something which far transcends any intention or ability to control on her part.

The phrase itself is not original. As Jacobus notes, it was available in current philosophical literature: "Axioma est Dispositio Argumenti cum argumento, qua esse aliquid aut non esse judicatur" – An Axiome or sentence is that ordering of one reason with another, whereby a thing is saide to bee or not to be" which comes from Dudley Fenner's 1584 translation of Ramus.[30]

What concerns us is, what message could it be conveying in this context? "If it be" is unable to subsist alone, but requires more surrounding material, more words, with which to stand in some kind of relationship. Although the phrase could follow or precede some such supplementary material and complete a sentence, in fact as a merely disembodied designator it acts only as a signpost. We might legitimately wonder what the 'it' refers to. Does it refer to the statement "all that lives must die/Passing through nature to eternity" or to the fact that this is 'common' and not exclusive to Hamlet's own bereavement? Given that we have no evidence of Gertrude's either wanting to confuse her son, or of wanting to indulge in speculation generally, we might reasonably assume she intends merely to convey her belief that excesses of mourning are not really appropriate, specially those so blatantly on display.

Hamlet's reaction, like his protracted mourning, 'seems' excessive. Ghose refers to it as "pretentious"[31], unsuitable for the time and place with its philosophical jargon (i.e.: 'forms', 'denote'), and not being really relevant to the external situation. Jacobus agrees, noting that its language demonstrates "…an awareness of the syllogistic methods of Aristotle and the scholastics" and of "…the Ramist concept of the object's being capable of arguing a point logically."[32] In addition to the obvious message that 'seems' is a surface level phenomenon and reality lies far deeper, Hamlet also reveals a strategy he will use throughout the play. Hamlet agrees with his mother on a superficial

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[30] Jacobus, 79. Fenner, it should be noted, contributed greatly to the formation of the late Tudor grammar school curriculum, and his edition of Ramus was on that curriculum.
[31] Ghose, 11.
[32] Jacobus, 80.

level, but, as Margolies notes, "...stylistically he contradicts Gertrude"[33] using the technique of invalidating his opponent's rhetoric by stylistic means, rather than discrediting them with reasoned discussion. Thus we can see how, despite the fact that Claudius has done everything with his considerable eloquence to make his new regime stable, Hamlet – initially by his non-conformist appearance, and now by his structurally anarchic speech – is destabilizing it. As a result, Claudius attempts to regain control of the situation. He does not want Hamlet to return to Wittenberg. He wants to keep him under observation. The timing of his request is excellent. The listening courtiers hear only the kind and solicitous words being used, while Gertrude instantly adds her entreaties. Hamlet does not really have a choice. Any refusal to remain would look like disobedience, a wilful extension of his insistence on protracted mourning.

> This gentle and unforc'd accord of Hamlet
> Sits smiling to my heart. (123-4)

Insult is now added to injury – and Claudius augments the insult by adding:

> In grace whereof
> No jocund health that Denmark drinks today
> But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
> And the King's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,
> Re-speaking earthly thunder. (124-28)

Margolies calls act one, scene three: "...an exercise of power seen in the way the language is used."[34] In other words, it is a microcosmic version of the verbal manipulation Claudius has just been seen to practise on the court at large. The length of the scene, however, is perceived as a flaw: "Shakespeare does not have available the terminology that recognizes the difference between the real context of this behaviour and its abstract definition...therefore he must show the behaviour concretely to reveal the contradictions between the image and the actuality."[35]

Margolies is claiming that a more adept Shakespeare could have given us the impression of this hypocritical house tyrant browbeating his child into submission, whereas the scene we have is supposedly the longwinded version of material which Shakespeare lacked the heuristic skill to convey succinctly.

This criticism assumes a desire to achieve something outside his capabilities on the author's part, and entirely ignores the fact that Shakespeare was writing popular drama – something which, whatever its experimental elements, had to be capable of

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[33] Margolies, 45.
[34] Ibid., 50.
[35] Ibid., 52.

filling a theatre. Granted, Polonius is longwinded. He is also entertaining. His longwindedness is not that of a buffoon, but rather, of someone who is self-conscious about speech, someone Hamlet will relish baiting because Polonius is capable of appreciating the wit involved.

At the opening of the scene, we do not hear the voice of Polonius but rather that of his son, who seems to have a bond with Ophelia and whose advice, with regard to Hamlet, seems designed for her protection rather than subordination:

> Perhaps he loves you now,
> And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
> The virtue of his will. (14-16)

But, he continues, since Hamlet is not a commoner, he may never be in a position to marry her. Laertes goes on to warn her, in words appropriate to any girl in her position, that it would be in her best interests to be careful. Her reply is both affectionate and animated. She acknowledges his words while cautioning him against hypocrisy, at which point Polonius comes in and treats both to a platitudinously banal sermon.[36] Ghose describes Polonius as "One obsessed by linguistic niceties; he is closest to Hamlet in his use of language, going so far as to comment upon the precise use of words…But, unlike Hamlet, his interest in language, while it has its academic and abstract moments, is utilitarian; for him, language is an instrument of discoveries to do with human behavior."[37]

Since we have not encountered Ophelia previously, her spirited response to Laertes might well lead us to believe we are dealing with someone capable of maintaining her integrity. Laertes seems to think so too, as, in full hearing of his father, he says:

> Farewell, Ophelia, and remember well
> What I have said to you. (83-4)

To this, also in the hearing of Polonius, she replies:

> 'Tis in my memory lock'd,
> And you yourself shall keep the key of it. (85-6)

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[36] Battenhouse believes Polonius' advice both makes evident his own usage of borrowed proverbs, and indicates that such advice (as was current in many folk sayings and books of precepts) contained a series of half-truths which required a scriptural corrective. For example "Neither a borrower or a lender be, For loan oft loses both itself and friend, And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry". (I.iii.75-7) could be countered with: "Lend to thy neighbour in time of his neede, and pay thou thy neighbour againe in due season." (Ecclesiasticus 29 v2) "Lese thy money for thy brothers and neighbours sake, and let it not rust under a stone to thy destruction." (ibid., v10) (Battenhouse, 235).

[37] Ghose, 17.

However, no sooner has Laertes gone than Polonius asks, "What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?" (88) Her answer, "So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet" (89), is interpreted by Ghose as a contradiction of her previous promise to Laertes. These words reveal "...the thoughtless way in which she contradicts her own words. She uses language absent-mindedly, speaking phrases which are neat, sometimes poetically elegant structures...she merely goes through the motions of rationality."[38]

This seems a difficult concept to grasp, involving, as it does, the notion of a person who can generate phrases which are both apt and elegant but without understanding. We can also question the validity of Ghose's comment on her promise-breaking, because she has not, at this point, revealed the content of Laertes' advice, but merely indicated the subject area. Polonius, of course, is well able to make good use of this sign of yielding, and demolishes the rest of her resistance easily. He does this less by an assault on her intelligence than by one of her emotions, which, as he well knows, are extremely vulnerable. His offensive strategy begins by praising Laertes for saying 'something': "Marry, well bethought." (90) He then goes on to assure her that he is aware of the situation with Hamlet, and says "If it be so – as so 'tis put on me." (94)

Here is an interesting "if it be", an echo of Gertrude's words, the 'it' here seemingly referring to the Hamlet/Ophelia connection, which could be very advantageous to Polonius. It is unsurprising then, that the concerned father's vital question is "What is between you? Give me up the truth." (98)

What Polonius seeks is to fill out the gaps in his knowledge. He has heard about the meetings and now he wants to establish the validity of the situation, and bring it under his own control. Ophelia replies:

> He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders
> Of his affection to me. (99-100)

Polonius has at last heard exactly what he hoped to hear, that Hamlet has been showing an interest in Ophelia. Hamlet cannot be directly manipulated, but Ophelia can, and used as a tool to manipulate Hamlet. Polonius immediately sets about the task of undermining his daughter's self-confidence, and does so in an interrogatory style, designed less to elicit information from her, than to provide himself with material he can twist to his own purposes. His main concern is that his pawn will move into exactly the right space in a chess game of his own design. Ophelia responds:

> I do not know, my lord, what I should think. (104)

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[38] Ibid., 16.

It might be tempting to read some diversionary or deceptive tactic into Ophelia's answer, but, given her subsequent fate, it appears more like capitulation. It could, in fact, carry a sub-text: "Tell me what I should think", because Polonius has totally destabilized her and left her in a state of uncertainty. He is interrogating her as though she has committed a crime, using his influence as a psychological hold over her, which, once he chooses to exercise it, she is unable to resist. Her intelligence is not the fault, rather her emotional commitment to someone who exploits it.

> My lord, he hath importun'd me with love
> In honourable fashion. (110-11)

Polonius twists her words. He has already twisted 'tender' and changed its meaning from one of love to one of lucre, now he twists 'fashion', so that it becomes 'momentary fad', as opposed to 'mode' or 'manner'. Similarly her next appeal to "All the holy vows of heaven" (114) which Hamlet has uttered, is also debased. In fact, Polonius admits,

> I do know,
> When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
> Lends the tongue vows. (115-17)

Polonius might mean that he has, as a young man, vowed and later perjured himself. Alternatively, he could simply be speaking as the world-weary, world-wise councillor. In either case he is imposing a cynical interpretation on everything Ophelia offers as evidence for Hamlet's love.

The interview concludes with a prohibition. Ophelia is forbidden to encourage Hamlet, and replies:

> I shall obey, my lord. (136)

This episode illustrates the verbal techniques of emotional blackmail, and represents a sophisticated verbal version of the maxim, "divide and conquer". Ophelia's view of reality has been severely undermined by the voice of her father, a voice she has been brought up to invest with total authority. Polonius, in seeking to manipulate his daughter for his own selfish ends, has, it will be argued, instigated that momentum which will result in Ophelia being "Divided from herself and her fair judgement." (IV.v.85) This will be examined in chapter five.

The play's supreme example of emotional manipulation, however is that of Hamlet by the ghost.

Ghosts in Shakespeares's plays, according to Greenblatt, can be broadly categorized into four main species. They are figures of false surmise, of history's nightmare, of deep psychic disturbance, and, inevitably, of theatre. He goes on to claim that they thus raise "theological, psychological and theatrical" questions, and that this ambiguity is deliberately fostered because they are staged "…in a variety of guises and from shifting perspectives."[39] Although the play was written in post-Reformation England, he observes that "…a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament, is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost."[40] A Catholic temperament does, in fact, permeate the play. Milward points out that the adjective 'holy' is frequently used, being applied to secular and material objects, but "…in the sacramental sense used by Catholics and often ridiculed by Protestants."[41] He further notes that there are many "…allusions to Catholic beliefs and practices with regard to the angels and the devil."[42] Prayer for the departed soul, for example, though anti-Protestant, surfaces when the mad Ophelia prays for the souls of Polonius and all Christians.

This may partly be explained by the fact that, as Greenblatt suggests, negotiating with the dead had by this period ceased to be an institutionalised, Church-ruled matter, and become "…a poetic process, governed by guilt, projection and imagination."[43] It is therefore an activity which appeals more to the emotions than the intellect. Thus, despite the prevailing theological climate, Shakespeare could reasonably be conjectured to be using this religious imagery to activate a more affectively mediated audience response.

Besides the affective nature of the response, there is also one of engagement with the mystery of where the ghost comes from. Ghosts are, as Greenblatt says, outside time, "…translated into eternity."[44] The ghost in *Hamlet* has apparently exchanged his extra-temporal dimension for a few brief re-incursions into our circumscribed world. The conventional Catholic view is stated by Bowers, who says that a ghost which comes from Purgatory could not free itself "…since divine permission alone could free the ghost to revisit the earth."[45] The implications of this are that the mission entrusted to Hamlet "…is not alone a personal call but in effect the

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[39] Greenblatt (2001), 157.
[40] Ibid., 240.
[41] Peter Milward, *Shakespeare's Religious Background* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973), 24.
[42] Ibid., 31
[43] Greenblatt (2001), 252.
[44] Ibid., 282.
[45] Fredson Bowers, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge" in Keesey, 15.

transmission of a divine command, appointing Hamlet as God's agent to punish the specific criminal, Claudius, but to save Gertrude."[46]

The situation we encounter in the play is, however, far from so straightforward, although the ghost certainly makes every effort to appear unambiguously righteous in his demands.

As Wilks has pointed out, "...the realities upon which Hamlet is obligated to act are purveyed to him in riddling terms disquietingly in tune with the play's pervasive metaphysical uncertainties."[47] Like the witches in *Macbeth*, the ghost is "...neither clearly subjective or objective... [It has] sufficient reality and substance to claim for [itself] a stage presence ... the truths [it] tell[s] are the gilded equivocations of all such instruments of darkness."[48] He concludes that such figures "...bear an obscure subjective relation to Macbeth's inner thoughts."[49] Though visible to Horatio and the soldiers, the ghost speaks only to Hamlet, and definitely in terms which resonate with much he has already experienced emotionally, but hesitated to put into words. Now, however, he can declare: "O my prophetic soul! My uncle!" (I.v.42) The ghost's verbalization of Hamlet's own suspicions are, as will be demonstrated shortly, one of the most effective methods of emotional manipulation possible.

The audience, then, is encouraged to view this other worldly being as arising from "...a paranormal dimension parasitic upon reality." This "mysterious ambivalence" [50] also extends to its prophecies, which are, for the individual, counter-productive. Wilks, again speaking of Macbeth, but in words which could be applied to Hamlet, says he "...trades a present freedom for the knowledge of a future that in the nature of things must enslave him; yet he never ceases to believe in his own freedom to act."[51] It might be wondered if Hamlet was, prior to the ghost's arrival, enjoying any kind of 'freedom' at all. A static, gloomy neutrality might best describe the condition of one who finds all the uses of the world "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." (I.ii.133) Similarly, questions might be raised about Hamlet's perception of his freedom to act – or not. Certainly he repeatedly upbraids himself for his inertia, but, as will be examined in chapter two, this may not really constitute a struggle of the will.

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[46] Ibid., 43.
[47] Wilks, 101.
[48] Ibid., 127
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 128
[51] Ibid.

Lewis claims that Hamlet believes in the ghost while it is present, but, in its absence, experiences doubts. This, in fact, is exactly the kind of reaction which accompanies belief which is emotionally rather than intellectually based. Lewis goes on: "Doubt, uncertainty and bewilderment" are what the ghost creates in every mind. "The appearance of the spectre means a breaking down of the walls of the world and the germination of thoughts that cannot really be thought: chaos is come again."[52] Hamlet's own words are: "With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls." (I.iv.56)

Wilks, then, sees "...a certain enriching vagueness to all such emanations of the spirit", but without ever "...permitting them characteristics accessible to the kind of proof which might confirm their status as either fully subjective or objective."[53] This 'enrichment' would seem to depend on exploiting that pre-Reformation ethos which, as we have already discussed, Jones sees as crucial to the success of contemporary dramatic art. Belsey agrees, noting that "...the play registers Hamlet's ambivalence in the imagery of its period, the effect of centuries of Christian iconography. What it withholds – both from the hero and from the audience – is the place of origin which would specify the moral identity of the ghost."[54] This whole area of uncertainty is neatly verbalized by Hamlet himself:

> Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
> That I will speak to thee. (I.iv.43-4)

What manner of shape can be classed as 'questionable'? Jenkins glosses it as a shape "...which invites questioning. Not '*dubious*' which the spirit may be but the shape is not."[55] Belsey takes up this theme by asking: "What is a 'questionable' shape? A shape, perhaps, which prompts a question, a signifier whose significance is unknown?"[56]

Hamlet has used the word 'questionable' as a reason, a justification, for speaking with the ghost, presenting the observed fact of its being 'questionable' as though this constituted something in the nature of an imperative, thus classifying the appearance of the apparition, and making his own behaviour consequent upon that classification. The word 'questionable' renders the entire situation onto a verbally operative plane.

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[52] Lewis (1967), 125.
[53] Wilks, 139.
[54] Belsey (1985), 159.
[55] Jenkins, 211 (editor's note).
[56] Belsey (1985), 160.

The point seems to be that the ghost's appearance, as attested to by the other witnesses, is not vague or in any way ambiguous – he appears exactly as he looked in the latter part of his life. Hamlet, while mentioning the obvious fact that this could be a malevolent trick, nevertheless decides to take the risk. His delight in seeing his father has overridden every other consideration.[57]

Having waved Hamlet along to follow him, the ghost finally speaks, and when it does, virtually the first words it utters are a call for revenge. Battenhouse remarks that despite both civil and ecclesiastical prohibitions against personal revenge for family honour " A revived classical ethics, or a decadent chivalric code, or simply natural human instinct, was all too often preferred as a guide."[58]

It might be argued that the murder with which we are concerned involved a King, therefore no ordinary man, and therefore no ordinary case of soiled family honour. Old Hamlet, however, does not highlight this aspect, and, as Ghose points out, he "...can only talk at the petty level of his own former miserable vanity."[59] He has "...only an earthly story to tell, melodramatic and self-pitying at that."[60] Melodramatic and self-pitying though it may be, but it also has the merit of effectively working its intellectual and emotional influence on the mind of Hamlet, as we shall see.

Lewis claims that "...the real corruption comes when men whose purpose in speaking is in fact purely emotional conceal this from others, and perhaps from themselves, by words that seem to be, but are not, charged with a conceptual content."[61] This ghost is the diametric opposite of a peaceful spirit. He has arrived with a mission, but, seemingly, in order to carry it out can only appear as a vision and only speak with Hamlet.[62] The ghost's verbal work, thus, has already been half accomplished. His

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[57] Stallybrass notes the way in which, contrary to both genealogical and social norms, the son Hamlet, actually names the father: "I'll call thee Hamlet, King, father, royal Dane." (44-5) Peter Stallybrass, "Naming, renaming and unnaming in the Shakespearean quartos and folio," in *The Renaissance Text*, ed. Andrew Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 117. Before this occurrence 'it' was the label applied to the entity occupying Old Hamlet's armour. Interestingly, Hamlet, *after* this impressive naming ceremony, continues to use 'it' or 'the ghost'. The reason for this could be that his emotional response is not quite in line with his intellectual one and, although he would *like* to operate in an effectively disciplined manner, he simply cannot follow his own orders.

[58] Battenhouse, 243.

[59] Ghose, 19.

[60] Ibid., 20.

[61] Lewis (1967), 325.

[62] It is not certain whether this is necessity or choice, however, since, even during the swearing scene the ghost is not heard by anyone except his son. Possibly ghosts, like modern-day hypnotists, deliberately choose receptive subjects. (See Greenblatt, 2001, p102n, for related examples of ghostly visitations and their reception.)

speeches are designed to act as a catalyst, to work on something Hamlet is already experiencing, and create the emergent property of revenge.

The ghost begins by speaking about the horrors to which he must return at cock crow (10-22), and what he leaves out of his rendition is as important as what he includes. He is 'forbid' to reveal all, so instead, describes the effect it would have on Hamlet if only he could 'unfold' the tale. All we do learn, of a factual nature, is that he is "Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night/ And for the day confin'd to fast in fires"(10-11), the reason for this being to cleanse his spirit from the unspecified "foul crimes" he committed while living. The most revealing part of the speech is its conclusion:

> If thou did'st ever thy dear father love. (24)

As Bloom points out, nowhere does the ghost ever say that he loves Hamlet[63] – it is all an appeal to the love that Hamlet, as a righteous man and a good son, should have for him. Assuming this 'love' as a given, he continues, "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder," (25) and straightaway elaborates:

> Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
> But this most foul, strange and unnatural. (27-8)

Battenhouse takes issue with this, pointing out the contradiction between commanding someone to commit a murder, while at the same time condemning murder generally, as "most foul" even "in the best", 'best' indicating the best of causes. This contradiction can, possibly, be resolved if we look at the same speech in Q1:

> Yea, murder in the highest degree,
> As in the least tis bad,
> But mine most, foule, beastly and unnatural.[64]

The passage now seems to suggest that 'best' be read, not as 'best of causes', but rather as 'best social degree' of persons involved. In this case, since he was a King, his social degree was of the highest possible and therefore so was the crime. A proviso is then attached, that murder – in any case, even, presumably, by a poor man - would be foul, more 'foul' than manslaughter, robbery or various other crimes.[65]

Hamlet's response elicits a piece of praise from the ghost: "I find thee apt." (32) French notes that a careful reading of the text suggests the priorities of the ghost are not

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[63] Harold Bloom, *Hamlet, Poem Unlimited* (New York: Riverside, 2003), 4.

[64] Paul Bertram and Bernice Kliman, eds, *The three-text Hamlet : parallel texts of the First and Second Quatros, and First Folio* (New York: AMS, 1991), 56.

[65] Bowers claims that in contemporary accounts, poisoning was the worst kind of murder "but murder by lingering poison was the worst of all." The ghost describes the physical effect of his poisoning, but does not specify how long the ordeal lasted (Bowers, (1994), 26).

necessarily those which we might assume, and that, in fact, he gives as much weight to his disgust at Gertrude and Claudius in bed as he does to his own murder. She continues:

> The ghost's major priorities are identical to Hamlet's, both in his immediate response to the spirit and throughout the play. Hamlet's highest values, his primary response to experience, is to "feel" it – through sensation, emotion or reflective thought.[66]

How much of Hamlet's parallel reaction is innate, and how much instigated by the ghost, is hard to tell. We have already in I.ii. seen him express a similar level of disgust for Gertrude's re-marriage. Unfortunately, he knows, in an intellectual sense, that, as Maus points out "...the forms, moods, and shapes of grief can as well be a calculated pretense as the symptoms of a genuine inner state."[67] He has even said so to Gertrude, playing on the word 'seems'. However, this knowledge is completely overwhelmed by the emotions which possess him in the presence of the ghost. He neither questions its words, nor seeks to examine their veracity in a soliloquy later on. All is swept along on a surge of affect.[68]

Battenhouse sees Old Hamlet's speech as retaining "...various tag ends of Christian vocabulary" which are "evidence of a heritage whose meaning the ghost is neglecting." For example, when bemoaning the fact that he died "Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd" (77), it is as though "...they were a fire insurance he got caught

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[66] French, 147.

[67] Maus, 6.

[68] The ghost's description of how the murder was committed seems to have escaped critical scrutiny. Murdering people, in the days before forensic science could establish cause of death, would need only to have been done without leaving an overt trace - such as wounds or strangulation marks. A fairly logical method, therefore, could involve some noxious substance introduced to the ear, which then proceeds to cause the symptoms of a fatal illness. Kings and other nobles had 'tasters' to sample their food, so poison via a culinary route would be problematic. This could explain how the players happened to have *The Murder of Gonzago* in their repertoire. The murder method it depicts was cunning, undetectable, efficient and simple to apply, worthy of being dramatized. There is, however, a problem with the method: the word *ears* which figures in both Old Hamlet's description of his murder, and the description of murder in the dumb show. Pouring something into *one ear* of a sleeper is plausible, if that person is lying on their side. The administration of ear drops, for example, requires that the head be tilted, otherwise the drops run out again. But how could 'ears' *plural* be involved? The assassin might wish - to be certain, that poison went into each ear - but how to effect this without arousing the sleeper? Waiting for him to turn over could take a long time - he might awaken and realize what was happening. This could work if the damage was done and the murderer, like a suicide bomber, was happy to face the consequences - which Claudius certainly was not. The King, in any case, did not awaken - he died shortly after the administration of the poison, without the last rites, and a serpent's bite was blamed for his death. The situation however becomes clearer if we look at the ghost's speech in Q1: "Thy uncle came, with juyce of Hebona / In a viall, and through the porches of my eares / Did powre the leaprous distilment..." (Bertram and Kliman, 58). This now makes sense. The poison was poured into whichever ear was facing upwards. It then burned its way *through*, destroying everything in its path and causing a death which could be attributed to snake venom.

without…he retains the shell of Christian faith with none of its substance."[69] Old Hamlet shows no evidence of having transcended that petty and miserably vain level which Ghose has highlighted. Battenhouse continues: "The moral flaw evident in the ghost, his lapsing from Christian norms which are residual in his language but neglected in his judgements, is the same flaw we are shown more at large in Prince Hamlet."[70] The ghost's speech is utilized to influence his son and, therefore, in a manner worthy of Claudius, he takes what he needs from the available socio-cultural vocabulary, dismissing that which would contradict, dilute or otherwise adversely affect his message.[71] Prince Hamlet, metaphysically speculating and indulging in verbal acrobatics throughout the play, can also use whatever seems appropriate, in a far freer though less effective manner, as will be taken up in chapter two.

Despite the fact that much of what the ghost utters is designed to arouse emotion rather than convey information, it is not heralded as such. In fact he leaves it to the 'apt' mind of his son to perform the necessary manipulations on the material which he provides, filling in the gaps, glossing over the less savoury areas, and arriving at the emergent property he desires. This covert technique, whereby a speaker, or an author, influences the mind of another, is referred to by Scarry as "…erased instructions."[72] It derives its power not so much from the persuasive nature of its terminology, as from its accurately targeting audience insecurities.

Lewis perceptively observes that words used to describe or express emotion are quite different from those used to *arouse* it, as, for example, when he advises poets how best to cause strong affective responses in their readers:

> By appealing to the imagination. (True of all imaginative writing.) By direct description, by metaphor and simile, by secretly evoking powerful associations, by offering the right stimuli to our nerves (in the right degree and the right order) and by the very beat and vowel-melody and length and brevity of your sentences, you must

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[69] Battenhouse, 243.

[70] Ibid., 244.

[71] We do have more of the Prince's speeches, therefore more evidence of his language use – so it might be premature to label him as exhibiting a greater degree of this trait than his father. For example, Hamlet's passionate "O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else? And shall I couple hell?" (I.v.92) sounds as though he is referring to the inhabitants or 'host' of heaven, and then to the abode of the damned. 'Host', however, could be a term used to describe natural features of the sky. In Acts 7 v42 we read "Then God turned himself away, and gave them up to serve the hoste of heaven, as it is written in the boke of the Prophetes, O house of Israel, have ye offered to me slayne beasts and sacrifices by the space of fourtie yeres in the wilderness?" In the Geneva Bible, the gloss to this passage gives "hoste of heaven" as "the sunne, moone and other starres." It now looks as though Hamlet's outburst seeks to encompass geographical rather than spiritual extremes.

[72] Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001), 35.

> bring it about that we, we readers, not you, exclaim "how mysterious!" or "loathsome" or whatever.[73]

this is exactly the technique deployed by old Hamlet, and further:

> ...an important principle thus emerges. In general, emotional words, to be effective, must not be solely emotional. What expresses or stimulates emotion directly, without the intervention of an image or concept, expresses or stimulates it feebly.[74]

Hamlet, as French has pointed out, immediately begins reacting in a hyperemotional manner. "O villain, villain, smiling damned villain!" (106) he declares, or perhaps screams. Lewis continues:

> The purpose of all opprobrious language is, not to describe, but to hurt – even when, like Hamlet, we make only the shadow-passes of a soliloquised combat. We call the enemy not what we think he is but what we think he would least like to be called. Hence extreme hatred may select the word *villain* precisely because it is not yet merely moral but still carries some implication of ignoble birth, coarse manners, and ignorance.[75]

Bradley, interestingly, modifies this apparently histrionic outburst by highlighting a note of prudence which though present is easily overlooked:

> My tables. Meet it is I set it down
> That one may smile, and smile and be a villain –
> At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark.
> So, uncle, there you are. (107-10)

Hamlet is cautious, according to Bradley, about what he writes in his 'tables', because tables are stealable. Therefore, if the story of his conversation with the ghost ever becomes known "...a mere observation on the smiling of villains could not betray anything."[76]

This is true, but we are still left with the puzzle of why someone so obviously emotionally agitated should break off ranting and start writing. Certainly the few words he writes are too abstract to be used in evidence against him, but they are also too abstract to be of much use. Why is it "meet" that this platitude be "set down", since Hamlet is unlikely to forget it? One reason could be that, by writing down this observation, Hamlet is somehow codifying it, making it into one of the socially accepted norms of Denmark. Hitherto Claudius' smiling villainy went unrecorded. Now, however, Hamlet has set it down as a bitterly ironic axiom and in doing so he is effectively categorizing and thereby reducing Claudius to the status of a 'type'. This

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[73] Lewis (1967), 317-8.
[74] Ibid., 324.
[75] Ibid., 122.
[76] Bradley, 348.

tendency of Hamlet's, to assign roles or impose an order on his fellow characters, will be examined in detail in chapter three.

There also exists the possibility that Hamlet is using a technique, a self-regulating device, in order to calm himself down for the serious business about to follow. We will be looking at ways in which he does this in more detail during chapter two, but, for the moment, it should be noted that he is using the very thing which aroused and excited him, words, in order to regulate his own feelings. He is, however, writing words down, translating the seething mass of verbal affect into something which has an independent existence outside of himself. During the time it has taken to perform this operation, he has managed to pull back, slightly, from being emotionally overwhelmed. Besides this cessation of turmoil, he has achieved the creation of a record, which if necessary he could use to re-incite himself to that emotional pitch requisite to carry out the deed. It is almost as though he were able to foresee his subsequent hesitation and were preparing an antidote in advance. Unfortunately, this display of self-discipline is the exception to the rule.

> Now to my word.
> It is 'Adieu, adieu, remember me.'
> I have sworn't. (110-12)

Greenblatt observes that here Hamlet is repeating the "dread command" as though wanting to "...ventriloquize the ghost's words by making them his 'word'".[77] The ghost's emphasis on 'remember' is understandable – coming from one who is , after all, dead, and who could stand in danger of being forgotten by the living. To be 'remembered' is one of the most familiar requests we encounter in verbal material associated with death, hence the resort to so many tombstone inscriptions, funeral sermons and poems.[78] It seems, in this particular ghost's case, to be even more pressing an injunction than "Avenge me". Again this is understandable, since the entire message the ghost gave Hamlet contains all the necessary ingredients, including the rationale for revenge, provided Hamlet can carry that message around with him. However, carrying it around as a mere narrative is insufficient. What the ghost needs, and what Hamlet seems to believe he can do, is to retain the heightened emotional reaction which

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[77] Greenblatt (2001), 228.

[78] As Duffy notes "...the textbooks emphasized the pathetic plight of myriads of anonymous and forgotten souls in purgatory" (Duffy, 352). He continues: "Ties of blood gave kindred both the obligation and the power to discharge the penances of the dead. The repayment of financial debts and the restoration of property unjustly gained or retained by the deceased was one of the primary duties of executors; this same principle was extended to supernatural debts" (Duffy, 353).

accompanied the initial hearing. Kerrigan, speaking of the way in which Hamlet's memory is portrayed, notes that "...the memories disclosed by Hamlet imply others, lying deeper, unspoken. Receding into remembrance (and the equally obscure processes of forgetting), the prince excludes his audience, and, in the process, wins a depth and secrecy unlike anything found in Greek drama."[79]

Hamlet, therefore, swears an oath, as much for his own benefit as for that of the ghost. This verbal formula, albeit emotionally driven, seems an act as rational as it is histrionic. We have already noted how externalizing and inscribing words onto 'tablets' could function as a self-regulatory device, and we can now add to that the fact that Hamlet uses similarly scribal language when referring to the structure and content of his mental faculties.

> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmix'd with baser matter. Yes, by heaven! (102-4)

It is as though he seeks to control his entire self in the same way he can control his hand to write or his mouth to speak, striving to bind himself with a verbal formula which will enable him to master the future as much as the present. In short, he is attempting to reinforce and project that transformed self which has focus, purpose and discipline into a lifelong persona. As Sullivan notes, however, since Hamlet's notion of self was not "...formed in untroubled accordance with the imperatives contained in the ghost's demand that he remember",[80] Hamlet can never become that precise being, even in response to the ghost's commands.

As an extra, a little augmentation of his own and his father's words, he adds "by heaven!" This provides yet another example of what Battenhouse has called a "moral flaw" – the use of the language of Christianity, minus its spirit. At the same time, it emphasizes his willingness to grasp every available means of solemnizing and strengthening his resolve, showing that the ghost's message has been internalised, assimilated, accommodated. Hamlet, insofar as he can, has adapted to a new self-representation.[81]

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[79] John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy : Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 173.

[80] Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama : Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 14.

[81] Black notes that swearing, let alone swearing vengeance, was in direct contravention of Scripture, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount (St. Matthew 5 v34-5) "But I say unto you, sweare not at all, neither by heaven, for it is the Throne of God: Nor yet by the earth: for it is his footstool." James Black, *Edified by the margent: Shakespeare and the Bible* : an inaugural professorial lecture in the Faculty of

So be it (116)

In Q2 this line is given to Hamlet, but in the Folio, to Marcellus. Horatio has just said "Heavens secure him" (115); thus "So be it" or 'Amen' would be an appropriate remark in context. We can, however, with equal appropriateness place it in the mouth of Hamlet, who, as noted, called upon heaven to solemnize his oath. The English "So be it" rather than the Latin 'Amen' could indicate something other than a conventional response, perhaps that Hamlet is, again with reference to heaven, attempting to solidify the construction of his revised notion of selfhood.[82] He next turns back to the affairs of his companions:

I hold it fit that we shake hands and part,
You as your business and desire shall point you –
For every man hath business and desire,
Such as it is – for my own poor part,
I will go pray. (134-8)

"Business and desire" is an interesting linkage, especially when juxtaposed with the notion that these two can 'point' the individual to some destination. Hamlet of course could be politely, if platitudinously, hastening the others away, since he wants to be alone, but there does seem to be an echo of wishful projection here. He has business and, at the moment, the desire necessary to carry it out, but could begin to doubt whether he can sustain the latter.

Horatio is not content with this response, and, because of their friendship seems to feel he can legitimately expect something more substantial. "These are but wild and whirling words, my lord." (139) he says. This first elicits an apology for any 'offence' from Hamlet, who then proceeds to play with the word 'offence' in a similar vein to that which he will later use during 'The Mousetrap' (III.ii.227-30). His oath "by Saint Patrick" (143) could be a signal to Horatio, personally, that he will reveal what really occurred (as in fact he does: III.ii.76-7). Doubtless an educated man like Horatio would recognize the name of Purgatory's patron. Hamlet goes on, with the apparently blasé

Touching this vision here
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you, (143-4)

Humanities, University of Calgary, presented on March 23, 1977 (Calgary: University of Calgary Faculty of Humanities, 1979).

[82] 'Amen' in both Old and New Testaments is used to express agreement with, or approval of, whatever has gone before. It was considered wrong to use the term in any but the most serious sense, i.e. insincerely or in jest.

hinting perhaps at some important verbal communication which confirms the ghost's authenticity, and which he will later share.[83]

'Honest' could also be seen as consequent upon Hamlet's earlier designation of the ghost as having a questionable shape. If so, it follows that Hamlet has now closed off the open-ended, process-like designation of 'questionable' and re-categorized the ghost as 'honest'. This designation, however, is temporary, since Hamlet will instigate the performance of 'The Mousetrap' as a further test of the ghost's veracity.

The term 'honest' will resonate over again as Hamlet frenziedly demands of both Polonius and Ophelia whether or not they are honest. Doubt is being expressed in each case, doubt regarding the trustworthiness of Polonius, and the chastity of his daughter. Hamlet has little doubt about Polonius (he has already categorized the old councillor as a scheming manipulator) but what exactly are we to make of his questioning Ophelia? One way of interpreting the interrogative nature of his utterance could simply be: "Are you a virgin?" Another, equally plausible way, given the evidence to the contrary provided by some of her mad utterances, could be: "Having yielded to me – are you unchaste with anyone else?"

With the resonances of 'honest' still sounding, Hamlet suddenly decides to make the others augment their merely verbal oaths of silence with a bizarre ceremony. During this ritual the ghost joins in – but we have no evidence that his voice is heard by anyone other than Hamlet and ourselves.

Battenhouse notes that, at each addition to the oath, the characters change their position on the stage. Hamlet:

> ...makes Horatio and Marcellus swear never to make known what they have *seen*. Then on shifting his ground, he makes them swear never to speak of what they have *heard*. Then, moving again, he makes them swear that, if he should think fit to play the antic, they will give no sign of knowing aught of him.[84]

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[83] Battenhouse, 237 sees the term 'honest' as misleading, since, rather than a judgement about morality, it denotes "...simply a frankness in *self*-communication". This opens the possibility that the ghost, like the witches in *Macbeth*, could be telling truths, but for immoral or selfish reasons. Jenkins, 224 glosses 'honest' as 'genuine', i.e., the vision is a ghost rather than a demon or mirage. OED notes that originally the word 'honest' was closely allied to 'honour'. "Of persons: Held in honour; holding an honourable position; respectable." Also: "Free from disgrace or reproach; respectable, decent, seemly, befitting, becoming." And: "Having honourable motives or principles; marked by uprightness or probity." Of a thing: "Not seeming other than it is; genuine, unadulterated, unsophisticated."

[84] Battenhouse, 350.

The shifting of position seems to follow that of the now understage ghost, and although Hamlet himself proposes each clause of the oath, the ghost echoes "Swear" or "Swear by his sword." (169)[85]

The inclusion of this surreal, semi-comic episode can be seen as a major destabilizing device. We have witnessed the fearful appearance and dread command of the ghost. All is decorous and dignified, replete with sinister resonances, a fitting consummation, in fact, to the doleful musings and vague suspicions Hamlet expressed in scene two. Suddenly, we are propelled from this intellectually and emotionally elevated experience to the level of burlesque, to something which, with its earthy morality ethos, seems to parody all that has gone before. What we have, then, is a first act which builds, sequentially and solemnly, to something resembling a multi-layered, tragic tapestry, and which then unravels before our eyes, becoming transformed into a carnivalesque procession. Another explanation for this might be that a notion of order i.e. the rule of Old Hamlet, has been disordered by his murder, and a projected re-order promised, if Hamlet is a successful avenger. However, the entire structure is graphically undermined by the farcical anti-climax of the oath scene.

The notions of order and disorder set up in the play establish themselves through the disruption of rationality, relationships and genre, and this is borne out microcosmically in the very speech of the exchanges.

This notion, it will also be claimed, lends itself to a dual application throughout, firstly, to the overall structure of the play, secondly to a series of interrelated episodes contained within, which constitute experimental scenarios in their own right. These scenarios concern various aspects of speech being made to perform, as the conventions they represent are pushed to their logical limits and beyond. However, rather than arriving at some pre-determined conclusion, this material is presented with sufficient flexibility to preclude a definitive closure. A series of experiments can thus be seen to operate within the framework of the metaexperiment.

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[85] Jenkins' comment may shed some light: "The familiarity with which Hamlet addresses it may recall the manner in which the stage vice traditionally addressed the Devil." In attempting to disentangle some of the strands which Shakespeare may have woven into the creation of the ghost, Jenkins notes that, in Morality plays, the Vice figure would speak in a bluff, affable manner to the stage devil thus this apparent piece of comic relief has "characteristically Shakespearean, serious and even sinister overtones. The situation and dialogue are pertinently matter-of-fact, and yet have an aura of diabolism" (Jenkins, 458). The entire oath scene, then, could be seen as the subversive re-working of a traditional motif, which by this very imposition, subverts notions of the comedy and tragedy generally.

The notions of order we have seen, besides their finite nature, have also built into them all the flaws and imperfections of their designers. Claudius, Polonius and the ghost all speak from the basest and most selfish of human motives.

We have thus seen how speech can be used in order to manipulate the emotionally vulnerable. We have also examined different types of vulnerability, from that of the court, which seems to prize continuation of privileges and lack of disruption so highly that they willingly support Claudius and his transformation of Gertrude from 'sister' to 'spouse' without dissent or query.

The vulnerability of Ophelia has been seen to result from an emotional overattachment to the father who had no hesitation in using it, and finally, the complex and intellectually adept Hamlet is similarly manipulable due to his unquestioning idolatry of his father.

In each case speech has been the tool by which a victim's emotions are first engaged, then exploited, on both individual and social levels. Power is thus seen to be, ultimately, in the hands, or rather the mouth, of the most callously eloquent.

Chapter 2

Reason, emotion and digression in Hamlet's soliloquies.

> In this speech I have tried to involve the audience by working it out and showing myself doing it, not as a culmination of all my thoughts but showing how one leads to another by association, and 'discovering' it with them; or performing self-analysis before them and winding up with an answer which is my own self-revelation.[1]

> Such philosophies give us a vision of the human being who has moved, through some mysterious reason, to a state of completeness…where all opposites are reconciled and all the ragged edges of life have evaporated…only with our death does time stop. Only then do we become whole, for nothing more can happen to us in the way that we know ourselves to be.[2]

> It is ironic, really, that "To be or not to be" should be the most famous line in *Hamlet*, for its posing of opposites between which one is supposed to have to choose is far from characteristic of the play; "to be *and* not to be" would be more to the point, given the tendency for opposite states to exist simultaneously within characters, situations and the meanings of spoken lines.[3]

This chapter continues to examine the relationship between self, language, reason and emotion. It will show how speech, being here the product of a sociocultural environment in a state of transformation, digresses in the attempt to find stability between the old order and the new.

Hamlet himself exemplifies and verbalizes this situation. His intellect is demonstrably adventurous, lacking the containment or restraint of the old order, and it manifests itself as an undisciplined stream of metaphysical speculation, or in Newell's phrase as:

> Memory, intuition, afflictions of conscience, philosophical or theological reflections, efforts to reason objectively, passionate resolve, rage, frustration, guilt, desperation, murderous intent…[4]

A detailed analysis of the 'To be' soliloquy in act three, scene one will reveal the fact that, despite Hamlet's attempting to proceed in a rational manner, the speech fails to achieve coherence. Its currents "turn awry" and we witness the process rather than the product of rational thought.

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[1] Steven Berkoff, *I am Hamlet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 101.
[2] Mike Harding, "Where is the past now that I really need it?" *The British Psychological Society: Psychotherapy Section Newsletter* No.35 (December 2003), 25.
[3] Calderwood, 197.
[4] Newell, 19. Ackroyd's list is even longer; see Ackroyd, 374.

This chapter, then, commences by making some general points about contemporary concepts of knowledge and the self in relation to speech, particularly drama. The language of *Hamlet* can be seen to reflect these ongoing issues microcosmically.

The earliest play in English that examines the notion of self is the late medieval *Everyman*. Hillman notes that its hero is

> forced to negotiate the discursive vacuum produced by the withdrawal of the divine word, to search for his true image in the face of the ultimate absence [and that] moreover, the text's interechoing proverbs, commonplaces and key spiritual terms comprise a signifying network that negates discrete identity.[5]

What Hillman describes here, surely, is applicable to Hamlet's situation, as he repeatedly uses the vocabulary but not the grammar of various doctrinal systems. He is articulating the presence of a void, a gap in the intellectual framework of a reality formerly occupied by all these metaphysical assumptions and implications. The use to which Hamlet puts these borrowings is a hybridized expression of thought itself.

In his analysis of *Everyman*, Hillman claims "...the cycle can be broken only with a shift from the mode of soliloquy to that of prayer by God's grace."[6] Hamlet's eventual fate is far different from Everyman's, and although soliloquizing will indeed be renounced in the last act, this does not imply that a transcendental truth has been realized. Hamlet has, in fact, lost the certainties he has hitherto lived with – his father, the idealized image of his mother and, it seems, the philosophical and theological axioms with which he still embellishes his speeches. He embodies uncertainty, articulates chronic doubt, asks questions, dissects possible answers, but never comes to any satisfactorily communicable resolution. In short, he has lost the comfort and constraint of his former ideologies.

Dollimore, commenting on the notion of ideology, refers to it as "...a system of illusory beliefs" which serve to keep one individual or group in a position of power over another. This situation, he claims, is usually legitimized by being represented as divinely ordained, therefore both desirable and unchangeable. He goes on to point out that merely realizing or being shown that one's beliefs are false is not necessarily sufficient to bring about a change because "...the very terms in which we perceive the world...the condition and grounds of consciousness" are involved. He insists "In truth

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[5] Hillman (1997), 46.
[6] Ibid., 47.

that order is within us."[7] We have internalized the grammar of our oppression along with its vocabulary.

In the previous chapter I argued that Claudius was responsible for the prevailing ideology which legitimized his taking and maintaining control over Elsinore. Dollimore would see a more insidious aspect of such an ideology, one which is externally proposed, but self-imposed, yet this comment presupposes a recognisable notion of 'self' in this period which can lead to problems of interpretation. In Collins' estimation, for example, there was no parallel in sixteenth-century England to our modern conception of selfhood. Instead, he claims, self was defined in relation to society and one's position in it. "Man was a correspondent agent in the divine cosmic order with no accepted personal motivations." A person could have a limited effect on the world, but could not alter "...the general structure of the divine order or any particular part of it." His virtues and vices had been viewed during the Middle Ages as behavioural characteristics, externally observable, while reason, rather than arising as a result of some introspective activity, "...was an innate virtue unto itself, a divine quality which directed behavior."[8] According to this view, this situation prevailed until the Reformation, when empirical knowledge, formerly mistrusted and controlled by the Church, could be seen in a new light, until "...experience was finally to supplant discourse as the source of truth."[9] However, before this could take place, a period of flux ensued, during which both self and society were perceived in different ways: "As the gap between received ideas and new interpretations of social reality widened, self-consciousness about private identity became inextricably related to the redefinition of social meaning."[10] The result was that 'meaning' became a cultural rather than an objective reality: "...Consciousness appears as the quality of perceiving order in things."[11] Consciousness could thus be seen historically as a change in modes of perceiving meaning, which, rather than recording one's real-world experiences, can be seen as a system of learned discourses for referring to the self and to the reality in which this self is embedded.[12]

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[7] Jonathon Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy : Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his ontemporaries*, 2nd ed. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1989), 9.
[8] Collins, 24.
[9] Ibid., 65.
[10] Ibid., 75.
[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] Belsey (1985), 65.

This topic has also been treated by Chaudhuri, who describes the Renaissance as not merely a time of "...glorious 'rebirth' but an age of collapsing values and systems, of disturbance, exhaustion, and deep humility",[13] a time when the task of somehow correlating old and new learning led to a distrust of human faculties, and a turning towards divine assistance. "If it idealizes an individual figure, this is generally offset by reflections upon common human nature. If it conceives of a well-defined world-order, man is permitted only restricted development within it."[14] Interestingly, Chaudhuri sees pre- and post-Reformation thought as dealing with broadly the same issues. He notes that although, on a surface level, doctrines may seem unreconcilable or even antagonistic to each other, there are parallels in the way Protestants and Catholics situate humanity and its relation to the cosmos.

Belsey claims that the pursuit of knowledge can be seen to cohere with this view, and, describing what this meant in terms of Medieval scholarship, notes that knowledge really indicated knowledge of God. "To know God was not to master an object of knowledge, but to apprehend a meaning which was also truth. God, the *Logos*, at once divinity, concept and word, was pure meaning and pure being."[15] The aim of acquiring this knowledge was to become one with God – by closely adhering to the route mapped out by the church. If knowledge, therefore, had this semi-divine status, then what of the one who does the knowing? "Discursive knowledge does not recognize the knowing subject of liberal humanism, differentiated from the objects of its knowledge, the unified self which is the origin and proprietor of what it knows."[16]

In concentrating on the role of speech produced from the self within this framework, one might wonder how exactly meanings are created and how potentiality becomes actualized, passing into common usage. The process seems somewhat mysterious, the story being told only through a retrospective analysis. As Hanson notes, well before the material which forms the basis for general "epistemic assumptions" has become well enough established to "...receive philosophical treatment", it has already "...been used by people in highly contingent and untheorized ways to negotiate myriad local crises and opportunities in economic, social and institutional life."[17] In other

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[13] Chaudhuri, 3.
[14] Ibid., 3.
[15] Belsey (1985), 56.
[16] Ibid., 65.
[17] Hanson, 3.

words, circumstances may almost force people to transcend the limits Belsey speaks of, therefore turning the tools of use into part of their everyday speech.

Hamlet, it will be argued, is doing exactly this on an individual level, coming up against the barriers of articulation, and, literally, talking his way through them. Sometimes the result will seem mere iconoclasm, destruction rather than creativity. At other times, these "...new ways of knowing are often profoundly at odds with the consciously held commitments of the people who begin to articulate them."[18] This produces often irreconcilable tensions, between reason and emotion, between the stable identity of a character and the emergent property of a new awareness, all of which Hamlet displays and endures.

Hamlet, however, is far from alone, for as Margolies comments, even in contemporary currency "The paradoxical nature of immaterial words with material referents is a traditional topic."[19] The value scheme such works represented may no longer exist, yet the language continues in daily use. Not only is this a disorienting or destabilizing phenomenon, but it is virtually inexpressible, because "...the basic elements of the value scheme are assumed without articulation, so the intellectual framework that would enable a clear differentiation to be made, that would supply terms and definitions – does not exist."[20]

In other words, the speech designed to describe, express and maintain one version of reality can scarcely be expected to adequately describe an emergent other, let alone express its potentialities, or maintain its essentially fluid identity without either failing to do it justice, or worse, re-creating, even verbally, the formerly existing status quo. "The degenerated reality cannot be measured in the language that is one instance of its degeneration."[21]

Drama, however, is in a unique position to record and respond to the alterations in psychological reality at a popular level. Belsey describes how a shift in the locus of interest is discernible:

> As the literal drama discards allegory, and morality personifications give way to social types, concrete individuals, the moral conflicts externalized in the moralities are internalized in the soliloquy and thus understood to be confined within the mind of the protagonist. The struggle between good and evil shifts its centre from the macrocosm to the microcosm.[22]

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[18] Ibid., 3.
[19] Margolies, 62.
[20] Ibid., 64.
[21] Ibid., 26.
[22] Belsey (1985), 43.

The very notion of what it means to be a self had, by the fact of its being questioned, changed from a given to a locus of speculation. It becomes plausible to query the influence of events, circumstances and relationships on the constitution of this 'self'.

Hamlet contains many such potentially self-defining encounters, and in chapter one I examined the influence of one mind upon another, as mediated by speech. There is, however, another and far more complex manifestation of self and speech which the present chapter will investigate, and that is the status of the self, the *'I'* when alone. How does one's own portrayal of events and of others influence the portrayal of oneself? This question can be taken even further. It can be asked what, in fact, constitutes the self in any given present and whether this self, this here and now *'I'* is any more real than the remembered self of one's past, or the projected self of one's future. Further, are these selves dependent on speech as the medium of their manufacture and maintenance, or could they somehow exist and be dramatically effective without it?

Words, which are products of one's sociocultural environment, could be used as building blocks in this self-assembly exercise. At the same time, the self, this verbal creation, remains in a state of flux, liable to be altered, even quite radically, by an unforeseen event, a chance encounter or by learning or inventing a novel turn of phrase. The speech which begins "To be or not to be", I will argue, is both demonstration and investigation of exactly this phenomenon.

Maus notes that Hamlet's talk of the difference between interior and exterior was a familiar topic in sixteenth - and early seventeenth - century rhetoric. Such material reflected a revived interest in the subject, rather than a previously unarticulated or unarticulable possibility. Various current traditions proposed various schemata, but these "...are not simply interchangeable: they are designed to address disparate philosophical problems and are often lodged within incommensurable metaphysical systems."[23]

She does however observe that subjectivity is usually spoken of as a unified concept, "...when in fact, it is a loose and varied collection of assumptions, intuitions, and practices that do not all logically entail one another and need not appear together at the same cultural moment."[24] She goes on to point out that what we might refer to as 'inwardness' in terms of being theatrically depicted is inescapably structured by the

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[23] Maus, 3.
[24] Ibid., 3.

processes used to depict it, resulting in two major determining factors. The first is that inwardness is inwardness of some particular framed previous system. The second is the method of its articulation.

Margolies is skeptical as to Shakespeare's success with the portrayal of inwardness in *Hamlet*: "Shakespeare is required to make the tools at the same times as he is making the product." He has not mastered his medium "...to the point where contradictions can be represented in language or given the concrete presentation in paradox."[25]

Is this so, or could Margolies simply be wrong in his assumptions about Shakespeare's intentions? Greenblatt thinks so, arguing that the rationale present in the source material has been deliberately omitted by Shakespeare from several of his later tragedies. The "antic disposition" of Hamlet actually made perfect sense in the sources, as a clever strategy to avoid being seen as a potential source of danger and so killed by his usurping uncle.[26] In Shakespeare's play it seems a puzzling anomaly, more likely to arouse suspicion than allay it. Greenblatt sees this as a means of creating "a strategic opacity", of rendering the plot irrational but of maintaining a more significant dramatic and aesthetic coherence. According to Greenblatt, this strategy "...released an enormous energy that had been at least partially blocked or contained by familiar, reassuring explanations."[27]

In portraying a situation where the old order has given way to a state of transitional turmoil the status of knowledge as a basis for action must surely undergo interrogation. Can mere words, for example, ever provide a reliable motivating force? Words generated by and for humanity, shorn of that divine sanction which formerly codified morality and constrained choice, and which Hamlet's verbal struggles exemplify, are no longer able to bear their former load.

> The proximity, in his Renaissance account, of the secular question and the theocratic order may be read as hinting at the degree to which the Enlightenment project of finding grounds of right action independent of Christianity will continue to bear the trace of religion.[28]

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[25] Margolies, 64.

[26] Saxo praises it thus: "O valiant Amleth, and worthy of immortal fame, who being shrewdly armed with a feint of folly, covered a wisdom too high for human wit under a marvellous disguise of folly." From *Historiae Danicae* by Saxo Grammaticus, trans. Oliver Elton, in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 3.

[27] Greenblatt (2004), 324.

[28] Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden: The Construction of Family Values in Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 162.

It would be difficult, in equating the figure of Hamlet with a tool of Shakespeare's making, to grant him only partial success. Greenblatt is surely accurate in calling Hamlet "...a traumatized mind straining to articulate perceptions of a shattered world."[29] And the emergent property of this struggle as a voice which "...both mediates and expands his own consciousness of self...Hamlet is the truth, insofar as any hero of consciousness can be."[30]

Battenhouse, however, warns that a 'coherent' view of Hamlet is surely necessary because "Hamlet, by reason of his tragic psychology, gives us a distorted, reductionist, and split version of the truth."[31] I disagree. I see this avenue of speculation leading, not only to wrong answers, but, more crucially, wrong questions. I prefer Chaudhuri's altogether more perceptive approach. Hamlet, he observes, unlike a real flesh and blood being, remains largely unmodified by experience; "Hence his 'madness', his moral passion, his occasional tenderness or self discipline cannot be arranged in any pattern of development." He concludes "He never succeeds in defining his ideal; it seems beyond description, let alone embodiment."[32] This seems a fair assessment, to which can be added a comment of Jenkins "...a Shakespeare play may have purposes which reach beyond those of its characters."[33]

What then can be said of Shakespeare's treatment of the 'self' that is Hamlet? My contention is that Hamlet is a vehicle crafted to fulfil the purposes of an experimental exercise into the nature of speech. Many commentators, however, have viewed Hamlet almost as a real human being, arguing endlessly about his psychological motivations, and supplying their own where the text seems inadequate or obscure. They persist in treating this vehicle as one of themselves, and endowing him with everything they believe he should have, even if Shakespeare's text must be contradicted in order to do so.[34] The audience is, undoubtedly, given a privileged glimpse into what is, apparently, the consciousness of Hamlet, overhearing his flow of ideas, memories, intrusive doubts, arguments, counter-arguments and so on, but attempts to explain or interpret the play in these psychological terms are misguided because Hamlet's apparent self-awareness is a dramatic illusion, albeit virtually unique in contemporary drama.

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[29] Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 3.
[30] Bloom (2003), 94.
[31] Battenhouse, 432.
[32] Chaudhuri, 143.
[33] Jenkins, 125.
[33] Margolies, 64.
[34] For an interesting and erudite survey see Brian Vickers, *Returning to Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1989), 198-208.

The criterion for judging it is not how expertly it mimics reality, but how expertly it sustains an illusion.[35]

The fact that so charismatically complex a creation as Hamlet may lack a fully realized subjectivity has been noted and explained in terms of issues surrounding the whole notion of interiority in contemporary thought. The inescapable implication of this is that Shakespeare was unable, due to the constraints of contemporary psychological understanding, to do any better. Francis Barker, taking a similar stance to Margolies, refers to a "promised essence" which "...remains beyond the scope of the text's signification"[36] and calls Hamlet's interiority some kind of proto-concept which Shakespeare struggled, and failed, to articulate. Thus, even as skilful a playwright as Shakespeare was unable to transcend the restricted intellectual horizons of his day, and the most he could do was reveal its constraints by highlighting a problem he could not solve. I propose, however, that this argument can be countered by reference to the internal logic of the play.

Barker, describing Hamlet's verbalized consciousness, uses such phrases as "The lack of closure in its relentless scepticism, its relativizing, unstable discourse" and "...the chain of Hamlet's rich but fleeting language."[37] This surely suggests that rather than trying and failing to portray consciousness, Shakespeare is trying and succeeding in portraying speech when used to articulate thought. I would argue that the latter is the case and, further, that Hamlet, rather than representing an individual, represents a type crafted by Shakespeare for the purposes of the whole dramatic design. Not only has Hamlet's eventual fate been already ordained by his author, but so has Hamlet's moment-to-moment awareness.

The Hamlet which we have, then, possesses subjectivity in so far as is necessary for that which he embodies. Built in to the specifications of the part he must play is self-consciousness.

Shakespeare's mind has been likened to Hamlet's: "There was a necessity in his soul driving him to penetrate below the surface and to question what others took for granted... He was forever unmaking his world and rebuilding it in thought".[38] This is

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[35] John Dover Wilson, in fact, refers to it as "...perhaps the most successful piece of dramatic illusion the world has ever known" (218).
[36] Barker, 37.
[37] Ibid., 38.
[38] Bradley, 91.

particularly apparent in soliloquies, and, as Salkeld notes in relation to this particular kind of dramatic speech:

> The problem centred (as it does today) on reconciling a notion of the self-as-subject with a notion of the self-as-agent. But neither philosopher nor physician could draw an absolute distinction between the soul as the essential self and the soul as the source of physical action.[39]

Belsey, speaking of soliloquies, comments that, since they are all in the first person, "...the occurrence of the 'I' in speech is predicated on a gap between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the utterance," meaning that the speaker, any speaker, must possess more knowledge, more personality, more hidden depths than can ever be present in his or her speeches at any given time. "It is this gap which opens the possibility of glimpsing an identity behind what is said, a silent self anterior to the utterance."[40]

Hamlet, as will be demonstrated, particularly with regard to the soliloquies fulfils both the role of subject of the utterance and that of the enunciation, and, due to the serial nature of his revelations, the audience is brought along with him, thinking and feeling no more, and often far less, than Hamlet does at any given time. Calderwood elaborates on this notion, going so far as to state that the Prince transcends the isolation of soliloquizing by generating "...with his own utterance a responsive audience. Interior monologue becomes interior dialogue."[41] Hamlet thus creates a distance between two separate *'I'*s, the one who perceives, queries and criticizes and a second *'I'* which passively forms the audience for the first.

One way that Hamlet's complex and dual consciousness finds expression is through the philosophical mode, which is particularly salient for expressing its complexities. As Jenkins says, many of Hamlet's ideas "...belong to the current intellectual currency of his age."[42] Jacobus agrees, citing particularly those concerning "...the question of the reliability of human knowledge." He goes on:

> The play accounts for most kinds of logical language, including syllogisms both compound and categorical, and Ramist axioms where they are appropriate...Hamlet invents syllogisms, examines axioms, and requires the kinds of sensory proof that underlies artificial arguments. His approach to causal analysis is sometimes Ramist, and his breadth of logical analysis reflects practices of place-logic. His concerns throughout the play are centered in inquiry of the kind that logic serves.[43]

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[39] Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 64.
[40] Belsey (1985), 48.
[41] Calderwood, 156.
[42] Jenkins, 107.
[43] Jacobus, *Shakespeare and the Dialectic of Certainty*, 1.

What can be said with certainty is that Shakespeare has allowed Hamlet to use the language of philosophy, but, as will be demonstrated, Hamlet's understanding seems to operate on a very superficial level, as he freely utilizes many philosophical clichés. However, as I observed about his use of Christian imagery in chapter one, the form, rather than the spirit, is all that is involved. Hamlet does not speak as one who can apply philosophical or theological ideas to the situation he is in, and therefore has only an abstracted, impersonal interaction with these. Knights even remarks that Hamlet's thinking is ineffective and not problem-oriented: "...his god-like reason is clogged and impeded by the emotions of disgust, revulsion and self-contempt that bring him back, again and again, to the isolation of his obsession."[44]

An alternative way of looking at this problem would be to view it as a clash between differing modes of expression. French, for example, notes a difference in the ways intellectual and emotional issues are dealt with. She sees this as a case of warring elements within Hamlet himself, as though he knows what he should do but feels strongly drawn to do the opposite, which, she claims, is evidence of a masculine/feminine dichotomy generally operative within the structure of the play.[45] It is more useful, however, to regard masculine and feminine less in terms of physical gender issues, and more in terms of a division in modes of verbal expression. There are intellectual modes and there are emotional modes, which Shakespeare blends and juxtaposes as part of his investigative strategy. Newell neatly sums up this process: "...discourse of reason is displaced or subsumed by discourse of passion. Reason is seen pandering will."[46]

Another contrast which will become apparent as I examine the soliloquy in detail is that an illusion or impression of motion is achieved and maintained, yet the overall situation remains essentially static.

Scarry, speaking of how words in literature generally affect the minds of the listeners or readers, notes that single words are often instructions: "...they are there to prompt a thought or an image."[47] She goes on to point out that, in the use of certain combinations of words, the writer gives us far more information than the character could ever be capable of, or would need consciously to be capable of, and notes

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[44] L.C. Knights, "An Approach to *Hamlet*" in *Notes on* Hamlet, ed. David Philips (London: Ginn and Co., 1969), 142.
[45] French, 157.
[46] Newell, 19.
[47] Scarry, 151.

something which is salient with regard to the 'To be' soliloquy: "The directional instruction moves us away from each image before we can even finish composing it."[48] A whole concept of motion is thus achieved through verbs which appear to describe some form of movement, but which really evoke and describe mental pictures. The soliloquy may be static, but we undoubtedly have an experience of dynamism. C.S. Lewis sums up this poetic achievement:

> ...the words in a great poet's phrase interinanimate one another and strike the mind as a quasi-instantaneous chord, yet, strictly speaking, each word must be read or heard before the next. That way, language is as unilinear as time.[49]

Hamlet's metaphors are, in general, graphically appropriate. Abstracts are being visually imaged and brilliantly portrayed, almost as though the cleverness of his descriptions can somehow act as substitutes for action. Mere action, in fact, seems somehow commonplace, even inferior to the magnificence of his rhetoric. Collins for one sees words as being analoguous to actions for Hamlet.[50] I agree, but would go further and suggest that the problem is not merely one of inaction being replaced by words, but of words being used to try to impose authentic meaning and a sense of identity in an unstable reality.

What follows will be a detailed analysis of the 'To be' soliloquy (III.i.54-89), arguing that although its themes receive major articulation at this point in the play, its antecedents are apparent from I.ii.129 ("O, that this too, too sullied flesh"), in a speech which both articulates the dynamism of a mind at work and introduces themes that will recur throughout. The ideas contained in the opening of the speech are not fully developed, but operate more in the mode of cues or signifiers, leitmotifs, in fact, which offer a glimpse of major metaphysical speculations, some of which will follow, others which will remain tantalizingly underdeveloped.

Ghose, speaking of the 'sullied flesh' soliloquy sees the recent events and Hamlet's misery as separate.[51] The soliloquy does not, at first, link inner and outer events. "Sullied flesh", in fact, carries overtones of humankind's fallen state, for which a remedy cannot be found, because flesh cannot 'thaw' or be resolved into 'a dew' or undergo any transmutation to a less corporeal state until death. Death by suicide is forbidden by Church Law; therefore Hamlet's present situation is represented as being

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[48] Ibid., 107.
[49] C.S. Lewis (1967), 313.
[50] Collins, 62.
[51] Ghose, 13.

both unbearable and inescapable. Hamlet has thus erected a mental structure from which he can explore the scope of his own misery, undistracted by any burdensome obligation to take action, a mental structure from whose inertia, as Colie notes, the Ghost's intervention will temporarily release him.[52]

Having made a statement applicable to humankind in general, Hamlet proceeds to describe his personal misery in terms of alienation from the world, which is "an unweeded garden". The image recalls the field of wheat in St Matthew ch.12, v 24-31, which an enemy sowed with tares or weeds and which were both to be left growing until the harvest of Judgment Day. Hamlet has thus symbolically restated the passivity of his attitude and represented his situation as requiring an otherworldly intervention. He then introduces the autobiographical material to which he attributes his unhappiness. At this point in the play he has no other available external focus for his inner disquiet. His expressed desire is to transmute something 'sullied' into the primeval purity of 'a dew', which is an unworkable project.[53] An alternative strategy, when facing the insoluble, is to try to render it comprehensible and, if still insoluble, perhaps slightly more bearable, but in order to do this one must, to an extent, distance oneself from the problem, thus making it possible to apply one's logical and critical faculties to it. An inchoate mass of negativity cannot be manipulated in this way; therefore, it must be translated into words. Once this has been successfully accomplished, the problem can be viewed somewhat more objectively.

This is eminently logical and, as a technique, will be used repeatedly by Hamlet. He produces justifications for his misery which are plausible – but are they accurate? They diagnose the illness in terms of the particular, erroneously so, because the actual cause goes far deeper and is intimately connected with the unfinished speculations with which he commenced the speech.

Chaudhuri's analysis is similar. He refers to "...a vision of total evil formed, we may say, under an artistic impulse rather than a rational or philosophic one." A melancholic outlook is thus constructed which "...will have the abstract perfection of a work of art: self-generating, self-justifying, and therefore impregnable." Hamlet cannot, apparently, merely react to circumstances, but must develop his reactions into

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[52] Colie, 212.

[53] See Newell, 37-9 for an interesting discussion on the various readings 'sullied', 'sallied', 'solid'. Although I prefer 'sullied' I agree with his point: "One should keep in mind that the word in question was meant in the first instance to be heard, not read...the potential of a word to produce a recognizable double meaning may in this instance be a useful clue to a resolution of the problem" (37).

an aesthetically appealing work. The downside of such a manoeuvre, as Chaudhuri notes, is a paralysis of the impulse towards any form of corrective action: "...not only will it be futile in the face of all-pervasive evil, but it will impair the fullness and independence of this artefact of melancholy."[54] Hamlet, however, is now occupied with constructing a case, in a legalistic way, and even goes on to supply an emotional commentary. He can now react to the material in a manner not previously possible, having verbally transmuted it, if not into a dew, then certainly to a more manipulable shape. He goes on to elaborate it linguistically, ornament it with classical references and vivid imagery, succeeding in constructing something which is poetic rather than an authentic commentary on his situation. Thus, his late father becomes 'Hyperion' to his uncle's 'Satyr', and Hamlet himself no more like 'Hercules' than the two brothers are like each other. Similarly, his mother, who followed the funeral "like Niobe, all tears" (149) and "Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears / Had left the flushing in her galled eyes", (154-5) has hastened "with such dexterity to incestuous sheets" (157). This dexterity, as French observes, could suggest unchastity, possibly the fact that desire for Claudius was present prior to Old Hamlet's death.[55] Certainly, Young Hamlet seems inclined to that view, as will be graphically illustrated in the closet scene. Overall, his thinking seems to be characterized by polarities, which French refers to as "...very young thinking"[56], and there does seem to be something naively juvenile about such monochrome categorizations. It must be noted, however, that they are expressed and elaborated in language of meticulous sophistication, as though an incredibly powerful and creative intellect is at the service of an undisciplined and immature emotional response. So successful in fact is this process that Hamlet becomes almost overwhelmed by his own rhetoric, interrupting himself with phrases such as "must I remember?" and "let me not think on it", occupying the roles of actor, author and audience – something which he will again have occasion to do in 'To be'.

Three specific biographical pictures have been created during the course of the soliloquy, the impossibly perfect King, the Queen whose love has turned to betrayal, and the Uncle who is both inferior and evil. Not only do they fulfill the purpose of providing background material for the plot, but they also afford an insight into Hamlet's attitude towards these characters. So that when Hamlet finally declares, "But break my

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[54] Chaudhuri, 136.
[55] French, 148.
[56] Ibid., 149.

heart, for I must hold my tongue" (159), the comment is both ironic and superfluous because his unheld tongue or, more accurately, unchecked speculations have led him further from the genuine cause of his heartbreak, causing him to deal with images rather than realities.

It can be seen that two perspectives are operative; Hamlet's, and one which is more objective, more a consequence of Shakespeare's overall dramatic design. This fact needs to be kept in mind, because it is difficult to see beyond, or behind, the overwhelming presence of Hamlet, and to avoid accepting his exposition of reality as though virtuosity of expression were synonymous with veracity. This state of affairs, then, represents the intimate relationship existing between Hamlet and the audience, who are invited to both observe and concur with his judgments. Hamlet's imagery soars. Its richly textured constructions scarcely admit the possibility that its plausibility rests on no more solid a foundation than opinionated and highly selective observation. Both the theatre audience and Hamlet himself are seduced by the vocabulary of passion during a speech which constructs a persuasive but highly idiosyncratic view of reality. This tendency has been fuelled by Hamlet's extremely sheltered and elitist preference for the exaggerated heroics of classical literature, which will be examined in detail during chapter three. Here, however, this constructed reality repeatedly, and erroneously, serves as a basis for a self-diagnosis of Hamlet's own condition. The process rather than the product of thought is verbalized throughout, a method which enables Shakespeare to portray Hamlet's reasoning as both dynamic and evolving, even though, as noted, he remains inactive in terms of the plot.

Act two concludes with a rhetorical embellishment:

> The play's the thing
> Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King. (600-1)

As Newell observes "There is a note of triumph in this couplet, as though Hamlet is celebrating the victory of his mind in formulating a suitable plan."[57] How suitable is the plan? At this moment in the play, when the plan is more of a proto-plan than a fully realized scheme, it seems, to Hamlet's fevered imagination, eminently suitable to catch Claudius in a trap. As to how this trap will work, we have already been introduced to the possibility of an extra speech which Hamlet will write for insertion into the text of the play. We might wonder, what might this speech consist of?

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[57] Newell, 70.

It is not possible to offer proof, only a reasonable conjecture, but, as will be argued in this chapter, the material Hamlet treats in the 'To be' soliloquy might be material for such a speech which the audience will never actually hear because Claudius interrupts the action of 'The Mousetrap' by leaving. The speech, I suggest, would be one for the murderer of the player King, his nephew Lucianus, whose conscience afflicts and torments him.[58]

Conscience, then, is a key word in this whole exercise, and we are primed for its salience in III.i., as Polonius observes, "'Tis too much proved, that with devotions's visage/ And pious action we do sugar o'er/ The devil himself." (III.i.47-8).

Claudius replies – or rather responds, since it takes the form of an aside

> O 'tis too true.
> How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience
> The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
> Than is my deed to my most painted word
> O heavy burden. (III.i.49-54)

Several things can be learnt from this speech - the fact of its being an aside, for example, therefore not intended for the hearing of Polonius, indicating that he was never an accomplice in Claudius' crime. There is also the fact that Claudius is guilty as charged, and, crucially, a fact that neither Hamlet nor the ghost is aware of: Claudius is 'burdened' by the deed. Hamlet, however, has set himself the task of composing a speech which must seem to be the words of one who is in Claudius' predicament.

"To be or not to be, that is the question:" This is the language of philosophy, the taut rhetoric of the Schools, as Hamlet attempts, in the very opening, to achieve clarity of expression.[59] He has a mission, which is to compose a speech for Lucianus, and he

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[58] Interestingly, Newell, in suggesting how the soliloquy might be performed on stage says "I would have the soliloquy relate to a manuscript Hamlet would be reading when he enters, which the actor would look up from and then handle so as to make it figure symbolically in Hamlet's problem of action, with all its implications. The manuscript is of the lines Hamlet said he would set down and insert in *The Murder of Gonzago*. Through the handling of the prop, the actor would convey that the presentation of the mousetrap play is the immediate meaning of the soliloquy's last word – "action"." (181) Despite this innovative advice, Newell fails to make any other connection between the material contained in the the soliloquy and the dozen to sixteen lines, for insertion to 'The Mousetrap'.

[59] Bacon's method of enquiry involved "...a rigorous examination of both sides of a question, a thinking in antitheta" (Faas, 113). This resembled the *in utramque partem* of Protagoras and Gorgias, proceeding by means of the dismantling of a given essentialist statement, such as "To be or not to be." Shakespeare was not writing within "...or for the context of the post-Baconian era. But when did this era begin? Bacon's *Colours of Good and Evil* was published in 1597 and his *Advancement of Learning* in 1605, both during the height of Shakespeare's career." Faas concludes that "to argue *in utramque partem* was part of Tudor rhetorical training and left its imprint on many literary works of the period before Shakespeare" (Faas, 114).
Ekbert Faas, *Shakespeare's Poetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). See also Chaudhuri, 139, Jacobson, 79-82, for more on Hamlet's scholarly method in this soliloquy.

must have it ready for the player to learn, so in order to discipline his ideas he utilizes the style and vocabulary of the classroom. He has obviously, as a student of Wittenberg, taken part in debates therefore, how better to marshal his ideas than by asking the right question, in the right manner? Unfortunately, as shall be seen, this ordered opening gives way before very long, because this is not, emphatically not, an intellectual exercise, a situation where the ideas are abstract and far removed from personal experience. Hamlet, as French has noted, is as much of a feeler as he is a thinker, and, as Dodsworth points out, it is as though he were more than one person: "He explains to himself the meaning of what he has just said, picks up his own words, listens to himself carefully."[60] This seems accurate, both in terms of what Hamlet is attempting to do, compose a speech for a play, and in terms of what Shakespeare is attempting to do, highlight the essentially amorphous nature of the borders between life, theatre, and the speeches we make in order to negotiate our passage through the world. Hamlet can thus be seen to represent both the subject of the utterance and the enunciation in Belsey's terms.

The business in hand, for Hamlet, is the manufacture of an element inside a play within a play. Ironically, the speech will never be spoken, 'The Mousetrap' never allowed to run its course. Equally ironically, although speech and its relationship to consciousness are depicted in this soliloquy, rather than the carefully controlled sequence promised by the opening, what is being given is a portrait of a mind which "...must compulsively go on combining words" because "...the ceaseless flow of language cannot be checked in whatever time or place the body dwells, and besides there is always the possibility that the next new combination of words might be the formula of revelation".[61] But this will not happen: what will happen is that the words, rather than the speaker, often control the direction taken.

As Dodsworth observes, "...the soliloquy puts 'thought' on display: but it is a thought without substance. It *sounds* like thought." Although "The assurance with which Hamlet opens the speech implies a long process of thought behind it" – that is, he has asked the right question - he fails to maintain this assurance, and Hamlet's uncertainties "...multiply as the implications of his question are set forth."[62]

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[60] Martin Dodsworth, *Hamlet Closely Observed* (London: Athlone Press, 1985), 124.
[61] Ghose, 40.
[62] Dodsworth, 110.

This is well illustrated when we consider the speculations Hamlet entertains during the soliloquy. The content is not unique to Shakespeare. It consists of a series of traditional ideas, a mixture of classical and Christian orthodox speculations.[63] And at times it resembles the speech of a "...lecturer glossing a familiar text."[64]

It is scarcely surprising that Hamlet utilizes what is customary to him in view of the difficulty of the task he has set himself. The speech of a dozen to sixteen lines must do two things. First, it must fit in to the rest of the play, not striking the hearers (i.e. the entire assembled court) as something which jars, something whose language betrays it as the insertion of a strange hand. Secondly, the speech must express such sentiments as would cause Claudius to betray himself. All Hamlet knows, with regard to his strategy, is that it has worked in the past, on "guilty creatures". He has never witnessed such an unmasking. His knowledge is purely anecdotal. Besides the fact of the unmasking, these same "guilty creatures" are said to have "proclaim'd their malefactions." (II.ii.588) This, as Newell notes, could, if successful, lead to a "...public confession by Claudius that will relieve Hamlet of his commitment to exact personal revenge."[65] Hamlet sets out enthusiastically, but, as soon becomes apparent, he has over-estimated his own powers. Eloquence is not the problem, nor any lack of the ability to create and describe powerful images. What Hamlet lacks is the discipline necessary to manipulate the emotions of another human being. As we have seen in the previous chapter, an ability to master one's own emotions is a prime requisite for such

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[63] For example, the notion of death as either a journey or a sleep can be found in Socrates: "Let us grasp in this way that there is much ground for hope that death is good. For being dead is one of two things. Either to be dead is to be nothing and to have no awareness of anything, or, as people say, it is in fact a change and migration of the soul from here to another place. Now if you suppose that there is no awareness, but the sort of sleep that someone sleeps when he sees nothing even in dreams, death will be an amazing gain.... Now if death is like this, I say that to die is to gain: for all of time then appears as no more than a single night. But if death is a sort of journey from here to another place, and what people say is true, that all the dead are there, what good can be greater than this" (Socrates, *Apology*, 40 C-41 C) Plato, *Complete Works* ed. J.M. Cooper (Indianapolis, 1997). Cited by Terence Irwin, *Classical Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 203-4. Pointing up the contemporary currency of the *Apology*, M.R.D. Anders, *Shakespeare's Books* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1904), 275 notes that it was translated by Cicero (Tusc. Disp. I, 97-99), quoted also by Stobaeus and Eusebius, paraphrased by Plutarch in "Consolatio ad Apollonium", 107 D Foll. (cf. Holland's transl. of the 'Morals', 1603, p.516.) Ph. de Morney's *Discourse of Life and Death* is cited, trans. Mary, Countess of Pembroke, 1592. Anders also mentions Florio's (1603) translation of Montaigne's Essays. On death: "If it be a consummation of one's being, it is also an amendment and entrance into a long and quiet night. Wee finde nothing so sweete in life as a quiet rest and gentle sleepe, and without dreames." (Bk. III, ch 12, p.627). Although the manuscript was not published until 1603 Anders considers it possible that Shakespeare may have had access to it and may even been personally acquainted with the author.. Jenkins notes that, in Belleforest, Amleth asks, "What is the good of living when shame torments our conscience and cowardice holds us back from gallant enterprises?" For more on the possible origins of the ideas, see also Jenkins p.489, longer note to III.i.56-88.

[64] Dodsworth, 124.

[65] Newell, 69.

an enterprise, and Hamlet cannot master his. Evidence of this is apparent in the very opening of his soliloquy, as the question "To be or not to be" resonates with Gertrude's earlier "If it be."

One reason for this could be that Gertrude is very clearly in Hamlet's mind at that moment. Hamlet, expressing himself in scholarly terms, is still under the influence of powerful emotional undercurrents. He has, up until his father's death and his mother's re-marriage, been operating with a strong, and strongly idealized, image of Gertrude which has cast her in the role of adoring and totally faithful wife. As I will be examining in chapter four, she was depicted by Hamlet as a mere adjunct of his father. Events, however, have forced Hamlet to reconsider, but, at this point in the play, he has not re-configured his representation – merely expended much energy in denigration. Given these issues, it is no surprise that Hamlet the scholar takes refuge in the familiar – familiar both semantically and syntactically.

Jacobus, speaking of the speech with which Hamlet responded to Gertrude's original "if it be", notes:

> At few other times in the drama is he capable of the certainty he declares in himself in this scene. The use of terms such as "forms" and "moods", recalling the types of syllogisms studied in the Schools, indicates Hamlet's sense of security about what he knows to be the truth in his own case.[66]

Has he lost his certainty because of the ghost's visit? The answer must surely be, yes, because up until then Hamlet could represent himself to himself as someone with a clearly defined place and time in the world. The ghost's manipulative influence has severely destabilized this self-hood, and, though agreeing to the ghost's vengeful demands, Hamlet has not managed to transform himself into the agent of his promises.

His speculations thus commence with the same idiosyncratic methodology we have seen him using previously. He constructs a notional scenario in which life is depicted as a negative experience, the only remedy for which is death. There is no third alternative at this point; either "outrageous fortune" is endured, or is ended. Any form of constructive action, which might reverse the 'outrageous' aspect of fortune, is conspicuously absent. He describes the troubles as "a sea", again, a traditional metaphor, but one which vividly presents them as envisaged by Hamlet to be beyond human control. As Clemen comments, "The first four lines already exemplify the dual

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[66] Jacobus, 80.

effect of the soliloquy, appealing to the imagination as well as to the intellect, and challenging the audience to active participation."[67]

Dodsworth comments on the use of 'may' in "what dreams may come", and that of 'must' in "must give us pause". He says,

> ...its strength is realized for us and him in giving him pause, now, at the moment he speaks, even as the dreams will give him pause after he has died...The pause is at once part of the future and in the present: it is what Hamlet will experience and what he does experience...it is the thought that even his own death cannot protect him from the consequences of his encounter with the ghost that makes him pause.[68]

It is also, of course, a very accurate description of what it might be like to have actually committed a murder and be in fear of the consequences. Hamlet has not but has promised he will, so, at this moment, he is merely projecting. One of the main problems is that he succeeds – too well. As Bloom comments,[69] Hamlet's consciousness expands (or, more accurately, Shakespeare allows it to) every time Hamlet speaks. The agenda he has set himself has caused a further such expansion, and, unfortunately, one from which there is no possibility of a retreat. Hamlet is not the only one who has closed off the possibility of going back, since the 'shuffled' of 'mortal coil' will have an echo - Claudius, as we shall see in chapter three, refers to the fact that corruption and bribery work here on earth, "But 'tis not so above/ There is no shuffling, there the action lies/ In his true nature." (60-2) Hamlet uses the word in an innocent sense, meaning to discard, as a snake does its old skin, Claudius in a guilty sense, to make a generalization, but one which he knows applies to himself. These reverberations resound at various points throughout the play, illustrative of the elusive nature of words, whose meanings, once uttered, escape the speaker's intention and constraints, as here, for example, when we encounter the reptile, or serpent, one of the stark, iconic and Biblical elements present in the dumb show which precedes 'The Mousetrap'. Another example of this occurs in the type of metaphors Hamlet has been using to speak of life and death. Knights observes that all those used for life are negative, those for death positive, and concludes "What we have here is a quality of moral relaxation, a desire to lapse back from the level of adult consciousness."[70]

Does Hamlet desire to lapse from adult consciousness, or merely to regain the kind of consciousness he supposedly enjoyed before his father's death? I would argue

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[67] Wolfgang Clemen, *Shakespeare's Soliloquies*, trans. Charity Scott Stokes (London: Methuen & Co., 1987), 139.
[68] Dodsworth, 126.
[69] Bloom (2003), 94.
[70] Knights, 134.

for the latter, and also that this desire is what he is attempting to place in the mouth of Lucianus, during a speech which will lament the state of mind which the murder has produced in him, and paradoxically, lament the state of mind which contemplation of committing murder has produced in Hamlet.

The subject of time arises, time as a scornful whip wielder (70).[71] Harding, speaking of the concept of time and our experience of it, suggests that it does not always "...seem to conform with the niceties of grammar"[72] and that it might not make sense to speak of the future as though it actually existed. "It cannot exist, that is be, if it has not yet, by its own definition, actually happened. How can something 'be' if it has yet to take place?"[73] One answer might be that it can, if one subscribes to the existence of an old-order cosmology, because faith, rather than intellectual gymnastics, is what is required for understanding. Time, as a concept in this play, is an ever-present, divinely maintained reality, rather than the serial unfolding which we make of it. Hamlet, however, is not situated within this world view; his speculations have propelled him beyond the comfort zone of its borders. The problem is one of finding a new means of expressing this state. Thus represented, Hamlet's situation becomes difficult, but not impossible. In fact, to break out, to transcend one's present universe of discourse, and the inflexible but invisible bars of the cage, involves listening rather than just speaking, as Harding concludes:

> Something emerges from the language of the every-day which has not been heard before, and frames the world anew...we can make ourselves more open to their possibility by listening more attentively to the words we use, attempting to put aside our assumptions as to what is being said.[74]

A list of life's problems comes next in the soliloquy, mainly consisting of fairly superficial platitudes, more general than particular, although "the oppressor"s wrong" and "the insolence of office" might describe his attitude towards Claudius's reign, since in V.ii.65 he describes his uncle as having come between 'the election' and his own hopes.

In Q1, however, the list is further removed from anything Hamlet is likely to have experienced personally:

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[71] Claudius, unbeknown to Hamlet, has just spoken of the exact effect of a whip: "How smart a lash..." (50)

[72] Harding, 15.

[73] Ibid., 18-19. Harding here also notes that "A number of native American philosophies see the future as being 'behind us' and the past as 'in front', for the reason we can never see the nature of the future, but the past may always be open to our inspection."

[74] Ibid., 23.

> ...the scornes and flattery of the world,
> Scorned by the right rich, the rich curssed of the poor?
> The widow being oppressed, the orphan wronged,
> The taste of hunger, or a tirants raigne. (845-48) [75]

These could be the reasons Lucianus would cite for his decision to commit the murder. Milward notes that Hamlet's use of the phrase "dread of something after death" (79) implies an atheism of some sort, which will not, he claims, be maintained during the prayer scene, where Hamlet seems determined to ensure Claudius' damnation.[76]

An alternative explanation would be that these words do indeed imply atheism, or rather, paganism, but that they are intended for Lucianus who will utter a demonic incantation prior to the crime and, since Hamlet is already familiar with this play, as *The Murder of Gonzago*, he is attempting to keep to the ethos of the plot and character. Besides this, Hamlet has little reason to assume any Christianity on the part of Claudius, the real murderer, since, apparently without remorse, he has dispatched not only his own brother but also God's anointed.

On the general theme of speculation, it is surely conceivable that the intellect goes on vast adventures, as does Hamlet's, while the will, or motive force behind action, remains unable to proceed or retreat, again like Hamlet's. C.S. Lewis comments that unless speculation with regard to the afterlife is "...limited by some definite religious or anti-religious doctrine," it must "...paralyse the will by introducing infinite uncertainties and rendering all motives inadequate." [77] This comment presumes a link between 'will' and 'intellect'. The intellect would surely be the part of one's mental equipment which, in the absence of a constraining theist or atheist answer, keeps speculating about possibilities, whereas the will is that which suffers the consequent paralysis.

To state the case far more simply, unless one's mind and one's emotions are engaged, the result will not be action.

Dodsworth also highlights the repetition of "bare bodkin"/"fardels bear" which I suggest as further evidence for the theatrical intent of this speech, given the archaic style of 'The Mousetrap', a portion of which we will hear later. The notion of bearing

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[75] Q.1. alters not only the word order, but also the whole outlook of the speech: "For in that dreame of death, when we awake/ And borne before an everlasting judge/ From whence no passenger ever return'd/ The undiscovered country, at whose sight/ The happy smile, and the accursed damn'd/ But for this, the joyful hope of this..." and later: "Who would this endure, But for a hope of something after death? Which pusles the braine, and doth confound the sence". (Bertram & Kliman 86-8)

[76] Milward (1973), 246. Newell also notes that Hamlet previously "expresses an obedience to Canon Law that implies faith in the 'Everlasting'." (I.ii.131-2) Newell, 33.

[77] C.S. Lewis (1969), 126.

fardels is itself interesting. It implies being burdened, something which, as previously revealed, Claudius is experiencing. The speech so far, then, contains a mixture of educated speculation, projected dramatic invention and, crucially, the attempt of a brilliant but undisciplined intellect to impose order.

The notion of travellers never returning from death seems anomalous, since Hamlet has recently been in the presence of one such returned traveller, but Hamlet is composing a speech for Lucianus, who has not. The line, thus, represents an artificial, though plausible, attempt to construct the kind of guilt-ridden scenario a murderer might, logically, be expected to endure, with all of its attendant imaginative background material.

Dodsworth focuses on the word 'and' repeated several times:

> Its function is to bind clauses together without revealing why they do go together, in that way. '*And* thus' suggests that phenomena identical in respect to their universality are being compared, but this cannot be so.[78]

Dodsworth continues that although we may all be cowards when we think of death, it doesn't necessarily follow "...that we would all regard it with 'resolution' were it not for 'thought'. It is only by thinking that we realize resolution is needed."[79]

It is also only by thinking that the 'and' linkages appear incongruous, and it is only by having them before us, as a written text, that we can afford the luxury of pausing and considering. A stage play, such as Hamlet is composing for, and Hamlet is part of, is a far more dynamic and impressionistic experience. It does not provide pauses for the audience to savour or deliberate over certain lines, so these could only be retrospectively relished. For example, as Scarry says, "...a verb that appears to describe motion within the text" can instead prompt and describe "...the arrival of a picture in the imaginer's mind."[80] This can result in the "directional instruction" moving "...us away from each image before we can even finish composing it."[81] We are not, in fact, permitted to catch our fantasizing breath before being given the next image. She goes on to speak of "...radical immobilization during key passages, after which motion erupts again."[82] It might be more accurate to say that it is emotion, rather than motion which erupts.

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[78] Dodsworth, 122.
[79] Ibid., 122.
[80] Scarry, 106.
[81] Ibid., 107.
[82] Ibid., 108.

Most modern editors agree with the interpretation of conscience in this speech as consciousness, but, in doing so, they are failing to see an obvious point; if Shakespeare wished to use a word indicating thought, and only that, he could have done so.[83] The fact that he does not do so, but uses such an ambivalent term, suggests that he fully intends to exploit its potentialities. Also, the speech is intended to "catch the conscience of the King."

Claudius, like Lucianus, the 'Mousetrap' poisoner, has not apparently been troubled by conscience before or during the murder, and as R.M. Frye notes, his conscience "...is pervasively retrospective, concerned only with distress over past conduct, whereas for Hamlet conscience is prospective, linking past, present and future, a guide (at least potentially) for what he may yet do."[84] Frye goes further, observing that even if we narrow the word to mean ethical awareness, as opposed to any other type, we might still wonder what the basis is for the ethics involved. Is God's Law being invoked, or merely that of the prevailing socio-cultural climate? Alternatively: "...is it the act and process of inner reflection by an individual who takes several or all of these criteria into consideration?"[85] All of these possibilities are available in Elizabethan thought. However, one thing which is not available is the modern notion that the dictates of conscience can spring automatically into awareness once we carry out, or imagine carrying out, some ethically questionable act. Conscience, as Frye notes, has to be voluntarily accessed in a disciplined way.[86] Hamlet, in considering material for a conscience-stricken speech, is attempting to place himself in that position, as a good actor or playwright should. Unfortunately, the exercise is soon beyond his control. That which was to be a tight, oratorically abstract investigation becomes an imaginative and potentially terrifying projection.[87]

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[83] Bradley, commenting on the term, rejects the notion that it refers to 'conscience' in the moral sense, and prefers the older definition 'consciousness'. His argument is that Hamlet is contemplating suicide, representing it as a desirable alternative to a life of troubles – except for the tendency to speculate on possible afterlife scenarios. Hamlet then generalizes – saying that speculation paralyses action: "What applies to himself, no doubt, though he shows no consciousness of the fact...it is the same thing as the 'craven scruple of thinking too precisely on the event' of the speech in IV.iv." (Bradley, 77) Interestingly, as noted by Jenkins. (Jenkins, 314), Claudius will express something of a similar nature in the prayer scene, III.iii.41-3: "And like a man to double business bound / I stand in pause where I shall first begin / And both neglect."

[84] R.M. Frye, 137.

[85] Ibid., 179.

[86] Ibid., 180.

[87] According to the OED the word 'conscience' formerly had two meanings, the first being the now obsolete "Inward knowledge, consciousness, inmost thought, mind." This is divided into five sub-sections, dealing with internal awareness of one's own mind, awareness of its contents, sensory awareness, reasonableness and common-sense. This definition, (I) seems to have died out during the

Clemen typifies this type of speech as one which reveals how "...the turmoil, the violent emotions that erupt in Hamlet when he is alone, may lead to a dislocation of syntax as well as to a disruption of coherent thought." It gives the impression of "...speech being used to express reactions of the moment, sometimes before logical patterns of language have been imposed on them."[88] Therefore, thought, a raw, multimodal heuristic, is here being portrayed.

There are, I will be arguing, patterns throughout the play, not necessarily logical, but patterns nonetheless, which can be discerned as guides or signposts, for various recurrent themes. If 'make' is read as 'cause' then the sense becomes that conscience causes us to behave like cowards by puzzling or paralyzing rendering the agent powerless to act on the world. However, according to the OED, 'make' can also signify: "To regard as, consider or compute to be: to describe or represent as."[89] In that case, 'conscience' could be judging the behaviour of the procrastinator (or the lack of behaviour) and finding it cowardly, thereby making the same kind of behaviourist judgment that any observer might make, although unlike the external observer,

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eighteenth century. The second definition is the more familiar one, dealing with the internal acknowledgement or recognition of the moral quality of one's motives and actions and the sense of right and wrong regarding things for which one is responsible. Opinions as to the nature, function and authority of conscience are widely divergent, varying from the conception of the mere exercise of the ordinary judgement on moral questions, to that of the infallible guide of conduct, a sort of deity within us. The word 'conscience' itself was originally "A noun of condition or function, like 'science', 'prescience', 'intelligence', 'prudence' etc., and as such had no plural: a man or a people had more or less conscience." This eventually evolved into a personal, private 'conscience'. There is also a distinction drawn between 'good' and 'bad' conscience. 'Bad' conscience does not equate with inefficiency; a 'bad' conscience competently informs the sinner of his faults, i.e. it is aware of 'badness'. 'Conscienceless', a term coined in 1420 (Hoccleve, "The Regiment of Princes", 23) apparently described a state of being able to over-ride this inner guidance, or being totally devoid of it. Besides these two major definitions of 'conscience' there is a third: "Conscious observance or practice, tenderness of conscience." This involves two basic components, a dynamic or behavioural, and an affective, indicating that 'conscience' was quite holistically manifested in the life of each individual. Clearly 'conscience' has evolved in the following ways: 1. Specialisation – from a word descriptive of consciousness in a broad sense to one dealing with a specific moral aspect of it. 2. Personalisation – from a general attribute to a specific one. The question which can now be asked is: how absolute were these transformations by the time of *Hamlet's* composition? Would it be reasonable to assume that the word has been subject to semantic fluctuations, and that all three definitions were, at different periods exclusive or overlapping in varying degrees? Was the transition from a general to a particular conscience a two-way process, or did a contextual variation continue to occur? And finally, how complete was the discarding of any one set of associations, and the acquisition of another, in view of the fact that a word's meanings can often persist, albeit implicitly, long after the explicit definition has been changed. It is also worth noting that the term 'Inwit' co-existed with 'Conscience', sharing its dual moral/intellectual meanings. It had died out by the end of the fifteenth century and was revived as an archaism by recent authors, most famously Joyce in 'Ulysses', who adopted it from Dan Michel's title 'Ayenbite of Inwyt' (1340). The Middle English Dictionary cites one usage in addition to the OED, and that is "The collection of inner faculties" or "One of the outer bodily senses".

[88] Clemen (1987), 122.

[89] Marcus, however, cautions: "...the OED, however invaluable, is not without its biases: it is a product of the same late nineteenth-century codifying impulse that has given us our standard editions of Shakespeare and many other writers" (Marcus (1996), 13).

conscience presumably has access to the agent's inmost thoughts and feelings, surely taking these into consideration.

We have already seen Hamlet refer to 'conscience' as something which prevents the individual from controlling his own behaviour, a fact which he intends to exploit. He hopes the King will involuntarily reveal his guilt, as his conscience forces him to 'blench' (flinch) or makes him 'unkennel' his 'occulted guilt' in words. Conscience, then, specifically a guilty one, can be represented as a force which overrules both will and intellect, compelling the sinner to behave in a self-revelatory manner, to his own detriment. In this case, behaviour is instigated rather than impeded, but the behaviour is not that which one would associate with courage, if by courage one understands an ability to feel, but overcome, fear. A brave man, or brave sinner, would, one presumes, sit stoically throughout any performance, even one which mimics his recently perpetrated crime, and thus escape detection. A coward, on the other hand, would be expected to 'blench' or utter some guilty admission. We associate this kind of behaviour with cowards, as we associate failure to act in the line of duty or the face of danger with them.

Claudius, however, is not the only king Hamlet wishes to put to the test:

> The spirit that I have seen
> May be a 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. (II.ii.594-600)

An admission of guilt on the part of Claudius would serve the additional purpose of confirming that the ghost is indeed that of old Hamlet, and not some diabolic manifestation engendered by 'weakness' and 'melancholy'. This reading indicates a lack of confidence on Hamlet's part. He is not completely certain that his unhappiness is due to the facts revealed by the ghost. So far he has only cited one other possible cause, an internal imbalance or weakness.

Returning to the 'conscience/make' conjunction, another possibility, cited by OED as now being obsolete, concerns a visual image: "To represent by graphic or plastic art", and the lines immediately following 'coward/conscience' do seem to add credence to this possible interpretation: "And thus the native hue of resolution/ is sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought" (III.i.84-5). According to the contemporary theory of the Four Humours, the native hue, or colour of resolution was sanguine, that is, ruddy. This chromatic association is reinforced by the word 'cast' and, as the OED

confirms: "A dash of some colour, thrown into or over, or interspersed with another tinge, hue, shade", which recalls Claudius:

> The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art,
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
> Than is my deed to my most painted word. (III.i.51-3)

This will be re-echoed by Hamlet in the graveyard when he says:

> Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her,
> Let her paint an inch thick,
> To this favour she must come.
> Make her laugh at that.(V.i.186-9)

Jenkins describes this idea as "...a common motif in the tradition of the *danse macabre*, in which a skull appears beside a woman at her toilet."[90] The whole notion of covering something up artificially while not really altering its original identity, so that this identity will resurface in some mockingly retributive sense later on, seems particularly appropriate in both Hamlet's and Claudius' cases.

Hamlet, however, is less dogmatic and more speculative, yet cannot escape from the emotional bondage which, as Knights observes[91], harkens back to something far less sophisticated, more primeval and immediate than the places to which his soaring intellect leads him. In the same way as his speech is peppered with Christian words and phrases, so his metaphysics is side-tracked by the undercurrent of these powerful emotional conflicts. Conscience, for Hamlet, carries connotations of past, present and future, and although in his case the past contains no personal crime, yet the present is already being influenced by that crime's presence as potential. Ironically, the undisciplined speculator is being pulled up sharply by the emotive resonances of a single word, a word which Hamlet underestimated as he set out with the task of composing "some dozen to sixteen lines". Clemen observes that

> Hamlet never gives us the final piece of information which he would perhaps have given – the sight of Ophelia causes him to break off. We can be sure that at the end of the soliloquy Shakespeare wanted us to be unsure about the conclusion that Hamlet himself would have drawn.[92]

It therefore becomes clear that the purpose of speech has been to prove itself a good servant but a bad master. Thus the self that is revealed is constrained by the speech available to it. Hamlet however has to proceed to the next part of his plan, the King's

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[90] Jenkins, 554.
[91] Knights, 142.
[92] Clemen (1987), 141.

conscience[93] has yet to be caught, and it is with the whole catching apparatus of 'The Mousetrap', together with the notion of a play within a play, that I will next be concerned.

[93] C.S. Lewis (1967) mentions a sense in which 'conscience' can be used to refer to a situation "...when two, or a few, men share some knowledge which most men do not possess; in fact when they are in a secret." (184) He refers to this as "consciring". It is tempting to see a version of this in Hamlet's soliloquising relationship to the audience.

Chapter 3

Plays within and plays without - drama as discourse analysis.

> Comparisons between the world and the stage were so common as to become, in many instances, almost automatic, an unconscious trick of speech.[1]
>
> Why is it he can 'act' and not *act*?[2]
>
> Shakespeare's refinement is to make this paradoxical situation not a joke, but an emphatic assertion of Hamlet's reality.[3]
>
> Cultural performances…have to violate the common way of classifying the world and society. The self of society is split up into actor and spectator, so that it may observe and transform itself.[4]

Having seen, then, how language, reason and emotion inform Shakespeare's exposition of character, and how speech, the product of a sociocultural environment in a state of transformation, digresses in the attempt to establish stability in the space between the old order and the new, we now turn to dramatic form and its relationship to language.

The main areas of investigation this chapter will cover are the purpose of having a play, or plays, within the main play and, secondly, the views of theatre's purpose as suggested in the play as a whole. I will be arguing that there are two quite distinct views, one traditional to playing, as expounded by Hamlet, and one more innovative, voiced by the player King. Both, however, are anatomized and found wanting within the play, which points the way for a fuller investigation into speech as both facilitator and constructor of roles, a theme which will inform chapter four, on the theme of verbally mediated notions of morality, and chapter five, which deals with Hamlet's antic disposition and Ophelia's madness. It can thus be seen how truth and reason fare when subjected to the dramatic rhetoric of these experimental scenarios.

Another crucial strand of the experimental strategy is Shakespeare's use of archaic references to the mystery and morality play traditions. This, I will argue, is included in order to indicate that a return to an older technique is taking place, whereby

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[1] Righter, 76.
[2] Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare the Professional* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 123.
[3] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Stage 1574-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2.
[4] Jessica Bockler, "European Theatre as Spiritual Practice?" *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 9.1 (Spring 2005), 27.

certain aspects of a single character were externalised. In *Hamlet* this occurs particularly during 'The Mousetrap', leading to the paradoxical situation of the composer of "some dozen to sixteen lines" actually being influenced as he hears a speech of that length, but influenced in a way which, as I hope to demonstrate, will not become apparent until the end of the play. The novelty of the situation is to have that which was externalised being internalised, then again thrust out as speech. However, running like a subterranean river throughout the entire play is a theme of disillusionment – not only with theatre as a medium, but with the whole edifice of value and meaning, as created and maintained by speech itself.

My investigation of the play-within-a-play material will attempt to expose it as a carefully constituted product, replete with glosses, omissions and juxtapositions, which, like the version of reality given to Hamlet by the ghost, has a very specific agenda in view, the agenda both of fulfilling the dramatic function and of furthering Shakespeare's experimental aim. It is also notable that the play-within-the-play material, that is, the Pyrrhus speech and 'The Mousetrap', use language which, due to its exaggerated artificiality, forms a strong contrast to the more natural-seeming speech of the rest of the play. However, this material is depicted in a way that allows its integration into the ongoing psycho-thematic structure of the whole text. Hence, there is a powerful undercurrent operative in relation to the main play, rendering 'reality' less separate from the playworld, diminishing the dividing line between life and fiction, and establishing a form of permeability, a grey area in which the normal psychological responses of the audience, i.e. that they are self-consciously spectators of a piece of fiction, is held in semi-abeyance, and the credence usually given only to real world events and characters is aroused. The play within a play therefore can both elucidate and complicate the main plot, while endowing it with an aura of realism. This can be seen, dramatically, to function in much the same way as the proliferation of published 'anatomies' in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England.

In *Renaissance Images of Anatomy*, Hodges comments that "...the traditional system of correspondences is exposed as corrupt and outmoded by a "science" that knows its own dependence on rhetoric." Paradoxically, as a result of this, the anatomy itself is "...a transitional form, a form uncertain about its relation to an older discourse of patterning or to the new analytical discourse of science that it helps bring into

being."[5] *Hamlet*, I believe, is also such a work; it rejects the stability and assurance of the old order universe, yet, in questioning the very rhetoric which upholds it, fails, deliberately, to replace it with a new one.

This open-ended exercise, however, has its own merit, as Hodges says: "Even if anatomy often ends up showing the hollowness rather than the substance of "reality", its transformative power may depend on severing meaning from form. Revelations of the hollowness of language encourage a liberating movement to expand knowledge and develop new styles of discourse."[6] The play *Hamlet* does exactly this, by questioning and revealing inadequacies, but by leaving the question unanswered as to what should be. "The paradox is a figure that disrupts the unity of discourse, of thought itself, by continually subverting the integrity of its own assertions about the world. Because it always ruptures itself, the contradictions that make up a paradox are not dialectical; they never resolve themselves into a synthesis."[7] This, I argue, is one way of viewing the relationship between truth, reason and the rhetoric of drama in *Hamlet*.

Gurr reminds us that we can never fully appreciate the mind-set of those who attended Shakespeare's plays when they were written, and one easily ignored but highly relevant aspect of this mind-set was its multidimensional interaction with the world of the play. "Early playhouses were designed to position audiences in a complete circuit all round the stage. Like everything in the centre of a circle, the stage therefore had no two-dimensional front or back."[8]

Besides this topographical difference, there is also what Gurr refers to as "the mental composition, the collective mind of people in company…the education, the routine prejudices, the playhouse traditions, and everything the playgoer expected from the playgoing experience."[9]

When Hamlet gives his instructions to the Players, in act three, scene two these take the form of an objective list of dos and don'ts, particularly designed to combat over-use of gestures. 'Smoothness' of speech is requisite to convey passion; mere physical gymnastics will not do, especially when they are energetic.[10] Suddenly,

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[5] Hodges, 18.
[6] Ibid., 18.
[7] Ibid., 65.
[8] Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.
[9] Ibid., 6.
[10] Faas notes: "There was hardly a part of the body that was not involved in these "strange postures". There was biting of lips and thumbs, knitting of brows, scratching of heads, sucking of teeth, changing color, and shedding of tears (sometimes with a little help from an onion or a cup of sack), quite apart

however, instruction gives way to opinion and Hamlet targets both unsatisfactory actors and "groundlings", condemning them by introducing the "Termagant" and the "Herod" of the mystery plays as examples to be avoided.

What purpose, aside from adding colour to the speech, could be served by reminding us of the mystery plays? One reason might be to add a dimension of transcendentalism, a reminder that the themes which are here being enacted have universal and timeless resonances. Shakespeare, in other words, is utilizing a genre which would act as a signpost to the depth and range of his process-like construction. The mystery plays, after all, deal with eternity itself.[11]

In the morality plays, where the stage represents a human mind, "...the audience is teased by significances which carry the action into the realm of eternal verities grounded in a Christian God above both nature and humanity and informing them with meaning."[12]

Audiences were familiar enough with the underlying notions of God's immanent rather than transcendent presence to be able to comprehend and engage with the entire cosmological background which the very use of allegorical devices indicated. Personifications can be seen as "...attempts by an author to present the whole *significance* of that which we lamely and imperfectly *name*."[13] Thus the embodied abstract acts out its attributes in an unfolding and dynamic way. Calderwood, however, offers an alternative explanation, seeing the play as a dramatization of the creative process itself, particularly "...that period in which the playwright rummages through the thesaurus of his imagination, the period of the temptation of his art, when he defers as

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from the usual sighing, musing, and staring. Actors would roll their eyes, cross their arms, make an angry wafture with their hand, beat at their heart in grief, stamp the ground with their foot, spurn at straws, paddle a lady with the palm of the hand, and practice less direct forms of non-verbal communication like making mouths, coyly declining the head into the bosom, or just winking and nodding." All of which, Faas wryly observes, is demonstrated by Hamlet himself throughout the play (Faas, 40). See also Ackroyd, 216-8, for more on contemporary techniques, and the relevant sections in Hugh Macrae Richmond, *Shakespeare's Theatre : A Dictionary Of His Stage Context* (London and New York, Continuum, 2000).

[11] Duffy, however, notes that since these plays were no longer performed by the end of the century only the older members of the audience would have recognized such references (Duffy (1992), 582). See also Ackroyd, 48 on Shakespeare's possible attendance at Coventry. The Christian reality with which allegory in literature was composed of various interactive dimensions, such as the earthly or temporal and the eternal or spiritual. Because of their symbiotic relationship, a specific mode of expression was required with which to describe and explicate them. Thus figural devices, versions of metaphor were brought in to signify both the mundane and the mysterious, and how they co-operate. Lavinia Griffiths, *Personification in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 8.

[12] Rosamund Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery : Some Mediaeval Books and their Posterity* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 172.

[13] Ibid., 173.

long as possible the fatal act of choice (in which his freedom to choose destroys his freedom to choose.)"[14]

Following this line of reasoning, the mosaic-like quality of these diverse utterances could be interpreted as containing more ideas, more material, than can comfortably be accommodated within the confines of this, or perhaps of any, dramatic form. Consequently they are allowed to emerge, spontaneously, creating their own idiosyncratic unities, occasionally knocking against a structure which is a frame both in the sense of 'constrain' and in the sense of 'display'. This allows presentation of the material, but avoids that final judgement which puts an end to speculation, destroys the freedom to choose, and confers only the mind-numbing benefits of a spurious comfort zone.

As Colie points out, in *Hamlet*, "Philosophies become translated into behavior, and behavior opens back into philosophy,"[15] which is to see Shakespeare drawing upon the older convention of separating out certain aspects of the human psyche and giving them an independent, if constricted, voice with which to state their case. These simplified, one-dimensional voices can thus operate within, yet remain separate from, the ongoing drama, providing, in Colie's words "verbal echoes" functioning as "...a shorthand designed to remind the audience of themes stressed earlier, to hold a remembered note."[16]

I would go even further, and claim that Shakespeare has the player King speak in a way which Hamlet – at the time of 'The Mousetrap' – is not yet capable of, but which he will exhibit in the final act. This manoeuvre enables a continuity to be preserved between the Hamlet of the first four acts, and that of the last, although no soliloquies occur in which this transition is explained. Hamlet, I believe, does not so much learn from experience as discover pre-existing but hitherto undisclosed aspects of himself in response to it. The play within a play can thus be seen, in one sense, to operate as an externalized voice of which Hamlet will demonstrate his eventual possession. In contrast to the speculative and undisciplined utterances of the early Hamlet, those of the post-voyage Prince will sound both older and wiser. In the earlier part of the play Hamlet, I will argue, exhibits many of the attitudes and attributes of the all-important, deceptively charismatic Vice figure of the morality play tradition, the

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[14] Calderwood, 158.
[15] Colie, 240.
[16] Ibid., 237.

personification of evil disguised as virtue. Righter notes that this "...age old connection of the actor with the deceiver" first entered English drama with the Vice figure. In order to fool the good and the gullible, Vice figures "...were essentially hypocrites. As counterfeits, deep dissimulators, they persuaded honest men of things which were not so and, to aid them in their task, assumed names and costumes not their own."[17] Ironically, Hamlet, in order to ascertain truth and root out deception, will not only direct a theatrical production, but assume an antic disposition. The Prince and the Vice figure share many characteristics, and a crucial question is here being asked of the whole business of acting, of roles and theatre, a question which, I believe, drives Shakespeare's interrogation of the nature of playing at this moment.

We will see two views of theatre's value, sequentially presented. The first is Hamlet's traditional elitist view of art as a means of moral improvement; the second, the player King's speech, in turn anatomized by the events of the main play, leading to an unresolved, even cryptic conclusion. Thus the rhetoric of drama broadly defined is ultimately seen as inadequate in dealing with concepts such as truth and reason.

The mystery play ethos is re-energized and its technique of externalizing and personifying abstract and psychic factors exploited, only for these to be internalized and re-integrated into the character of Hamlet and into the thematic structure of *Hamlet.* This re-integration, however is curtailed by circumstances. It is a movement towards liberation from past constraints, but, despite the enlightenment which is implied by this momentum, the events of act five deny it scope for fulfilment.

The best example of this is the way in which the Players' arrival affects Hamlet, causing him to discard both antic disposition and gloom and allowing us to see how deeply involved he is with the whole concept of theatre and its relationship to life. Ghose notes the genuineness of the Prince's exuberance thus: "He cannot wait to hear words which create complete structures of meaning without reference to personal experience."[18] Hamlet takes time to single everyone out, adding little personal touches, so that it is difficult to conceive of this scene without physical contact, without hugs and handshakes. The players are not merely 'friends', but 'good friends'. However, a speech is speedily requested, a 'passionate' one, and, as Ghose continues, such artificial utterances, due to being built on a codified aesthetic or rhetorical structure, are necessarily grammatically constrained, yet possess "...a potential for perfection not

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[17] Righter, 62.
[18] Ghose, 32.

available to ordinary existence."[19] Ordinary existence, with all its attendant imperfections and untidiness, utilizes the same words as do 'passionate' speeches in plays. This could result in a misleading situation, which, Ghose believes, Hamlet is caught up in, i.e. the expectation that "...language ought to allow us visions to do with our own lives which in literature it does to the abstract concept of life."[20]

Ghose thus reads into Hamlet's delight at the entry of the players a desire to re-experience the joy that language afforded him as a student, when it created "...a reality on which to impose its symbols"[21] without reference, necessarily, to 'real' reality, thus capturing ideas "...which evoke a luminous comprehension without the mind being able to so say what it has understood, although it is certain that it has understood much more than the words it has heard",[22] and sees how essentially linked speech and human relationships are to each other.

The Prince's enthusiasm is closely linked to something the players can do with words, and which Hamlet would like to be able to do, which is that they can "...act while divorcing themselves from their actions – which is what Hamlet would have to do if he were to revenge his father."[23]

Hamlet's effervescent attitude to the players can be seen to serve a much more pragmatic end, in terms of audience reaction, than might at first appear, as Cruttwell notes: "A great deal of Hamlet's attractiveness has always depended on this; all through the centuries readers and spectators alike have felt for him... a delusion of equality and intimacy, and they have been all the more pleased with this delusion because they remembered, at moments, whom they were feeling it for."[24] The whole theme of sympathy for a character one can feel intimacy for, and, crucially, one can laugh with, will be taken up in chapter five, but it may be noted here that Hamlet's warmth towards the players can be experienced as warmth towards his audience too. Shared laughter can win allegiance far more effectively than usage of soliloquies. It operates as a heuristic psychological device for colouring audience attitude without taking up time and space within the structure of the plot.

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[19] Ibid., 32.
[20] Ibid., 32.
[21] Ibid., 33.
[22] Ibid., 33.
[23] Kerrigan, 191.
[24] Patrick Cruttwell, "The Morality of *Hamlet* – 'Sweet Prince' or 'Arrant Knave'?" *Stratford-upon-Avon Studies* 5 (London: Edward Arnold, 1963), reprinted in *Shakespeare: Hamlet, a Casebook,* ed. John Davies Jump (London: Macmillan, 1986), 193.

The players, it should be mentioned, do not alter any of their behavior or see Hamlet's friendliness as an excuse to slip out of their essentially menial role, and he who is designated as "First Player" addresses Hamlet as "My good Lord", a title which inevitably carries connotations both of Hamlet's superior social status, and of Hamlet's using that status to be 'good', that is, generous with his patronage.[25]

Granville Barker sees Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as present throughout all of this, yet remaining silent and unmoving, almost as if they were in some kind of stasis. He describes this situation as having "...been brought, in comparison with the solid and vital figure of Hamlet, to something of the dramatic value of a bas-relief." This results in their vanishing "...without distracting our attention from Hamlet or checking the impetus of the scene."[26] The visible but passive presence of these two may further highlight the way in which Hamlet displays the ability to suit his speech and behaviour to the moment, since very recently they themselves have been greeted by him, and replied similarly, for example with "My honoured Lord" (222), and have then been exposed to Hamlet's antic disposition.

Hamlet now requests a 'passionate' speech, and here he resembles nothing so much as he who pays the piper calling for a tune. Hamlet knows the speech he wants, but lacks a title, so he goes on to describe it, giving first his own reactions, then the information which enables the player to identify the speech.[27] Economically, we learn what Hamlet likes and why. We receive a considerable amount of insight, yet we do so in a neatly constructed speech, unobtrusive in plot terms.

Hamlet, in seeking to hear the required speech, would obviously have done better to have first mentioned Dido and Aeneas rather than his opinion of its merit, which is surplus to requirements. However, this opinion, valueless to the player, is valuable to the audience, who learn about Hamlet and his theatrical preferences, which do seem to be those of a university rather than a 'universal' man. The speech, he claims, like caviare, is an acquired taste, a connoisseur's delight, and further, Hamlet's

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[25] Hamlet is similarly hierarchial with Horatio using the form 'thou' whereas Horatio keeps to the more formal 'you'. See David Crystal and Ben Crystal, *Shakespeare's Words : a glossary and language companion* (London: Penguin Books, 2002) for an explanation of the different forms of address (450-1).

[26] Harley Granville Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare: Hamlet* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1937; reprinted London: Nick Herne Books, 1993), 311.

[27] The first player is presumably an older man, making it likely that he will later play the King in 'The Mousetrap'; however, only in the Folio are 'First', 'Second' etc. Players mentioned Q1 and Q2 call them all 'players'. I do however, take McDonald's point that: "The character assumed by the Player in telling the story is that of Aeneas, another dispossessed and grief stricken son." David J. McDonald, "*Hamlet* and the Mimesis of Absence: A Post-Structuralist Analysis" in Keesey, 386.

preference is underwritten by others, "whose judgements in such matters cried in the top of mine." (434-5) The crucial thing about this play, despite its only being performed once, is the method of its construction. First, the scenes were "well digested" or shaped; secondly, they are written with as much "modesty as cunning", that is, they eschew obvious sentimentality; and, as presumably one of the 'others' who underwrote Hamlet's judgement stated, "There were no sallets in the lines to make the matter savoury, nor no matter in the phrase that might indict the author of affection." (437-9) The play thus does not descend to ribaldry, nor does it rely on ornate language; in fact it is praised for "an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine." Hamlet here stresses the honesty, the coherence, the innate connection between what he thinks and what he feels – this is where emotion and logic finally can meet and be expressed. The rhetoric of drama is thus metaphorically metamorphosed into an enjoyable meal, providing nourishment for the mind rather than the body, and doing so without any necessary reference to the inconsistencies and incoherencies of reality.

Hamlet himself attempts to recite the speech, gets the first three words correct, then errs. Pyrrhus is not "like th' Hyrcanian beast." (446) There are no such beasts anywhere within the speech; in fact Pyrrhus is never compared to an animal. In Hamlet's mouth a connection is made, as though in Hamlet's mind the type of work Pyrrhus is about to undertake has all the characteristics of bestiality, hence the reference to a tiger. Hamlet's false start thus draws a sharp line of contrast between the realistic language of the main text and the highly artificial speech of the inset.

It is not difficult to see why this material "pleased not the million". It is, however, difficult to apply Hamlet's gastronomic description in any positive sense. Although the raw material of the speech is highly exciting, the style is not. In fact, it detracts from the on-going activity it portrays, giving the impression of too much matter with too little art. Hamlet calls its method 'honest' and unaffected, which leads us to expect a totally different kind of oration from what we do in fact hear. Certainly the speech contains no "sallets", as in ribaldry[28], but it certainly contains "sallets" as in overblown, thrill-seeking expressions: such terms as "coagulate gore" (458) and "eyes like carbuncles" (459) seem examples of additions to make the matter "savory". This

[28] Faas notes that Hamlet's taunting of Ophelia makes this prohibition somewhat hypocritical and goes on to observe that Shakespeare "...who made his character's joke about erections and impotence...would hardly squirm at the odd 'tale of bawdry' or 'sallet'" (Faas, 39).

said, the overwhelming impression is of an artificial, pedantic, thesaurus-raiding production, which would only appeal to those whose previous encounters with violence and murder were confined to the pages of books.

Pyrrhus may well be "the model of the heroic revenger Hamlet feels he ought to be" but he is also "...an image of such terror that he is a living argument against revenge."[29] Stripped of most of the obfuscatory language, Pyrrhus certainly does represent the negative side of the avenging son, even though, objectively speaking, killing the father of the man who killed one's own father may seem the kind of thing a dutiful son should do.[30] One of the ways in which Pyrrhus' strength is undermined is the repeated stressing of his victim's age. Priam is, at the time of the action, an old man. He is introduced as "Old grandsire," (461) contrasting with the raging killing machine that is Pyrrhus.

Whatever the original rights of Pyrrhus' quest, they are not present in this piece. Aeneas, the narrator, tells us that a young, superhumanly strong man is going after an old, frail one. What could have been related by Pyrrhus's supporters as a glorious act of justified revenge instead becomes a repulsive massacre. In contrast to Pyrrhus, Priam is an "unnerved father" (470) with a "milky beard" (474) and is "reverend." (475) Even the moment when Pyrrhus, distracted by the noise of Troy's falling masonry, hesitates, his sword "seem'd i' th'air to stick," (475) which is not a description of a mere pause but one of attack, of sticking into the air itself, as though, even motionless, Pyrrhus never ceases to be a threat. A beautiful touch comes with Polonius' irritable exclamation, "This is too long" (494) and Hamlet's equally irritable rejoinder, "It shall to the barber's with your beard – Prithee/ say on. He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps./ Say on, come to Hecuba." (495-7) As Patterson comments, this is "...manifestly an example of how poorly a classical, humanist education translates into successful theatrical experience."[31] At this moment, then, the audience is brought face to face with Hamlet's continuing struggle with the action he is required to perform in avenging his father.

Hecuba is introduced, as "mobbled", which word again invites comment from the 'real' world, and then, fully into his element, the Player gives us the fictional Queen's adjectivally laden grief. Stripped of stylistic flourish, the portrait is tragic,

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[29] Kernan, 97.
[30] See Bowers (1959), 38-40.
[31] Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 14.

portraying the miserable fate of war's victims, of those who have to endure its aftermath. An old woman runs, shrieking, at the sight of her husband being butchered. The very gods of Olympus might have wept, we are told; the Player certainly does, to Polonius' discomfort and Hamlet's torment.

We do not know at which moment Hamlet decided on 'The Mousetrap' strategy. Possibly it was at the sight of those very real tears for the fictional Queen. He certainly praises actors who meet his standards, in glowing terms: "They are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time./ After your death you were better have a bad epitaph/ than their ill report while you live." (520-2) Newell sees Hamlet's reaction as an overreaction: "...his intense feelings about his own terrible situation interfere with a proper view and sympathetic reception of Hecuba's plight, as evoked by the players' emotional performance."[32]

Is this so? The Pyrrhus material allows the receptive listener to indulge in a pre-packed product, a journey of the senses and the emotions without reference to the messy bewilderment of the real world. In directing 'The Mousetrap' Hamlet's "...passive suffering gives way to his aggressive assertion of wit and will,"[33] thereby functioning as a coping strategy. Hamlet can become an avenging orphan, like Pyrrhus, a successful, single-minded one, with no inner life to dilute the ballistic impetus of his mission. Obviously it is much more than coincidence which fuels the urge to request this particular piece. Also, the analogies between Priam and Old Hamlet are obvious – just as age had rendered the former helpless, so did sleep the latter.

Left alone, Hamlet tortures himself with speculations regarding the verbal and behavioral histrionics the player might have produced were he in Hamlet's position: "...like a mirror reflecting a mirror, Hamlet (himself being played by a stage actor) imagines himself being played by the Player."[34] The histrionic mode both evades and invades his utterances because he lacks the self-discipline which would allow him to express himself in this way, without contaminating the entire speech. Rossiter notes that "...the Hamlet who reproaches himself only exists intermittently, produced by circumstance. So too does the Hamlet who is reproached...there is no self, but only

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[32] Newell, 63.
[33] Robinson, 186.
[34] Newell, 66.

selves – or perhaps no self that Hamlet can be aware of after the event,"[35] and this is clear at that moment.

The language of the Players seems, as Ghose says, to resemble that of a closed world system such as geometry or math, "...a self sufficient world which resembles reality in having subjects and at the same time a context of abstraction." Truth value, in such systems, does not arise from a correlation with the real world, but rather "...is contained in the words themselves, in their apparently accurate relationship with each other."[36] Premises and conclusions, therefore, are compassed within the linguistic pattern itself, and Hamlet can only stand admiringly on the outside of such a system, and wish to belong.

It is interesting to note that the Player's genuine tears for fictional Hecuba are now being paralleled by the audience's genuine sympathy for a fictional Hamlet. As Gurr observes "Shakespeare's refinement is to make this paradoxical situation not a joke, but an emphatic assertion of Hamlet's reality",[37] and the point is made very clearly.

"What would he do?" (554) Hamlet demands, instead of what would – or should – 'I' do? Even his outrage is being theatrically mediated, so caught up in the moment is he. He attempts to direct the now-absent Player in the role of Hamlet, describing a behavioral performance, and including the telling phrase "Make mad the guilty." (558) Following on from this, Hamlet can do no better than imagine a series of insults, both for himself and for Claudius, resulting in nothing more than the utterance of even greater histrionic excesses. This is "...an example of an indirect audience contact that operates through an awareness of the theatrical medium itself."[38] Hamlet, here, while remaining in his own role has an awareness of how he would like the spectators to be affected, that is, by arousing "...the full capacity of their physical as well as moral sensibilities."[39] It is almost as though Shakespeare is having Hamlet play out all these roles, without being willing to sustain any of them because they are all too limiting. Hamlet's 'self', via a process of donning and discarding, seems to achieve greater depths, wider scope, by the very exercise which he hopes will satisfy it. Thus the supreme role-player is, ironically, forced to remain in searching mode throughout.

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[35] Rossiter, 178.
[36] Ghose, 35.
[37] Gurr (1992), 2.
[38] Weimann (1978), 223.
[39] Ibid.

This multi-role playing is symptomatic of a disillusion with speech itself, since Hamlet retains "...a conviction in the truth-inducings of theater" and this despite the fact that if you are able to "unpack" your heart with words, "...what you express is already dead within you."[40] We are, I think, back to Belsey's earlier distinction between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the utterance. Hamlet, I suggested, fulfils both roles, and, to press Bloom's point further, it could perhaps be said that, once Hamlet verbalizes something, it is not so much a case of "dead within" him, as of used, and then transformed into a necessary precursor of something yet to come – which can not come until the previous utterance has paved the way for it. The same is true of roles. For example, Hamlet as director has almost superseded Hamlet as avenger, since destroying Claudius has ceased to be the sole goal. Instead, Hamlet will utilize art in order to show truth to the world. Mercer calls this strategy "...a drastic extension of his antic performance,"[41] while Mack goes even further, and sees it as Hamlet's "...encroaching on the role of providence... too quick to take the burden of the whole world and its condition upon his limited and finite self."[42] Not only is the Prince anxious to cast Claudius as villain, revealing his guilt to the assembled court, but, if this works, Hamlet has written himself into the plot:

> I'll observe his looks;
> I'll tent him to the quick. If a do blench,
> I know my course. (592-4)

This relationship of the self to its outer manifestations has given rise to a number of interesting questions:

> What are a person's parts? Are they immaterial as well as material, and if so what is the relationship between the two? (Is the soul, or the will, part of you in just the same sense as the eye is?) Are you equivalent to your body, or more than it (are you what you eat, what you wear, what gestures you make), or less than it (so that your body's surface, or your surface in general, is not you, is an opacity, a lure or a lie)?[43]

Most of the emotional impetus which suffused Hamlet while talking to the ghost has dissipated. His questioning, doubting intellect is reasserting itself, until finally he sums up his hopes, dreams, fears and ambitions in one succinct rhetorical flourish:

> The play's the thing
> Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King (600-1)

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[40] Bloom (2003), 32.
[41] Mercer, 197.
[42] Maynard Mack, "The World of Hamlet." in *Shakespeare: Hamlet, a Casebook*, ed. John Davies Jump (London: Macmillan, 1986), 105.
[43] Ann Thompson and John O. Thompson, *Shakespeare: Meaning and Metaphor* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), 91-2. See here for a general discussion of the metaphors of the human body in *Hamlet*.

It has been suggested that "It is rather the conscience of the Queen that Hamlet is fishing for."[44] Is this so? Nowhere is this stated, and, as we shall see in chapter four, Hamlet conducts an attack on Gertrude's conscience in the closet scene, during which he never once refers to 'The Mousetrap'. Conversely, there always exists the possibility that something which is not explicitly stated may in time come to be manifest, albeit indirectly. "As repeatedly happens in *Hamlet*, the playwright's ironic designs defeat the characters' purposes and puzzle their wills."[45]

By act three, scene two we see Hamlet, having scripted the extra speech, now become both director and choreographer. Marcus highlights an obvious, yet easy error to make when encountering Hamlet's instructions. "...we have tended to assume that Hamlet speaks for Shakespeare himself... But Hamlet has all the prejudices of the university man; Shakespeare, by contrast, was an actor."[46] The situation is even more accurately expressed by Montrose as he says, "Hamlet is Shakespeare's personification of the elite audience for his own plays."[47]

Hamlet's elitism is evident in his attitude to acting. The extra speech he has written – and, apparently, just performed for the players – is to be spoken "trippingly on the tongue", the opposite of which would be to "mouth" it, like a town crier. "Trippingly" gives the impression of something light, something accomplished, stepping with the natural grace of a gazelle, the opposite of bellowing, or drowning feeling with volume. However, this still falls far short of copyable instructions, and we would need to have heard Hamlet's rendition of the Pyrrhus speech in order to get a real idea of "trippingly".

There is a plausible rationale for Hamlet's insistence that the players use discretion: "This advice provides important insurance so that Hamlet can know that the King's responses may come from within him rather than from a powerful piece of rhetorical acting."[48] (Unfortunately, one might add, the inclusion of the dumb show rather complicates the whole issue and renders such 'insurance' less than fully comprehensive.)

Hamlet now proceeds to give what might be called the traditional view of theatre's value. He "...integrates, both literally and theoretically, the scholarly view of

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[44] French, 156.
[45] Montrose, 102.
[46] Marcus (1996), 161.
[47] Montrose, 42.
[48] Jacobus, 84.

mimesis (embodied in Hamlet's sophisticated taste) and the popular traditions of acting and stagecraft of the travelling players,"[49] these scenes "provide a dramatized version of the problematic relationship between language and action, and they adumbrate some deeply disturbing incongruity between what represents and what is represented."[50] In Hamlet's own words, the purpose of playing[51]

> was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. (21-4)

Greenblatt, highlighting the "mirror" image, notes that

> Both optics and mirror lore in the period suggested that something was actively passing back and forth in the production of mirror images, that accurate representation depended upon material emanation and exchange.[52]

All of this was orthodox, the established, establishment's view. But, as noted, Hamlet slips easily from objective to subjective mode, and, suddenly starts castigating those who "have so/ strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of/ Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them/ well, they imitated humanity so abominably." (32-5)

What we have here is the "...conventional moral view" as Kernan calls it "...very similar to that found in Sidney's *Apologia*, which argues that plays can directly influence the moral and political life of kingdoms by presenting idealized images of the world – Priam's Troy or Gonzago's Vienna – that throw light on the world in which they are represented and effect change by curtailing the consciences of kings."[53] This view, however, is juxtaposed with material which makes the entire passage an example of Hamlet's elitist attitude, and as Kernan notes, the "...complex ironic matter"[54] in which the traditional view is expressed should lead us to be wary of accepting it as

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[49] Weimann (1978), 199.
[50] Ibid., 281.
[51] Faas notes that Hamlet's advice, though owing much to Plato and Aristotle, comes from a phrase Donatus attributes to Cicero: "Cicero ait Comedia est imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, et imago veritatis." This phrase was apparently a Renaissance commonplace, occurring for example in Heywood's *Apologies for Actors* and Lodge's *Defence of Poetry*. Sidney, Spenser and Ben Jonson are also cited as paraphrasers of it, (Faas, 28). Felperin, however, believes that two separate notions of drama are being fused in Hamlet's speech, "...each with a long tradition and each in some degree antagonistic to the other in aim and method. The former, the view of the play as moral vision, transcends by its very nature considerations of time and place, associates drama with theology or moral philosophy, and is identifiable in Hamlet's account with Medieval and Tudor allegorical theatre...the view of the play as lifelike illusion, is by its very nature timebound and localized, associates drama with historiography, and is identifiable in Hamlet's account with the more or less naturalistic theatre of classical Rome and Renaissance Italy." Howard Felperin, *Shakespearian Representation: Mimesis and Modernity in Elizabethan Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 45-6.
[52] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations : The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 8.
[53] Kernan, 109.
[54] Ibid., 97.

Shakespeare's own. The Prince's viewpoint is deliberately limited, as limited as Hamlet's perception of many of his fellow men as "groundlings"[55], since Hamlet is naively speaking from both an aristocratic and a sheltered stance. "Furthermore, the royal hero's own subsequent behaviour and the actual outcome of the dramatist's play are far more equivocal – both ethically and politically – than the high theatrical principles espoused by Hamlet himself might lead us to expect."[56]

The harangue against poor players (considerably enlarged upon in Q1) resembles the pro-theatrical apologies in contemporary circulation. Basically, most of these, such as Heywood's *An Apology for Actors* (1612) took the anti-acting polemics of their enemies, and reversed them. Their arguments of necessity "...remain constrained within the terms of the dominant anti-theatrical discourse"[57] and are "...didactic and rigorously behaviouristic."[58]

Act three, scene two, contains some of the crudest, and also some of the most elevated language of the entire play. It is no accident that this proximity occurs, since the realism, or illusion of realism, created by the former is thrown into stark relief by the artificiality of the latter, as though to highlight the ongoing subjection of speech in all its manifestations to a series of rigorous and innovative experimental scenarios.

Line 134 contains a cryptic little reference to a folk dance: "For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot."[59] We are again reminded of the older tradition, which announces its influence at salient points along the way. Dying and being forgotten by the living forms the theme of the Prince's surrounding remarks are of dying and being forgotten by the living (a theme which was strongly apparent in his meeting with the ghost). Here, however, it is worth noting that when reading the text, "The eye tends to skip over aural signs that could be memorable on stage."[60] Probably "...there were

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[55] Gurr (2004) notes: "The only other use of this term contemporary with *Hamlet* was Philemon Holland's word in his translation of Pliny's *Natural History* (1601) for a small fish or ling, a species which fed by sucking the algae off the stones in a river bottom, so its mouth was a huge yawn. Prince Hamlet was calling the crowd of understanders surrounding the stage small fish with gaping mouths, just what he would have observed from his superior posture looking down on them" (21).

[56] Montrose, 43.

[57] Ibid., 44.

[58] Ibid., 45.

[59] Duffy notes a pre-Reformation prayer "The Seven Oes of St. Bridget" which was believed particularly powerful in assisting souls detained in purgatory (Duffy (1992), 249-56). Patricia Parker notes that "Hobby-horse" was also Elizabethan slang for 'whore'. "*Othello* and *Hamlet*: Dilation, Spying and the 'secret place' of Women" *Shakespeare Reread : The Texts In New Contexts*, ed. Russ MacDonald (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 126.

[60] Charney, 52.

certain conventions about how the "O's" were to be rendered,"[61] providing a visual correlate to the verbal drama. This is linked to Weimann's observation that this type of "topsy turvy patter" originates in magical incantations whose former functions have become forgotten or even misunderstood as comedy,[62] all of which Shakespeare's design includes and at the same time holds up for an investigative analysis.

Hamlet's remarks are followed by the dumb show, which is virtually unique because it directly anticipates the ensuing play, whereas usually "...the dumb show is allegorical or symbolic." One explanation for this anomaly is that both dumb show and 'Mousetrap' are parts of a drama so complex that if rendered allegorically, "...might have detracted too much from the actual play and puzzled the spectators unnecessarily." Besides this, the delay factor is salient in heightening dramatic tension, and thus "...delay and suspense are deliberately employed as structural devices."[63]

These observations merit consideration. Shakespeare would, undoubtedly, bypass a convention, such as that of having a symbolic rather than anticipatory dumb show in order to direct audience attention to where he wanted it, and would doubtless also use a delaying or slowing down tactic where appropriate. Mehl further notes that, unlike 'The Mousetrap', the dumb show is allowed to proceed right to the end,[64] again, a useful device for setting up certain expectations in the audience, who will thus not be prepared for the interruption that actually occurs. And on this theme, we might wonder whether there could be a reason, a logical one, for Claudius to be guilty as charged, and yet remain silent; I think there is; a reaction might be the worst possible thing to do under the circumstances. Claudius is an extremely well disciplined man, an excellent politician. He has successfully manouvered his way into his present position and, so far as he is aware, no one knows how he did so, his crime having gone un-witnessed. He knows nothing about the ghost's activities, and, although Hamlet's behaviour is giving him cause for unease, there is no solid reason to suspect that anyone knows the truth. However, suddenly he is faced with a mimed version of his crime, which could be a coincidence since the Players have just arrived and are performing something from their repertoire, not something (as far as he knows) specially commissioned for the occasion. The best thing Claudius can do is sit tight, because, in fact, if he did show any signs of

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[61] Ibid., 53.
[62] Weimann (1978), 20.
[63] Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show : The History Of A Dramatic Convention* (London: Methuen, 1965), 113.
[64] Ibid., 119.

discomfort they might be noticed and interpreted. Not only Hamlet but most of the court knows that their previous King died while asleep in an orchard, and that his Queen remarried hastily. Abreaction from Claudius could lead someone, anyone present, in fact, to start comparing the recent events in Elsinore with those portrayed on the stage, and then perform the heuristic leap which would link the two. Indifference on the part of the guilty is the best form of defence. What Claudius has seen is his own behaviour represented in the stark morality of the dumb show, and what he will shortly witness is the same thing in the classical paradigm of 'The Mousetrap'. In either case, and from any representational angle the verdict is guilty. In the next chapter I will examine the way in which Claudius attempts to deal with this verdict by yet another formula of words.

For the moment, he remains silent and watchful as the entertainment moves from dumb show to drama. As noted, one view of theatre's value and purpose has already been expounded by Hamlet in his speech to the players, and here we have another, as voiced by the player King. The play metaphor, the comparison of the world with the stage is as old as, if not older than the view of theatre as a mirror to bring about improvement in life. Righter characterizes it as describing "Man as an actor" and assigning "...either to fate or to God Himself the double position of dramatist and audience." She continues: "Before the mid-sixteenth century...this image of the world as a stage was associated almost entirely with non-dramatic literature."[65] By Shakespeare's time, the "life as play" metaphor had, according to Righter, established itself very firmly in popular consciousness. The metaphor abounded in lay and religious literature. "Comparisons between the world and the stage were so common as to become, in many instances, almost automatic, an unconscious trick of speech." She goes on to convey something of the multiplicity of its use; it could "...describe the nature of deceivers, the splendor of man's life and its transience, the inexorability of fortune, or the character of individual moments of time."[66] This then was a multi-faceted and readily recognizable contemporary allusion.

In *Hamlet*, then, the idea of improving or enlightening the audience becomes secondary to the task of representing the human condition, of imaging life itself. Theatre, thus seen, is essentially process rather than product, and its intended effects are similarly ambiguous. Besides being made explicit in the speeches of the player King ,

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[65] Righter, 60. Also see here for a review of the notion in classical and medieval writing.
[66] Ibid., 76.

these ideas are "...woven into the substance and the plot."[67] If the player King "...is the essential voice of the theater...then the theater is here speaking directly to the audience about its own nature and telling us that the real truth a play offers is to be found not in its content but in its form."[68]

Shakespeare was no longer using theatre as "...handmaiden of metaphysics and theology. Freed from this subservience, be it Aristotelian, Neoplatonic or Christian, art becomes an autonomous medium. Rather than depict what ought to be, it reenacts what is."[69]

Besides the view of theatre herein expressed, the interaction of the player King and Queen refers to themes already extant within the action of the main play. For example, one of the motifs from the 'To be' soliloquy is now taken up, and concerns "enterprises of great pitch" which lose the name of action. The player King is gently, but firmly, cautioning his Queen against making rash promises, such as her insistence on never remarrying. "I do believe you think what now you speak, / But what we do determine, oft we break." (III.ii.181-2) (It is difficult, hearing her speeches, not to see the Queen as the younger and therefore less mature of the two, although it is worth remembering that they have been married for at least thirty years. (150-5))

The present, when actions are proposed, has little control over the future - despite the individual's most zealously expressed assurances that it will.

The Queen replies:

> Nor earth to give me food, nor heaven light,
> Sport and repose lock from me day and night,
> To desperation turn my trust and hope,
> An anchor's cheer in prison be my scope,
> Each opposite, that blanks the face of joy,
> Meet what I would have well and it destroy,
> Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife,
> If, once a widow, ever I be wife. (III.ii.211-18)

Since Hamlet knows *The Murder of Gonzago* it is reasonable to assume that in his 'To be' musings he wanted to make some connection, preserve some continuity with the style of the original, so that the dozen to sixteen lines of conscience-stricken speech for Lucianus which, I argued, he was trying to compose, would not stand out as an obvious insertion. Thus 'To be' remains as a ghostly after-image, its profoundly unfinished speculations re-worked and partially completed.

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[67] Kernan, 107.
[68] Ibid., 101.
[69] Faas, 80.

If, as Armstrong suggests, the Queen's speech is that of someone who "...has just sworn eternal fidelity to her husband, not, we feel because she is being presented as a steady and decisive person, but because her naiveness makes her wish for these qualities... She behaves as though a flood of words, laced with hyperbole and repetition, might urge her into the integrity she wants to possess,"[70] we are reminded inevitably of Hamlet's own similarly eloquent promises to the ghost, also spoken under the influence of violent emotion.

The notion of roles, and the part emotion plays in their initiation and maintenance is surely being highlighted here. Emotion not only constructs an erroneous 'selfhood' but, crucially, projects an equally erroneous future self, therefore writing a false biography of any individual who is reasoning under its influence. Thus, an enthusiastically donned role will in time be discarded, altering the role-player permanently, but not necessarily in ways he or she would have guessed or desired. This, then, is the purpose of the player King, who "...acknowledges and accepts human frailty; the maturity expressed in his lines is that we should not expect too much of ourselves nor rail savagely against others who fail to live up to the highest ideals."[71] Thus form, as well as content, contributes to the ongoing debate.

It might here be tempting to see the ghost in this as analogous to the player King. He has after all shown patience with Gertrude's behaviour, attributing it partly to weakness on her part and mainly to villainy on that of Claudius. However, his treatment of Hamlet contradicts this comparison. Hamlet has been urged – even ordered – to don the role of avenger, yet nowhere has the ghost shown the least sign of understanding that this role, donned in a moment of extreme emotion, might prove problematic to his son.

The player King, then, speaks from a mature and world-wise stance. He knows that while passion incites action, it does not always provide sufficient impetus to bring that action to fruition. He describes the mechanics of inertia without judgment or condemnation, and in this he is totally unlike either Hamlet or his father.

The possibility of *self*-deception is now beginning to be implied, and this too is apparent in the player King's speech, which, after reverting to a traditional series of platitudes (l.195-204), observes that:

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[70] Edward A. Armstrong, *Shakespeare's Imagination: A Study of the Psychology of Association and Inspiration* (London: Drummond Ltd., 1946), 53.
[71] Ibid.

> … who in want a hollow friend doth try
> Directly seasons him his enemy (203) [72]

The player King then sums up:

> But orderly to end where I begun,
> Our wills and fates do so contrary run
> That our devices still are overthrown,
> Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own. (205-8)

"Where I begun" is obviously a reference to the 'think/speak' conjunction of the opening, which he returns to after a brief digressive sermon on trust and love, again sympathetically aware of his wife's zestful naivety, excusing her in advance for what she will eventually do, and refusing to accept her extravagant promises as in any way binding. The reasons he gives for doubting her sincerity, and the sincerity of anyone who rashly commits themselves verbally, is that no human being is in a position to swear to things which he or she cannot possibly control. The terms 'will' and 'fate' are opposed, as are 'thoughts' and 'ends'.[73]

Hamlet will in V.ii.10-11 declare:

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them as we will.

Some dozen to sixteen lines of the speech of the Player-King have been heard by Hamlet, whereas Hamlet's own speech will never be heard, since it was to come at the end of the play, an end never reached during this performance. In the same way that Shakespeare curtails 'The Mousetrap' and deprives us of what I have argued was to have been a conscience-stricken monologue for Lucianus, he instead allows Hamlet to hear, internalise and later in act five to re-externalize these words of the player King. At this time in the action Hamlet is incapable of such sentiments, because he is so caught up in the present moment. Levao asks "Has the revenge impulse become so self-directed that Hamlet stages a psychomachia, where his inhibiting melancholy is destroyed by an archaic, vengeful side of his personality?"[74]

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[72] Jenkins identifies these sentiments as being similar to those in Cicero's 'De Amicitia' and cites MLR, lxv, 1-6 (Jenkins, 300). This sentiment will soon be repeated by Hamlet in III.ii, as he verbally spars with Guildenstern, after the latter admits he cannot play the recorder: "It is as easy as lying. Govern these vantages with / Your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your / Mouth, and it will discourse most excellent music." (III.ii.348-50)

[73] Again, neither the sentiments nor the image are original. Anders notes in Florio's translation of Montaigne: "My consultation doth somewhat roughlie hew the matter and by its first show, lightly consider the same: the main and chiefe point of the worke, I am wonte to resign to heaven" (Bk III, Ch 8, p.559) (Anders, 54). It is of course the idea of the psychological that underpins the moral drama to which I drew attention earlier in this chapter.

[74] Levao.

Something of that seems to be the case, as Hamlet, intent on his dual mission of proving the ghost's honesty and unmasking Claudius, remains in a constricted, monotropic state of awareness. The Player-King himself seems an appropriate choice for the verbalization of these externalised sentiments. He is an idealization, part of *Hamlet*, yet unaware of Elsinore's fate, embedded but oblivious – a kingly figure of wisdom, maturity and selflessness. From his blameless, if bland, lips fall the uncontaminated utterances which Hamlet hears, his conscious attention elsewhere occupied. Later, as will be seen, the seeds will grow and produce a brief, doomed flowering.

What of the rest of the court? Gertrude, as Kernan notes, seems "...entirely oblivious of the application of *The Murder of Gonzago* to events in Elsinore."[75] Her objection to the "lady" and her "protest" sounds more like boredom than any discomfort occasioned by guilt while Hamlet's reply, "O, but she'll keep her word" (226), is symptomatic of his general lack of self-discipline. Bradshaw observes that Hamlet "...jeopardises the test with an insulting choric commentary which would prompt an innocent King to terminate this performance."[76] Conversely, as Mehl says, the interjections "...very clearly mark the sharp contrast between the two planes of action and heighten the tension of the scene."[77] Claudius, at this moment, after witnessing the first act of 'The Mousetrap', is bent on ascertaining how much Hamlet knows, as he asks, "Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence / in't?" (227), this could indicate that his shrewd Machiavellian intellect is already working on a face-saving device - a preliminary to condemning the play in general terms as being seditious or somehow compromising the security of the realm. Hamlet's answer, "No offence i th' world" (230), neatly manipulates the ambiguity of the word 'offence', turning the meaning of Claudius' enquiry about whether it contains anything offensive, to its other sense - a crime. The phrase is slippery; it claims that offence is not present, but insists that this applies to the world, where, as we shall see in the next chapter, Claudius struggles with the awareness that the bribes which serve to dissolve offence on earth are ineffective before a heavenly tribunal. Hamlet has played a similar game with this word in I.v.139-143, when, after the ghost's departure, Horatio, concerned about his friend's distress, observes that his words are "wild and whirling" (139). Hamlet immediately

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[75] Kernan, 99.
[76] Bradshaw, 119.
[77] Mehl, 111.

returns, "I am sorry they offend you, heartily", and Horatio's reassurance, "There's no offence, my lord", is met with: "Yes by St. Patrick but there is, Horatio/ And much offence too" (142-3). The same twisting of another's words to suit his own purpose is now being employed by Hamlet almost as though the previous instance was only a practice, sparring against a friend, in the prelude to what is now a deadly game of cat and mouse. Claudius does not, of course, know that Hamlet has inserted anything into the play, yet his next question indicates he is aware of at least some manipulative involvement. "What do you call the play?" (231) Not, note, 'What *is* the play called?' Hamlet now gives the play a new title – one which cannot fail to confirm everything Claudius most fears, he calls it 'The Mousetrap'.

Hamlet's next interjection is to name Lucianus, nephew to the King, and confirm that he is a murderer. (246-7)[78] Gurr sees the savagery of the Prince's attitude towards the players at this point as evidence that the dumb show was a total and unwelcome shock to him, as does Dover Wilson[79]. However, shock or no, Claudius has not responded to it and all Hamlet's hopes are now converging on the projected dozen to sixteen lines which he has written for insertion. If my hypothesis is correct, the lines come at the end of the play, augmenting its action beyond that of the dumb show, forming an epilogue whereby the murderer, the successful murderer, bemoans the conscience which torments and makes a mockery of all he has gained for himself. Hamlet, thus, could be simply urging the player to get on with things and reach this crucial scene – he might be fearful that a display of boredom on, say, Gertrude's part could force a premature conclusion and leave Claudius unchallenged.

A fear such as this could in fact fuel Hamlet's need to spell out the next piece of action, as foreshadowed in the dumb show, although, according to the stage directions, Lucianus has just poured "the poison in the sleeper's ears." (254) Hamlet's addition "You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife" (257-8) has the desired effect – which interestingly enough is spotted first by Ophelia. Ophelia? Was she not watching the play, or, if she was, did a movement catch the corner of her eye and cause her to look around at Claudius and exclaim? Conversely, is it possible that she, suspicious of how the play proceeded, was also watching Claudius at this point? In any case, she is the first one to remark on Claudius' abreaction, as she was also the one

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[78] Although, as Levao points out, the reference to "the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge" seems entirely contrary to the action of 'The Mousetrap', where a murder has not yet taken place, and is prematurely provocative of Claudius (Levao, 347).

[79] Gurr (1992), 4; John Dover Wilson, 157.

to observe, of the dumb show: "Belike this show imports the argument of the play." (136)

Gertrudes's "How fares my lord?" (261) certainly sounds like an exclamation of surprise, not of confederate guilt. It is Polonius who orders "Give o'er the play" (262), and Claudius then requests light, saying, "Away."[80] He leaves with the entire court except Hamlet and Horatio. This is convenient, since the two friends can then compare notes, but it also prompts Bradley to wonder why, if the courtiers accept the play as insulting to the King, as their subsequent behaviour suggests, does no one show "...any sign of perceiving in it also an accusation of murder"?[81] One obvious answer could be that they did, but courtly subservience and corruption are enough to have let it go. Another reason could be that the peaceful status quo of Claudius' diplomatic rule is preferred to Old Hamlet's aggressive foreign policy. Alternatively, is there sufficient material in either the Play or dumb show to alert the suspicions of a court whose only knowledge about their late King's demise is based on the story that he was bitten by a serpent in his orchard?

Hamlet, however, is jubilant – frenziedly so – and part of that jubilation has to do with his success as a director. He speaks to Horatio, first in a little jingle about "strucken deer", then goes on to fantasize about himself as a professional actor, even to the detailed extent of a feathered cap and rosette adorned shoes, concluding, in Arcadian mode, with "Damon", the Shepherd (Horatio), "Jove" (Old Hamlet) and Claudius as a "pajock". (278) Horatio wryly observes, "You might have rhymed" (279), but Hamlet is not in a rhyming mood. His chronic indiscipline has quite overwhelmed his ability to express himself and, at this moment of triumph, he distorts reality. "He mistakes the abstract world constructed and projected by his emotions and imagination for the real world in which he must act."[82] Horatio seems somewhat uneasy both about the situation and Hamlet's reaction to it.[83]

Hamlet has never really planned beyond 'The Mousetrap'. He has composed his speech, instructed the players how to perform it, orchestrated the juxtaposition of Claudius and the play...and then what? All Hamlet's talk of actually killing Claudius has all the hyperbole of a theatrical exercise, of something so illusory as to be almost

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[80] In Q1, however we find the following: "Hamlet: he poysons him for his estate / King: Lights, I will to bed / Corambis: The King arises, lights hoe." (Bertram and Kliman, 148)
[81] Bradley, 109.
[82] Morris Weitz, *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), 299.
[83] Levao, 349.

supernatural, which could, in fact, be the case, as "...the most important cause of man's recourse to magic is his lack of the necessary empirical or technical knowledge to deal with the problems which confront him."[84] This statement can be applied to Hamlet on an individual level in the same way that a primitive farmer, unable to control such a vital variable as the weather, might turn to some ritual or incantation. So the Prince, ill-prepared for his avenging role, turns to something which he believes in, the power of speech, and speech in its most flamboyantly dramatic form.

Theatre's ability to create illusion through speech as one of its mediums of expression is firmly established as powerful because of its essentially parasitic yet transcendent relationship to the 'real' world. Hamlet believes that all the necessary ingredients are now present with which to achieve success. Claudius has acted in the part Hamlet assigned for him. Hamlet's running commentary and the action of 'The Mousetrap' have proved themselves – rendering the *coup de grâce* of the inserted speech superfluous.

Illusion, however, has its limitations, as Hamlet has yet to realize. The beautifully arranged tableau has worked, so far, but what of its star player, Hamlet himself? He now has genuinely to don the role of avenging hero. "I know my course" Hamlet declared – if and only if Claudius should react to the play. Claudius reacted, Hamlet does *know* his course of action, but unfortunately *knowing* in an intellectual sense is not enough. The player King's words are eerily appropriate: "What to ourselves in passion we propose, the passion ending, doth the purpose lose." (189-90) From now on "Hamlet's and Claudius' relations to each other are radically altered, which means that the real play's action is altered."[85] Whom – or what – has 'The Mousetrap' caught, and by what means?

One purpose of the play within a play is, I suggested, to clarify the status of Elsinore as representing real life. This is achieved by both the Pyrrhus speech and 'The Mousetrap' using language which, due to its exaggerated artificiality, forms a strong contrast to the more natural-seeming speech of the rest of the play. This material is depicted in a way which allows of its integration into the ongoing psycho-thematic structure of the whole text, rather than as a separate element of imposition in the main play. Hamlet, in outlining how others should act and speak, is revealing much about

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[84] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1978), 648.
[85] Colie, 221.

himself and his own preoccupations and preferences. In addition to the autobiographical nature of his utterances, their interactive elements are apparent. For example, when Hamlet confronts the players, he maintains the stance of a superior speaking to inferiors. The players, in turn, reinforce this socially hierarchic situation by remaining very securely in their assigned position, responding to all his interrogatory remarks by prefixing them with "My lord" or "My noble lord". This reciprocal arrangement will also be seen to operate particularly with regard to the antic disposition, when the necessity of an audience for reciprocity is investigated in chapter five.

Awareness of some of the differences between modern and contemporary audiences heightens the experience. "The verbal tropes and quibbles are quicker of access when listening is a more natural habit than reading."[86] Thus, awareness of contemporary context adds to our understanding of the drama.

The whole status and nature of selfhood can thus be scrutinized, in the light of the hypothesis that 'self', rather than a fixed entity, is in fact amorphous and evolving, constantly adapting and adjusting to suit the environment in which it finds itself. "Responses such as guilt, shame, pride, indignation and so on are subject to change as contexts change"[87] yet the verbal and behavioural components of these responses are the measures we use when inferring that someone is or is not responsible. The ghost finds Hamlet 'apt', as though this aptness constitutes an enduring characteristic. Far wiser is the player King, admonishing his Queen to take her words less seriously and not be bound by them.

It could be argued that this essentially mercurial self, although outwardly conforming to a socially mediated reality, accepts, or rather requires there be a certain corresponding fluidity or 'magical' dimension to life. As I pointed out in chapter one, although the elaborate rituals of Roman Catholic services partly fulfilled this need, they were in fact attempting to colonize territory previously occupied by pagan nature worship, much in the same way that old seasonal festivals were Christianized and re-allocated. Although a sophisticated Renaissance man such as Hamlet might denigrate such beliefs and needs as immature, that is, as "Such a kind of gaingiving as would perhaps trouble a woman" (V.ii.211-12), I have argued that he does believe deeply in the transformative power of theatre and attempts, in a Prospero-esque manner, to

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[86] Gurr (2004), 13.
[87] Craig Newnes and Elina Baker, "Taking Responsibility", *British Psychological Society: Psychotherapy Section Newsletter* No. 35 (December 2004), 3-10.

harness this potency for his own ends. His conviction is an emotional rather than a rational one, as exemplified by his willingness to base the entire 'Mousetrap' experiment on a piece of unproven hearsay. (II.ii.584-90)

His expressed ideas about the value of theatre are similarly removed from experience, as I have already mentioned, since they represent the traditional elitist view of art as a means of moral improvement. This view, though not directly contradicted is, due to its proximity to the player King's speech, anatomized and found inadequate, a juxtaposing technique Shakespeare uses as a subtly undermining device. The player King's speech, however, is in turn anatomized by the events of the main play, leading to an unresolved, process-like conclusion which will be examined in chapter six.

Two intriguing possibilities have been raised, as to what, allegorically or metaphorically, was being dramatized during 'The Mousetrap'. One concerned a notion that the creative process itself was being depicted, while a second considered the possibility that Hamlet's own mental state might be being portrayed. In connection with this I mentioned the mystery and morality play ethos, which is frequently recalled in the text. These recollections, taking the form of odd, apparently unconnected references to, for example, the 'Hobby Horse' or 'Herod', act as signals that something characteristic of the older tradition is about to take place, such as the externalizing of mental attributes or personifications. Shakespeare uses this technique by having the player King speak in a way which Hamlet – at the time of 'The Mousetrap' – is not yet capable of, but which reflects a level of maturity and wisdom he will exhibit in the final act. Thus, instead of the inserted dozen to sixteen lines Hamlet himself composes, we hear a speech of that length which imposes itself on him and which he later reproduces albeit in slightly modified words. This intriguing manoeuvre enables a continuity to be preserved between the Hamlet of the first four acts and that of the last, although no soliloquies occur in which this transition is explained. Danby makes a crucial point about the difference between the traditional morality play and its limitations, and Shakespeare's re-use and transcendence of these: "The morality could not depict process; it could only handle products. It could not suggest growth, the dynamic of ideas passing in and out of people; it could only present a thesis, and never got beyond its initial premise."[88] My interpretation of this will be that *Hamlet*, in contrast, becomes a forum for the portrayal of experimental scenarios, providing entertainment which is

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[88] Danby, 18.

stimulating, and often discomforting, since it questions and anatomizes the comfortable constraints of the old order.

As Faas notes, "...language, if unrelated to a superior reality, can never equal what it stands for. Where essentialist language finds its fulfillment in articulating absolute truths, its opposite operates from the basic assumption of the intrinsic incommunicability of reality."[89]

A way beyond such an impasse can be found in re-enactment of the forms which are found inadequate, a re-enactment in a way which presses them into service as part of the investigative strategy; thus the 'carnivalesque' becomes not merely ornamental or humorous relief material, but rather an "...attitude, a history of languages and practices which functions as a structural and ideological method."[90] Under this heading can be listed many of the elements which Shakespeare frequently uses, such as representations of rituals, portrayals of madness and borrowings from classical, religious and philosophical discourse. These inaugurate a "...continuum of licensed genres"[91] which, mirror-like, reflect each other and in so doing, examine and question the objectives of theatre. This is particularly salient with regard to the revenge theme in *Hamlet*, where a sequence of interrelated revenge stories, ongoing but unresolved, seem to query the whole avenging ethos.

A form of liberation is thus achieved. It is a movement towards liberation from past constraints, but, despite the enlightenment which is implied by this momentum, the events of act five deny it scope for the actualization of its potential. "It is a fantasy that works on the collective mind like a shared dream, of great constancy because remembered and replayed. It is memorable and faithful to itself, and yet like all dreams it is unreal."[92]

Having examined the way in which the dramatic rhetoric of *Hamlet* deals with that which is explicit and that which is only implied, and having seen how the two are fundamentally related, it is now time to see how the notion of morality fares under this investigative strategy.

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[89] Faas, 98.
[90] Gorfain, 304.
[91] Ibid., 306.
[92] Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company 1594-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 146.

Chapter 4

The Speech of Morality and the Morality of Speech

> The universe of Shakespeare's plays, fundamentally medieval in character, has inherently a legal basis; its moral axes are intelligibly rational, and it is permeated by a conception, scholastic in origin, of the Natural Law, to which all creation is bound, and to whose cyclic and teleological operations the conscience of man functions as an internal and spiritual witness.[1]

> To depend on sermons and other Elizabethan social documents to determine our view of revenge in a play is to assume that the playwright uncritically adopted these ready-made moralistic formulations. Such an assumption can lead to fallacious a priori conclusions in relation to what one actually finds in specific plays. Apart from the difficulty of integrating the different views found in these materials, such an assumption diverts attention from the playwright's own thought, which might have been quite original and not conditioned by views that were current, except as these views might have stimulated him.[2]

Hamlet's metatheatrical strategy is an attempt, it will be recalled, to "catch the conscience of the King" by making him reveal his "occulted guilt", thereby convincing Hamlet, and if possible the entire court, that Claudius is indeed the murderer the ghost declares him to be. The plan has been only partly successful, because, as I will argue, Hamlet does not seem capable of following up his vengeful speeches with action.

'The Mousetrap' has, however, given Claudius an immediate problem to solve. This problem has two aspects, external and internal. Externally, Claudius must try to defuse the threat that Hamlet now represents. Internally, Claudius must try to regain some kind of homeostasis, some way to continue functioning, while accepting the fact that what he has done is a mortal sin.

During this chapter I will explore a large amount of scriptural material. This will provide a background for what I consider a radical departure in how Shakespeare deals with certain moral issues, particularly those of conscience. Newell, rightly, cautions against depending on contemporary religious writings for our interpretation of a play, arguing that we can be led to assume erroneously that playwrights imported "...ready-made moralistic formulations."[3] Ackroyd notes that Shakespeare "...summons the pagan deities...as frequently as he invokes the Christian God."[4] Both

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[1] Wilks, 265.
[2] Newell, 54.
[3] Ibid., 54.
[4] Ackroyd, 447.

comments are worth bearing in mind when we try to discover exactly what use Shakespeare makes of these ideas and raw materials. I will be examining the prayer scene as Claudius attempts to solve the internal aspect of his problem. This attempt at verbally dissecting the problem manifests itself as a disciplined, if doomed, soliloquy, inviting comparisons with Hamlet's 'To be', since both engage with the consequences of living a moral or immoral life. Hamlet's hesitation in killing Claudius at apparent prayer will be contrasted with the reckless murder of Polonius and vigorously effective misogynistic assault on Gertrude's conscience. Throughout Hamlet will be seen to oscillate between the self-styled roles of classical and Biblical hero, as he attempts to impose his idiosyncratic orthodoxy onto Elsinore, insisting that Claudius' death ensures damnation, whereas Gertrude's amended life will ensure salvation. Hamlet thus can be seen to exploit the rhetoric of drama in what he believes to be the service of truth.

Milward, speaking of the play in terms of themes, notes: "In Hamlet the theme of revenge has been so emphasized in traditional criticism that the significance of the contrary theme of repentance and forgiveness is not always noticed."[5] I would agree on this point, and add that I do not find evidence in the play for allegiance on Shakespeare's part to most of the religious material which he includes. Rather, he investigates, engages with and dissects.[6] The speech of morality, or the morality of speech, is his concern, rather than propounding some orthodox transcendence of morality's verbal vehicle.

It is apparent that Hamlet's project, to 'catch' the conscience of the king, is more successful from the audience's point of view than Hamlet could ever have intended. Not only does Claudius flee the scene, thus convincing Hamlet both of his guilt and of the ghost's veracity, but he does so before the inserted speech, a speech which, ironically, would have given us merely Hamlet's projected version of a conscience-stricken murderer, rather than the totally unexpected yet perversely engaging speech of Claudius himself. Claudius' main problem is that he is a Christian and was one at the time he planned and carried out the murder of Old Hamlet. As a Christian, he cannot claim ignorance of moral law. In fact, as the prayer scene reveals, he has a very sound grasp of matters theological, particularly with regard to sin and its consequences for the soul.

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[5] Milward (1973), 246.

[6] For a discussion of contemporary homilectic material in Hamlet see Milward (1990), 58-73, and for a Catholic reading of the text see Milward (1997), 34-47. Ackroyd, however, argues against any religious affiliations (Ackroyd, 446-8).

Possibly he considers that a long life of peaceful rule, followed by a sincere death-bed repentance would suffice to mitigate the severity of his crime. 'The Mousetrap' can be seen to act as a catalyst; not only does it convince Hamlet of Claudius' guilt, but crucially, it convinces Claudius of it too. Prior to the staging of the play, Claudius has, as mentioned in chapter two, abreacted to Polonius' general remark on the subject of hypocrisy. (III.i.46-9) His abreaction takes the form of an agreement with the statement and an augmentation of its sentiments. (49-54) It is also notable that Claudius utilizes the speech of orthodoxy, referring to 'lash' and 'conscience'. But, as I will attempt to demonstrate, he shows no more adherence to its underlying spirit than Hamlet or the ghost, who freely quote scripture and use scriptural allusions as mere rhetorical devices. Claudius' brief aside and his prayer scene soliloquy will achieve audience acknowledgement of the formidable stature that Shakespeare wrote into this character's part. As Rossiter has observed, "You only weaken Hamlet by making Claudius less than a 'mighty opposite'."[7]

Shakespeare precedes the prayer scene with two examples of Hamlet's antic disposition, during which Hamlet spars with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and then Polonius. As soon as Polonius and the others have left, Hamlet gives vent to a very brief, dark soliloquy, the darkness of which stands in stark contrast to the banter which has gone before, and we are swept back into the world of Pyrrhus, spiced with a few Christian references. The present has been temporarily transcended, once again, as Hamlet tries hyperbolically to prepare himself for the confrontation with his mother by becoming the single-minded avenging force for righteousness that he has scripted for himself. The rationale for this confrontation could be extracted from the ghost's command to

> Leave her to heaven,
> And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
> To prick and sting her. (86-88)[8]

Polonius has still to eavesdrop on the meeting between Hamlet and Gertrude, and report his findings, but, if we agree with Bowers in assuming that Claudius has already written the condemnatory letter[9], then nothing he says will make any difference. Hamlet is condemned to death, and was so condemned once Claudius had witnessed 'The

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[7] Rossiter, 184.
[8] In Q1 we find "Leave her to heaven / And to the burthen that her conscience beares." (Bertram and Kliman, 60)
[9] Bowers (1987), 42.

Mousetrap' and heard Hamlet's accompanying barb-like jests. One thing, however, might make a difference, and that is the result of Claudius' attempt to pray.

Before going on to examine the text in detail, I would like to refer to some of the relevant background material shared by both Claudius and Shakespeare's audience. In doing so I hope to prepare the ground for what follows.

Popular consumption of religious literature reached a high point during the Renaissance. Battenhouse[10] mentions St. Augustine as most popular of the church fathers, and Sims[11] notes that, if we ignore the fact that Shakespeare's audience had impressive amounts of theological background knowledge, we risk missing much that Shakespeare included, but which depended on familiarity with the narratives of the Bible and their allegorical and doctrinal interpretations.[12] Noble highlights something of the novelty value which the word of God still possessed for those who represented only the second generation to whom the Bible in English was available, and he also notes that in the earlier plays, scriptural allusions are more complete and more obvious, but in the later plays, like *Hamlet*, they are more "idiomatic" and textually woven.[13] It is also worth noting that the frame of reference into which scriptural and orthodox allusions fitted was still, in Post-Reformation times, very much influenced by its scholastic medieval predecessors. Chaudhuri, speaking of the hierarchical nature of represented reality, notes that although Protestantism apparently broke with tradition, what superficially appear as positions which are unrelated or even hostile to each other, actually contain much that is common ground, especially those related to mankind's nature and position within the cosmos.[14]

I will now turn to look at the first of two examples of the rhetoric of drama as applied to the notion of conscience. In the second of these, Hamlet will verbally attempt to superimpose his concept of what she should be feeling on his mother. In the first, Claudius tries to explicate and resolve the cognitively dissonant dilemma in which he finds himself. He has no doubts whatsoever about the gravity of his crime within the scheme of things (36-8)[15], a scheme of which, ironically enough, he never questions the validity. A speculator like Hamlet might have erected fantastic Gothic traceries of

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[10] Battenhouse, 380.
[11] Sims, 77.
[12] See Ackroyd (52) for a discussion of which Biblical texts feature most prominently in Shakespeare.
[13] Noble, 41.
[14] Chaudhuri, 50.
[15] In Q1 the Biblical parallel is even more explicit: "The earth doth still crie out upon my fact, / Pay me the murder of a brother and a King." (Bertram and Kliman, 160)

doubt and counter-doubt. Claudius is convinced that he exists in a Judaeo-Christian universe, and that his place in that universe is as a sinner, in danger of damnation.

A word here about interiority. We might ask whether, when Claudius speaks of his own crimes, he is doing something radically new and different from, for example, the rationale for self-confession Belsey attributes to Richard III's soliloquies. She says: "When Gloucester asserts his own identity and agency he is declaring a total and unified commitment to evil rather than defining an emerging interiority, an independent realm of consciousness."[16] She sees such self-assertion as the mark of evil: "...it is a humanist appropriation of the texts which finds it heroic or calls it integrity."[17]

If the foregoing interpretation of Richard is correct, it is reasonable to wonder whether something similar can be applied to Claudius, and seek to discover why someone so evil is praying. In order to answer, it must be borne in mind that Richard was also troubled by dreams in the last act and by something he referred to, scathingly, as conscience. A form of conscience can, in fact, be part of the make-up of someone who is evil. Shakespeare is not trying to present Claudius as someone who may have yearnings towards goodness, but rather as someone interesting, someone eloquent and disciplined, and, if not worthy of salvation, then surely worthy of respect. Claudius is not, like Old Hamlet, petty or self-deluded; he is a villain on quite a formidable scale. The interiority he voices may well be construed as a commitment to evil, but it is an evil expressed with consciousness, an evil against a backdrop of adherence to a scheme which will result in destruction.

First Claudius admits that he cannot pray. He can manage some verbal formula, but that, as he knows, is not true prayer. (39-43) He claims his situation is comparable to someone "bound" to two pieces of "business" so that he can usefully proceed with neither. So far, this resembles enterprises being dwelt on until they fall apart and nothing is done. Claudius, however, seems to be suggesting that one piece of business is prayer, but there is a second piece. Guilt is surely preventing him from praying, not making the demands of a separate and conflicting course of action upon him. He either prays, or does not. If this reading is accepted, then what Claudius seems to be saying is that he is trying somehow to avert the eventuality of damnation for himself, yet, due to the fact of a murder he has committed, a murder whose only effect he regrets is its potentially negative consequences for himself, he cannot genuinely seek forgiveness.

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[16] Belsey (1985), 38.
[17] Ibid., 39.

This inability to pray properly is taking up time he could be more usefully spending in making final preparations for Hamlet's murder, the second piece of business. Claudius does not immediately abandon his attempt to pray. He first rehearses the relevant material appertaining to sin and forgiveness. He attacks the problem logically, methodically, and begins at the outside, almost as an observer of his own crime.(38-41) The problem is not the size of the sin, but rather the fact that heaven cannot be appealed to by the impenitent. Claudius has not verbalized this necessary proviso, and will not do so until he has carefully gone through all the evidence before him, evidence based on his past and present feelings, plus his considerable scriptural knowledge.[18] Next he examines the concept of mercy. Mercy exists in order "to confront the visage of offence." Mercy would not exist if offence did not. Therefore, since offence facilitates grace, offence has a place in the scheme of things. And prayer is the means by which an offender accesses mercy.[19]

> My fault is past – but O, what form of prayer
> Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder?" (51-2)

The answer could be in the affirmative. The form is certainly correct. Claudius' problem is that this is not a prayer: it is mere form. If a form of speech were enough, Claudius would have no need to fear. Claudius is eloquent, creative, disciplined and persistent. Claudius, in fact, at this very moment, is using speech as a tool in order to probe its own scope and limitations. He cannot see a way out of his dilemma, but, being Claudius, will employ his finest weapons in the attempt to secure one. (52-5)[20]

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[18] In Isaiah I.18 we read: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the lord: though your sins were as crimson, they shall be made white as snow: though they were red like scarlet, they shall be as wool." This is glossed in the Geneva text as "Lest sinners should pretend any rigour on God's part, he only willeth them to be pure in heart, and he will forgive all their sins, were they ever so many or great."

[19] It is worth noting, as Grene does, that Claudius never accuses himself of incest, only of murder (Grene, 43). In Q1, however, we find: "And the incestuous fault I have committed." (Bertram and Kliman, 160). Possibly Claudius is accusing himself of adultery rather than incest and therefore the two terms are being used synonymously to refer to the blacker dimensions of the crime. The Ghost and Hamlet use 'incest' as a condemnation of the marriage; they do not use 'adultery', which would tend to implicate Gertrude in a pre-marital tryst. Duthie mentions a more text-oriented rationale, seeing the Q1 admission of adultery as due to a glitch in the memory of the compiler, who erroneously conflated it with material from the closet scene. Duthie then goes on to highlight other places where he discerns similar lapses, the most interesting of which concerns the prayer scene's opening line's "O that this wet that falls upon my face would wash the crime cleare from my conscience!" He sees the parallel with Hamlet's own first soliloquy: "O that this too…". "It may well be that the opening of Hamlet's first soliloquy (I.ii.129ff) was the reporter's model for the opening of this version of the King's soliloquy in the Prayer-scene." George Ian Duthie, *The Bad Quarto of Hamlet: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1941), 110. It is interesting, however, that such a mismatch scenario so readily occurs; in fact it strengthens my argument about the potency of thematic resonances, which seem to have reverberated strongly enough in this reporter's mind to have caused a verbal transition from one part of the play to another.

[20] Q1, less elegantly but more poignantly, gives us: "I but still to persever in a sinne, / It is an act against the universal power." (Bertram and Kliman, 160)

Claudius, in fact, contradicts his earlier statement, "My fault is past", because presumably part of the original fault consists in the enjoyment of its effects and thus the fault is translated into the present. It is doubtful whether Claudius, until now, ever applied his formidable intelligence to the problem. He has earlier reacted to the "lash" of conscience, (III.i.49-54) even going so far as to claim he is heavily burdened by the fact of having to speak one thing while feeling another. This little soliloquy, or lone aside, seems merely the weight of awareness, awareness of having become the kind of being who, according to his belief system, is headed for a long and terrible eternity following on from a short, "painted" life. As Polonius says:

> 'Tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage
> And pious action we do sugar o'er
> The devil himself." (III.i.47-8).

Platitudinous or not, it directly, if inadvertently, targets the vulnerable part of Claudius' self-representation, the part that associates deeds with consequences.

During the soliloquy "Claudius' intellectual considerations are rigorously objective, free from an ego-centred profusion of first-person pronouns."[21] This is comparable to Hamlet's soliloquies, except that, although the impersonality may be common to both, the discipline belongs to Claudius, and, unlike Hamlet's verbal maze-making, this Claudian soliloquy has an inevitable, predictable outcome. We can almost hear the door of salvation clanging shut when he asks, "May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?" (56)

Claudius asks the right questions, mainly because he already knows the answers.

> In the corrupted currents of this world
> Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
> And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
> Buys out the law. (57-60)

The lines themselves are superb, "...an allegory so briefly sketched that it almost passes as something other than allegory."[22] On a less positive note, Battenhouse comments that Claudius' attempt at prayer contains no word of praise for the Lord's name or obedience to his will. "Claudius is more anxious to wash his hands than his heart and is not thinking on mercy to his own neighbour as a way to honor Heaven."[23] This, however, is hardly surprising, since Claudius, lacking the spirit, can only replicate the letter of the law, without the insight to apply it creatively in a truly virtue-seeking way.

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[21] Newell, 111.
[22] Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 2000), 36.
[23] Battenhouse, 379.

Claudius' agenda is specific, involving neither glory-giving nor good works. His contact with and representation of heavenly judgement can go no further than seeing it as a tribunal and himself as its victim. He has no notion of transcendent bliss, because, for him, the highest joy existence offers is to retain his hold on those things for which he committed the crime. If damnation were not a possibility, then Claudius would not have a problem. His understanding of Christianity refers only to a rule-book, and his guilt is only that of a rule breaker. (60-4)

Again he posits "above" as a place where the means of investigation and interrogation are so powerfully sophisticated that no-one can keep anything hidden. In rhythms reminiscent of Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, he says:

> What then? What rests?
> Try what repentance can. What can it not?
> Yet what can it, when one cannot repent? (64-6)

Claudius has almost reached the conclusion of his trial, and, although this conclusion is obviously foregone, he still has to continue, turning each verbal stone, drawing out the process, delaying the moment of self-condemnation.

Belsey notes how drama discards allegory and instead "...morality personifications give way to social types, concrete individuals", thereby moving the arena of struggle "...from the macrocosm to the microcosm"[24] by having conflict internalised then promptly externalized by being verbalized. Claudius does not address a separate character. He addresses the audience and himself, a self which, like the soliloquizing Hamlet, provides both a subject of utterance and of enunciation. His argument unfolds serially, an argument in which he expresses thought, but thought transformed into properly worked-up statements. (66-9)

At this point Claudius realises and accepts that repenting while keeping the fruits of one's crime is an impossibility, yet he stubbornly refuses to part with those fruits. During the course of his prayer he has efficiently painted himself into a corner.

Next, Claudius addresses two separate audiences, one external, composed of interceding angels, the other himself, a self he has constructed for the purpose of this exercise and which can be described as having "stubborn knees" and metallic heart-strings. Interestingly, this self-description is merely physical, a temporary projection which can be ordered about, even criticized, as though the temperamental underpinnings

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[24] Belsey (1985), 43.

of unbending knees and hardness of heart were irrelevant, or amenable to a mere behavioural intervention.[25]

Before going on to look at Hamlet's reaction in this scene, it might be appropriate to compare the overall content of Claudius' soliloquy with that of 'To be', because the latter carries resonances of the former.

Both soliloquies open with the clear acknowledgement of a problem, this problem then forming the material for an ensuing examination. In the case of Claudius, opening clarity of expression is maintained throughout, focussed on a recent, real world event, but in Hamlet's case the issue becomes confused, since he is attempting to become Lucianus the poisoner, whose dozen to sixteen lines must represent the words of someone with a Claudius-like mentality – as he imagines it. Unfortunately, this projection becomes destructively entangled with his own situation, and loses the name of even verbal action. He cannot sustain the necessary discipline to complete the exercise successfully. Claudius, supreme pragmatist that he is, actively considers every option which the situation suggests to him, whereas Hamlet does not, and merely forecloses on the dual notion of resistance or death, the trademark of a true idealist. Hamlet's omissions are often as informative as his inclusions, his philosophical references all tending to support the theatrically unrealistic outlook we have learned to associate with him. The notion of death, though a cause for fear, is also a speculative "undiscover'd country", whereas for Claudius it seems to involve certain damnation. Hamlet, by contrast, seems almost amoral in both his representation of the cosmos, and his position with regard to it. This lack of constraint comes across as the consequence more of immaturity and indiscipline than of a considered attempt to disengage himself from any perceived orthodox restrictions.

In neither case is a solution achieved; both speeches are curtailed, one by an external factor - the presence of Ophelia - the other by reason, by a stoical acceptance of an unchangeable status quo.

The action of the play now concentrates on Hamlet and the opportunity for revenge, but, as Wilks notes, the words, "Now might I do't" (74), lead us "...in turn to

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[25] It was believed that the heat of pride and anger caused the heart to dry up, thus preventing the normal flow of blood, which contained the spirits and humours necessary to nourish the body, and preserve a balance between the various temperaments; thus Claudius might mean that, if only the sinews of his heart were less rigid, then the gentler passions of remorse and humility might have a chance to manifest themselves enabling true repentance to take place. See J.M. Bamborough, *The Little World of Man : Renaissance psychological theory as an aid to the understanding of Shakespeare* (London: Longmans & Green, 1952), 125.

expect the rationalization by which he summarily abandons it."[26] It seems as though Hamlet, prior to drawing his sword, had the rationalization already in mind, which may well be true, since the sword's being drawn has all the characteristics of a theatrical gesture. Newell, in fact, sees a parallel between the sword of Pyrrhus, sticking in the air and Hamlet's drawing then hesitating. "...both images win sympathy for a helpless victim and provide a clear, sustained perception of a person consumed with a passion for vengeance."[27] I agree that the first consideration may be true but surely our awareness of Hamlet's inner life shows that he wishes he were so consumed, but is not.

As Ghose says, Hamlet "...proceeds to make an investigation of logic in order to understand the word 'revenge'"[28], becoming over-involved with the verbally structured reality he creates. (75-9) He should also, surely, know "...that repentance for sins like Claudius' requires penance more substantial than prayer."[29] He does not appear to know this, or, if he has been exposed to sufficient theological education to know it (as his utterances lead one to assume) then he is using an excuse and not a reason. As Margolies notes, Claudius is, indeed, surrounded by courtiers who, apparently, are content with the status quo he has established.[30] If, as Hamlet originally hoped, 'The Mousetrap' had caused Claudius to admit his guilt publicly, then this might have altered. As it is, the play seems to have acted as a catalyst for Claudius' own inner process, but not in any way which might benefit Hamlet. In fact, the events are detrimental to his avenging scheme, since Claudius is now forewarned and armed. Hamlet never mentions bringing Claudius to any form of public trial or justice, and this is the case even after the sea voyage, when he possesses the incriminating evidence of Claudius' commission to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.[31]

In other words, the picture is less than perfect. Claudius is apparently praying; Hamlet does not know the reason, cannot hear the words, and never, verbally, makes any association between Claudius' hasty withdrawal from 'The Mousetrap' and this display of piety. This seems a large oversight on Hamlet's part, since the stated aim of the enterprise was to catch the King's conscience, and now, here is that same King, guilt confirmed by flight, that flight now suspended in prayer. However, Hamlet ignores the obvious connection because, following on from observing that Claudius seems "fit and

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[26] Wilks, 118.
[27] Newell, 125.
[28] Ghose, 49.
[29] French, 153.
[30] Margolies, 60.
[31] Bradley, 76.

season'd for his passage", he sheathes his sword and catalogues what he considers more suitable opportunities:

> When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
> Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed,
> At game a-swearing, or about some act,
> That has no relish of salvation in't,
> Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven
> And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
> As hell, whereto it goes. (89-95)

These are the activities Hamlet hopes will provide a way to avenge his father effectively; they are not activities that a repentant man, praying for forgiveness, would indulge in ever again. Thus, Hamlet, does not allow of the possibility that Claudius is truly sorry for his crime. Another aspect of this catalogue is its theatricality. Hamlet has sketched a magnificent portrait of an unrepentant, villainous king, a superb exercise in economy and venom. Yet the venom is Hamlet's own. He has projected a one-dimensional character of evil, and of gluttonous, lecherous evil at that, onto Claudius, and this is a technique he will again use when similarly projecting onto Gertrude in the closet scene. Again, the rhetoric of drama is being exploited to promote Hamlet's idiosyncratic views of morality.

> My mother stays.
> This physic but prolongs thy sickly days. (95-6)

Acting rather than action mode is exactly what Hamlet needs for his next encounter. He has the ghost's order; he must not in any way proceed against his mother. Meanwhile Claudius has verbally woven a strong thread of personal ambition in alongside the intellectual understanding of an orthodox, Christian system. The unravelling of this intricate, but ultimately untenable production is inevitable. There exists no formula of words with which to repair it. Claudius knows there is such a thing as repentance, and knows he cannot achieve it. The closing lines of his attempt at prayer illustrate both the sophistication and futility of his insight:

> My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
> Words without thoughts never to heaven go. (97-8)[32]

Perhaps Claudius is hoping that, on his deathbed, he will be able to achieve repentance.[33] The major obstacle will have been removed; he will not have to face life

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[32] In Q1 we read a less enlightening if more conventional: "My words fly up, my sinnes remain below. / No King on earth is safe, if God's his foe." (Bertram and Kliman, 162)

[33] Duffy notes that current belief held: "Such was God's mercy that even deathbed repentance or repentance based merely on fear, if accompanied in fact or in desire by resort to the Sacraments, would save from damnation" (Duffy, 341).

without the crown, Gertrude and all the other fruits of sin. Sims, however, takes a less optimistic view: "When he rises like Esau, he has sought with desperation if not tears, a place of repentance and not found it…after this passage he never considers praying or penitence again."[34]

I believe the conscience herein implied is a short-hand term for awareness, in its second sense of consciousness, or perhaps even in both senses, of having heard and understood the rules of the Judaeo-Christian universe, and of knowing that one has transgressed them. We can therefore agree that Hamlet has caught the 'conscience' of the King. Ignorance of the law is not, and never was, a defence posture adopted by Claudius. He is as well prepared as any lawyer yet, ironically, he has acted as counsel for the prosecution rather than defence.

Claudius represents a supreme example of one who can perfectly utilise the speech of morality without misunderstanding, misapplication or hypocrisy, unlike Hamlet and the ghost, whose usage in the play so far has been mere rhetorical embellishment or theologically vague justifications for less than altruistic agendas, as examined in chapter one.

In the next scene we will see Hamlet uncharacteristically disciplined, focused and successful, as he utters an idiosyncratically selective moral montage directed 'at' rather than 'to' the hapless Gertrude, to whom we now turn.

According to the scarcely impartial eyewitness accounts of Hamlet and the ghost, she was deeply devoted to her first husband. However, according to the rest of the play, her loyalty and love towards Claudius are graphically depicted, especially when she physically restrains the vengeful Laertes from harming the King.[35]

The first eye-witness account of Gertrude's passion for Old Hamlet comes in the 'sullied flesh' soliloquy, interspersed with much hyperbole:

> She would hang on him
> As if increase in appetite had grown
> By what it fed on. (I.ii.143-5)

And at the funeral:

> She followed my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe, all tears. (148-9)

Then her new marriage took place

> Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears

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[34] Sims, 59.
[35] Greenblatt (2004), 137. "Let him go, Gertrude." (IV.v.122)

> Had left the flushing in her galled eyes. (154-5)[36]

Nowhere during the play does Gertrude add anything to this evidence, nowhere does she speak lovingly or sorrowfully about her first husband, regret his demise or wish for a return to former wedded bliss. Behaviourally, she resembles the dumb show Player Queen, since we have no verbal explanation or augmentation of any of these behaviours. We do have evidence throughout the play that Gertrude is highly, even impetuously, emotional. She also, equally passionately, goes to the defence of her son, eagerly sharing his fate, yet, as the previously mentioned scene with Laertes and Claudius shows, she does not abandon the man she apparently loves.

Our second eye-witness is the ghost himself, relating that as soon as he was dead, Claudius,

> 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. (I.v.43-6)

We do not know exactly at which point in the 'prequel' to *Hamlet* this seduction occurred, since the ghost's speech deals with events occurring prior to his death, presumably because knowledge denied to the limited perspective of the living becomes available to their meta-perspectively enhanced spirits. In chapter one I discussed how the ghost seemed to be trapped in a totally egocentric perspective. His priorities had less to do with the fact of his murder than with Gertrude's remarriage, a perspective shared by his son. This being the case, his speech can be seen as driven by these priorities, rather than driven by any chronological accuracy. He constantly, vituperatively denigrates the situation in all its aspects, flitting between outrage at the murder and marriage and his attempts to ensure Hamlet's compliance as a willing tool of retribution. His notion of a "virtuous Queen" would seem to involve someone who, in the manner of a Queen Katherine, spent the remainder of her life as a chaste widow. He describes Claudius' feelings in the most derogatory terms, as "shameful lust" although throughout the play this seems an inaccurate depiction of apparently much deeper, even nobler emotions on Claudius' part. Bradshaw, similarly, finds no evidence in the play that Claudius and Gertrude's relationship was merely lustful: "In sharp contrast, the Ghost's dreadful image of lust preying on garbage does not convey *love* for

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[36] 'Salt' could also indicate lasciviousness (David and Ben Crystal, 383).

Gertrude. If anything it suggests that the purgatorial fires are failing in their intended effect."[37]

Claudius is accused of entrapping Gertrude's will, rather than merely her passions, and, although Hamlet later goes on to denigrate the second marriage in the most sexually explicit terms (unpacking his heart as a drab would, and in the language of one), 'will' was considered quite a separate and superior faculty to the emotions. This is a reversal of the expected sequence of events, in which a seducer stirs the desires of his infatuated victim, until her will is contaminated, then ensnared. Old Hamlet, in stressing the fact of 'will' being thus wooed and won over, could mean that, in wedding Claudius, Gertrude was turning away from all that was good and committing a mortal sin – her will, her higher faculties, setting her on a path to destruction.[38]

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem an unfortunate choice of envoys for the meeting which is about to place, certain to cause Hamlet to feel suspicious, yet chosen they are, and their rationale for Gertrude's summons must strike Hamlet as falsely as it does us. (303-4 and 317-18). Left alone, he declares:

> Now could I drink hot blood,
> And do such bitter business as the day
> Would quake to look on. (381-3)

As already noted, words like "could" herald a chronic lack of action. The traditional nature of the pre-revenge rant seems, rather than an attempt by Shakespeare to resuscitate it for present purposes, more like an attempt to allow Hamlet one more theatrical gesture. In order to take action Hamlet's frame of mind needs to be quite unreflectively different.

> Soft, now to my mother. (384)

It is easy to get lost in the logistics of this act, because its momentum is so attenuated, and its narrative flow channelled through so many powerful currents. Before Hamlet has walked the short distance that separates his present location in Elsinore from that of his mother's closet, we will have revisited the ever-congealing plot of Claudius, overheard him at prayer and been given proof positive that Hamlet's bloodlust was merely verbal as he allows the King to live, as this "…creates the eerie sense of minds passing in the night, oblivious to their parallel torments."[39]

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[37] Bradshaw, 113.
[38] Q1 makes this even clearer: "Leave her to heaven, And to the burthen that her conscience beares." (Bertram and Kliman, 60)
[39] Levao, 352.

> O heart, lose not thy nature, let not ever
> The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom;
> Let me be cruel, not unnatural.
> I will speak daggers to her, but use none.
> My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites:
> How in my words somever she be shent,
> To give them seals never my soul consent. (384-390)

The elaborate rhetorical flourishes which Hamlet uses to open the speech seem not to be directed at Claudius, but at Gertrude, or rather, at Hamlet's representation of her.

Act four opens with a hasty little conference between Polonius and the Queen. He is in busybody mode; he repeats everything which has previously been decided upon. He sets up the tableau in a manner worthy of Hamlet, even choreographing and proposing dialogue.

> Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with
> And that your Grace hath screen'd and stood between
> Much heat and him. (2-4)

We will not learn the nature of these 'pranks' from the ensuing interview, because Hamlet will superimpose his sermonizing, effectively silencing Gertrude. However, his antic disposition surely does not qualify as 'pranks', which in Jenkins' gloss are "...acts outraging order and decency."[40]

The only thing Hamlet has done which comes any way near to being defined in such a way is his staging of 'The Mousetrap', which, so far as everyone except Claudius is concerned, is merely a piece of entertainment from the players' repertoire. Gertrude, admonished by Polonius to be "round" (blunt), answers, "I'll war'nt you, fear me not." (5) This is a reply which betrays nothing of any "occulted" guilt and which seems to come from someone completely caught up in the task at hand, motivated by a genuine desire to help her son. Her desire, however, is mingled with what she presumably perceives as her duty, as Queen and wife, to act as Claudius' tool. Evidence that she had nothing to do with the murder is surely established by her very acquiescence in this stratagem – if she suspected anything like murder on Claudius' part, she would not be so anxious to have her son potentially betray his knowledge of it with Polonius listening. Paradoxically, this simple reply blends innocence and ignorant culpability equally. Hamlet's opening, "Now, mother, what's the matter?" (7), has in its combination of 'matter' and 'mother' a suggestion of various themes. Aristotle placed male 'form' higher than female 'matter', and many Renaissance authors adhered to this

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[40] Jenkins, 318, note to III.iv.2.

distinction, adding much misogynistic cryptic adjectival support.[41] However, rather than merely denigrating Gertrude for her gender, I think Hamlet is, by his 'matter/mother' link attempting to highlight what he sees as the negative aspects of her position. Rather than behaving as a superior, rational being, she has gone to the extreme of low, animal lust. "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended". (8) Gertrude's remark is countered with "Mother, you have my father much offended" (9), and the situation rapidly escapes her control (10-11), as the change in the register of the pronoun changes the register of the exchange.

Polonius' plan was not, in fact, very well thought out, because Polonius refused to relinquish his hope of one day becoming Hamlet's father-in-law.[42] He wanted this so badly that he failed to consider the possibility that eavesdropping might put himself at risk: "...his tragedy is less a sign of senility than of a competence that has lost its context."[43] He is as innocent as Gertrude of the real issue, an innocence which will be of no help now. A more Claudius-like mind would have planned for guards to be positioned nearby. Polonius pays for this narrowness of vision with his life.

Hamlet now utters the line which, I believe, is pivotal in bringing about the change of heart and mind which Gertrude will shortly experience. In answer to Gertrude's "O what a rash and bloody deed is this" (26), he says, "Almost as bad, good mother, as kill a King and marry with his brother". (27-8) If this is a test, designed to assay Gertrude's complicity in the murder, then her stunned repetition surely exonerates her, "As kill a King?"[44] (29). Hamlet's reply, "Ay, lady, it was my word" (30), neither explains nor withdraws, but plants seeds of doubt, then allows them to do their work. He provides a brief tongue-in-cheek epitaph for Polonius (31), then returns to concentrate on the business in hand, which is to speak, rather than use, daggers, ordering her to "Leave wringing of your hands." (34)

The image suggested is of Gertrude in a state of horrified bewilderment, because not only has Hamlet made the most terrible accusation a mother could ever hear, but, motivated by the same impetus, has slaughtered someone whose identity was unknown

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[41] See R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Ian McLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[42] For example, even after the nunnery scene, see his aside at III.i.178-9.

[43] Levao, 336.

[44] In Q1 only, Hamlet follows up his cryptic remark with a fuller explanation: "Murdered, damnably murdered, this was your husband." (Bertram and Kliman, 166). And: "A! have you eyes and can you look on him / That slew my father, and your deere husband, / To lie in the incestuous pleasure of his bed?" (Ibid., 168)

to him until after the deed. Two possibilities are open to her; either she can completely abandon any illusions of Hamlet's sanity, or she can accept what he is saying.

Her response to his verbal attack (39 and 53) indicates that she has not, as yet, made her choice but is genuinely terrified by the consequences of either.

Hamlet continues:

> Such an act
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
> ...is thought sick at the act. (40-50)

I think it is reasonable to use Gertrude's verbal expressions of bewilderment as evidence against some form of premarital tryst with Claudius. She clearly has no idea why Hamlet's disgust and rage are directed against her. She does not, until this scene, entertain any notion that Old Hamlet's death was due to anything other than the serpent's bite. Neither does she have any notion that her remarriage was, if faulty in any way, anything more than a little 'hasty'.

Her first husband is dead and buried, and his brother has, it seems, adequately fulfilled her emotional, intellectual and physical needs, but suddenly here is her incomprehensibly morose son blaming her for his distemper, and doing so in the speech of moral opprobrium.

Hamlet is trying "...to find an image, a form of words, that will force his mother to see the monstrosity of what she has done." However, what he is so anxious to make her see is his own subjective representation, because the glass he wants to set up for Gertrude is really only "...the mirror of his own outrage."[45] Nothing in the play supports the accusations Hamlet and his father have been making. Hamlet seems to hope that, by some manipulation of reality or the environment, he could make another person feel as he feels. Mercer sees this as a recurrent theme, especially so in the orchestration of 'The Mousetrap' where the desire is to change Claudius into someone capable of seeing his crime as the violation against all righteousness which Hamlet believes it to be. Hence, in this scene Hamlet's strategy is to paint a sensually revolting picture of Gertrude's relationship with Claudius. This could be seen as either cathartic – for Hamlet's own benefit – or because an appeal to the senses might be the best way of attacking a non-abstract thinker, as Gertrude seems to be. She is a woman of passion therefore, Hamlet might consider harnessing the negative aspects of this trait in order to shock and shame her into what he believes she should be feeling. He thus creates a

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[45] Mercer, 197.

physically reprehensible image and uses it to cast into relief an intellectually admirable one.

His attack is indeed a *tour de force* of hero worship for his father, denigration of his uncle and sheer misogynistic revulsion for Gertrude. As he produces and compares the two portraits, he slips back into hyperbolic language:

> See what a grace was seated on this brow…
> To give the world assurance of a man. (55-62)

Hamlet is having problems keeping faith with the image of his father and uses rhetorical flourishes as a self-incitement to emotion.[46] Almost everything he says about his father during the play suffers from the same tendency to tedious and unoriginal floridity. It is as though the concept of Old Hamlet which young Hamlet retains and maintains is derived from the same source as his escapist Pyrrhic fantasies.

Shakespeare has already given his audience the raw materials necessary for a comparison between the two royal portraits. As a counterweight to Hamlet's unbalanced commentary we have seen the high quality of Claudius' statesmanship and the genuineness of his regard for Gertrude. Similarly, as I detailed in chapter one, Old Hamlet's shortcomings were revealed in the carefully edited, autobiographical speech with which he persuaded Hamlet to act as his agent of retribution.

Hamlet now goes on:

> Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear
> Blasting his wholesome brother. (64-5)

This is better, neatly coupling Hamlet's opinion with a scriptural allusion to the Book of Genesis no less[47], and makes Gertrude, like Claudius, an offender against goodness itself, the supreme irony being that the 'ear' was the target organ of the poison. Hamlet's own vituperatively worded bewilderment (65-7) echoes both Saxo and Belleforest, where Amleth compares his mother to a bitch and a mare, mating indiscriminately, even with the slayer of her previous mate.[48] The imagery here, however, is more obscure – if Old Hamlet is a "mountain" and Claudius a "moor" then what is Gertrude? She is something which feeds, that is, derives nourishment from, rather then mates with, since both brothers are metamorphosed into geographical

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[46] Yves Bonnefoy, "Readiness, Ripeness: *Hamlet, Lear*", in *Selected Essays,* introduction and translation by John C. Naughton (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), 33.

[47] "And lo, seven eares, withered thinne, and blasted with the east wind, sprang up after them, and the thin ears devoured the seven good eares." (Genesis 41:23-24) An analogy is surely possible with the fraternal strife which led to Joseph's Egyptian exile and the strife between Claudius and Old Hamlet.

[48] Jenkins, 91-2, note to III.iv.56-7..

features. The suggestion is of something essentially parasitic, something following on from the notion of the food plant, the ear of grain, being mildewed and destroyed by a verminous infestation, a leechlike creature that "battens" on something in order to feed. This taps into an undercurrent of deeply threatening imagery; as Mercer observes, "…here it is the woman whose appetite is insatiable, who feeds upon the man," inciting him to an incredible potency, but at the same time "…to 'hang on' a man with an unsatisfied lust is to disparage and menace that potency." The man thus becomes "…a meal for a parasite; women are creatures that feed on men, devour them,"[49] without, apparently, losing anything themselves, but becoming strengthened by that which they feed off, destroying their prey as they do so.

In contrast, Hamlet introduces the "…tender, almost asexual, concern" his father once showed. Mercer concludes: "…it is extreme enough to suggest that there is something perverse and hysterical in his perception of his mother's sexuality, in such an absolute discrepancy between that nasty image of female desire and the exaggerated purity, even the unreality, of his father's gentleness."[50]

In other words, Hamlet seems to be projecting rather than perceiving. What he describes are fantasies of his own manufacture, rather than facts from real world observation. This leads to an interpretation, certainly on his part, that if this perception is accurate, then Gertrude's former 'love' is analoguous to that displayed by the Player Queen in 'The Mousetrap', something as shallow as that she now feels for Claudius:

> You cannot call it love; for at your age
> The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
> And waits upon the judgement, and what judgement
> Would step from this to this? (68-71)

Note the imperious – "you cannot call it love" – and the premises for this conclusion, which are that Gertrude is too old to be infatuated, and, presumably, could not be exercising even the most basic of judgements to willingly choose Claudius. Hamlet will not consider the possibility that Claudius might be attractive in any way whatsoever – because Hamlet cannot picture him so. To be in a relationship with Claudius is wrong, sinfully wrong. It might be wondered whether, in the eyes of Hamlet or his father, *any* relationship Gertrude indulged in would be acceptable. This raises the provocative question as to what should be the fate of female sexuality: "…when the husband dies,

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[49] Mercer, 150.
[50] Ibid., 150.

who is there to hold its potentially dangerous excess within the bounds of a fully social constraint?"[51]

> Sense sure you have,
> Else could you not have motion: (71-2)

Gertrude can move around, and therefore Gertrude possesses five senses, as was unarguably the case, because, according to Aristotle[52], motion and apprehension are inseparable attributes of the sensitive soul. Thus, Hamlet is claiming, a properly moral, sentient being could not want to be with Claudius. There is, however, an explanation:

> But sure that sense
> Is apoplexed, for madness would not err
> Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd
> But it reserv'd some quantity of choice
> To serve in such a difference. (72-6)[53]

Hamlet is suggesting apoplexy as a diagnosis, an ailment which certainly had a far more devastating effect on the ability to use one's senses accurately than either insanity or the temporary mental disorder brought about by fever. A final possibility is also mentioned: "What devil was't / That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?" (76-7) Marriage to Claudius is equated with sin therefore, the forces of darkness must have bewitched Gertrude – as the ghost previously stated. (I.v.42-5) Having suggested several diagnoses, Hamlet proceeds to describe the symptoms. (78-81)

This is Biblical, reminiscent of St. Paul's rhetorical harangue to the Corinthians, using imagery of a body sadly disabled, but one which still possesses more discrimination than Gertrude.[54] Making his language moral, Hamlet continues, "Rebellious hell / If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones." (82-3)

'Hell' is never far from Hamlet's thoughts throughout this sermon, as he couples Gertrude's and Claudius' relationship with everything dark and diabolic.

> Oh Hamlet, speak no more.
> Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,
> And there I see such black and grained spots
> As will not leave their tinct. (88-91)

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[51] Jacqueline Rose, "*Hamlet* – the 'Mona Lisa' of Literature", in Keesey, 70.

[52] *De Sensu*, Chapter 1, 4366, as cited by Jenkins, 323.

[53] In Q1 Hamlet elaborates on Claudius' physical shortcomings: "Here is youre husband / With a face like *Vulcan* / A looke fit for a murderer and a rape, / A dull dead hanging looke, and a hell-bred eie, / To affright children and amaze the world." (Bertram and Kliman, 166)

[54] St. Paul in II Corinthians, Chapter 12, verses 14-18, warns against inter-church rivalries: "For the bodie also is not one member, but many / And if the eare would say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the bodie, is it therefore not of the bodie? / If the whole bodie were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? / But now hathe God disposed the members everie one of them in the bodie at his own pleasure."

The interpretation of this passage is crucial to understanding the scene. It could be read as indicating that Gertrude, by virtue of the self-righteous ranting of her son, has been made to see her whole life in a different way and that the marriage, which up till now has seemed perfectly legitimate, is now metamorphosed into something which she sees as staining her soul. The possibility also exists that Gertrude, very much in awe of her son, and very much in awe of her first husband has now come to believe, think and feel exactly what Hamlet and the ghost want her to.

Gertrude, seen thus, comes across as a rather pathetic figure, whose conscience, like her body, can be auctioned off to the most eloquent bidder. "Frailty, thy name is woman", indeed. There is, however, another possibility, one which enables a more sympathetic reading of Gertrude to emerge.

Prior to this verbal onslaught (and an onslaught which, for Hamlet, is uncharacteristically well-disciplined in its ability to keep to the point), Hamlet has, quite cold-bloodedly, slaughtered Polonius and then declared the deed to be

> Almost as bad, good mother
> As kill a king and marry with his brother. (27-8)

Hamlet has now brought out the visual evidence of two portraits, enabling Gertrude to look once more on the face of her first husband. This strategy, I believe, acts as a sort of catalyst, inducing the over-wrought Gertrude to beg for silence, silence in which to marshall her overwhelming emotions, silence in which to consider the terrible thing Hamlet has accused Claudius of doing, a crime which her ongoing cohabitation with the accused makes her guilty of by association and acquiescence.

Her language of 'soul' and 'spots' is the traditional expression and acknowledgement of guilt, and, she assumes, it is surely this type of confession which Hamlet has been trying to elicit, and which will gain the silence which this tortured woman craves. As a plea for cessation, her words do not succeed. "A murderer and a villain" (97), Hamlet continues, accusingly, zealously oblivious to any voice but his own. Gertrude does not contradict, nor offer any word in her own defence, perhaps because safety would be a plausible consideration, given the circumstances. However, I believe, doubt about the nature of her first husband's death has begun to do its undermining work.

Suddenly Hamlet breaks off because he and Gertrude are no longer alone. "Alas he's mad." (106) As Ghose notes, this line should be spoken with great relief.[55] If Hamlet is mad, then what he says and does are not his reactions to external circumstances, but rather to the "coinage" of his brain.

> Save me and hover o'er me with your wings,
> You heavenly guards! What would your gracious
> Figure? (104-5)

Hamlet is plainly terrified. He has reason to be, partly because he is attacking his mother with more venom than the ghost's mandate allowed, thus calling into question the morality of his own speech, and partly because he feels truly that he has been 'tardy' in carrying out the main commission. He does not, however, seek to justify his tardiness with the claim that he was awaiting a more perfect vengeance.[56]

In Q1, the ghost enters in his nightgown. One could speculate that, since the ghost is in his wife's private apartments, his garments are appropriate. However, it is difficult not to see the comic aspect of such a stage direction, a surreal enough comic aspect, but inescapably present. The ghost, for all his nightgown, speaks more gently, and in a more regally restrained and dignified manner than we have hitherto heard him. The speech he needs to use now is, of course, designed for a different purpose from that of the battlements. There, he had to create something out of Hamlet's vague uneasiness, marshalling misgivings about Claudius into a lethal weapon. Here, however, aside from a reminder that Hamlet's purpose is "blunted", the ghost seems mainly concerned with Gertrude's welfare. (112-115) If the ghost has one redeeming feature, it is his concern for Gertrude. Granted, it is a patronizing, egotistical concern – he cannot see her as anything but pathologically 'weak' and a prey to emotions she cannot control, but his concern seems genuine.

> How is it with you lady? (116)

It is difficult to see how such a line could "step between" Gertrude and her "fighting soul" and so bring relief. On the other hand, it seems strange that the ghost does not manifest himself to her eyes. That would be logical; it would convince her that Hamlet was not mad, that Claudius was a murderer and that Old Hamlet still loved her.

He does not do this. We do not know what constraints he operates under. Formerly he was able to appear, though silently, to Marcellus and company, not once,

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[55] Ghose, 52.
[56] Bradley, 107.

but many times. However, his situation may have changed; some mysterious power may have lessened in potency.

There is always the possibility that he could not bear to do so, that he could not bear to face the woman, who, for all his faults, he loves. Stenner lists "Jealousy, anger, dejection, shame"[57] as the lot of the sexually betrayed, whether in reality or in imagination, and Old Hamlet, as his earlier speeches showed, was clearly still in the powerful grip of these emotions.

He does not appear to Gertrude for whatever reason, and she, now convinced of Hamlet's madness, answers:

> Alas, how is it with you,
> That you do bend your eye on vacancy,
> And with th'incorporal air do hold discourse?
> Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep, (117-119)[58]

Hamlet is bewildered. He cannot accept that or understand why this visitation is solely for him:

> Look you how pale he glares.
> His form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to stones,
> Would make them capable. (125-7)[59]

Hamlet is deeply moved. Love for his father (a love which for all the chronic verbosity of its expression, is, I believe, genuine) has quite overwhelmed him now that the ghost has shed its warlike aspect and appeared in gentler, more accessible guise.

There is now no more subterranean surrealism – the ghost obeys the laws of spatiality and leaves by the door, rather than remaining as a disembodied voice from under the stage, as in act one.

> This is the very coinage of your brain.
> This bodiless creation ecstasy
> Is very cunning in. (139-41)[60]

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[57] For more on the emotional problems associated with adultery, see Paul Stenner, "Rights and Emotions, or: The Importance of Having the Right Emotions", in *History and Philosophy of Psychology*, (2004) Vol. 6(2) (The British Psychological Society), 11-21.

[58] These 'spirits' would be the 'animal spirits', which, it was believed, circulated in the blood and, in this case, relayed images from eye to brain. It was also believed that this was a two-way process, and that the spirits could be emitted like a beam from the eye, a phenomenon Gertrude believes she is observing (Bamborough, 108).

[59] Jenkins, note to III.127.iv. In St. Luke 19, verse 40 we find: "But he answered, and said unto them, I tell you, that if these shoulde holde their peace, the stones would crye." And St. Matthew 3, verse 9: "And thinke not to say with your selves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." The Biblical connotations of 'stones' and 'preach' are unmistakable. Sims notes: "Hamlet's brief allusion suggests his belief in the holiness of his cause as well as the hypocritical position of Gertrude; she is like the Pharisees, who can see no cause for concern. Further, if Hamlet is not stirred, he will be worse than a stone."

[60] In Q1 we read: "Alas, it is the weakenesse of thy braine, / Which makes thy tongue to blazon thy heart's griefe: / But as I have soule, I sweare by heaven, / I never knew of the most horride murder: / But Hamlet, this is onely fantasie, / And for my love forget these idle fits." (Bertram and Kliman, 172)

Gertrude still tries to put her world back to rights (even though to do so, she must include a dysfunctional, insane son within it), but Hamlet insists on denying her any such comfort (146-8) ,using words such as 'Grace' and 'trespass', and going on to use 'confess' and 'repent', again making Gertrude's marriage a mortal sin, and eliciting the desired response:

> O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain. (148)

This separation has surely been achieved by Hamlet's firstly accusing Claudius of murder and then of committing one himself in her sight. Hamlet, predictably, sees her reaction as evidence of the success of his sermon, and immediately redoubles the attack, an attack couched in the terms of a traditional anti-female orthodoxy, at the same time "...dismissing his own sin with a perfunctory gesture of regret – "For this same lord/ I do repent" – and laying to his soul the flattering unction that "heaven hath pleased it so".[61]

Hamlet now goes on to claim for himself the dual roles of "scourge and minister".[62] By thus labelling himself, Hamlet seems to be assuming a Pyrrhus-like grandeur, translating himself to an existence beyond the scope of the Great Chain of Being – simply because he has at last delivered a mortal, if misdirected, wound. Rather than repent, he seems to eagerly embrace the new identity, even glory in it. At last he has taken action, drastic action, has convinced himself that it can be done, and seems, momentarily, to believe that he has changed into one of his heroic literary avengers. He has used the speech of morality - as he sees it - in order to achieve this dubious metamorphosis.

This new identity could be traceable to his killing of Polonius. Hitherto, Hamlet has concerned himself with the heroes of the classics. Now, however, he has actually put someone to death, though not in any way heroically. Polonius was an elderly unarmed man, and, ironically, the wrong elderly unarmed man. Pyrrhus in killing Priam at least had the correct victim, repugnant as the deed was. Hamlet has no such justification. Polonius was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Hamlet has,

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[61] Mercer, 205.

[62] Bowers notes that God was seen to operate on human affairs in two ways – either internally, by causing the sinner to experience severe conscience pangs, or externally, by sickness or accident, occasionally by using a human agent, "...and it was standard belief that for this purpose God chose for his instruments those who were already so steeped in crime as to be past salvation" (Bowers (1987), 42). Jenkins notes that heaven thus "...may use sin to chastise sin...Hence the paradox of being (as here) both punisher and punished" (523). He disagrees, however, with Bowers, and does not believe this role went exclusively to those already doomed by their own guilt.

however, found a way out which enables him to categorize the killing as something heroic and righteous, to maintain, for a little longer, the illusion of a world where goodness is on the side of Hamlet, the Ghost and Horatio, and evil of virtually everyone else. Gertrude is poised between the two, and, Hamlet believes, can be pulled back to safety. Hamlet has taken those pieces of scripture, with accompanying glosses, church traditions and so on, which appeal to his heightened sense of the dramatic and the grandiose, and, since he cannot really insert either himself or present circumstances into the classic mould, has instead chosen the Biblical.[63] It then follows that even if Denmark is rotten and Hamlet is doomed, in one glorious act of divinely sanctioned bloodshed, he will save the land. Polonius is dead, murdered, an accident more pathetic than tragic, yet an inescapable, unchangeable fact. Hamlet is nothing if not flexible, endlessly inventive. He can, in a few words, transform himself and his environment into something he considers worthy.[64]

> I must be cruel only to be kind. (180)

'Kind' could be taken in the sense of viciously verbally abusing Gertrude in order to save her soul, as he would have her and himself and us believe, but there is also the sense of 'kind' as 'kindred'. Hamlet is acting as both concerned son and his father's surrogate. He is on a mission which his father's ghost entrusted to him, saying, "If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not." (I.v.81) To "bear" it would signal that he was no true son to either parent. So, Hamlet is now a warrior evangel, a crusading saint, saving some souls and damning others – but, uppermost of supreme ironies, he himself is an outcast, risking damnation as he pursues his quest. He quite out-Pyrrhuses Pyrrhus in his luridly dramatic version of Elsinore's moral interlude.

> Hamlet: One word more, good lady.
> Gertrude: What shall I do? (182-3)

Gertrude is, however one interprets the scene, a sorry figure, who is given no speech with which to justify or explain her actions, and who, even more than Ophelia, seems

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[63] For example, in St. Paul's letter to the Romans (13, v3), we read: "For princes are not to be feared for good works, but for evil. Wilt thou then be without feare of the power? Do wel: so shalt thou have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God for thy wealth: but if thou do evil, Feare: for he beareth not the swords for nought: for he is the minister of God to take vengeance on them that doeth evil." St. Paul's reference is to the legally appointed rulers, Hamlet, however, seems ready to overturn this authority, although the message of St. Paul does not include any clause whereby one could legitimately seek to overthrow the rulers due to coming to the conclusion they were unrighteous (not even if one had seen a ghost).

[64] In Belleforest, Hamlet, after the successful killing of Fengon, makes an oration to the people: "To you also it belongeth by dewty and reason commonly to defend and protect Hamlet, the minister and executioner of just vengeance" (Bullough, 116).

merely a pawn, a piece of worldly goods along with 'crown' and 'kingdom' for which the more self-aware and responsible male characters contend. Hamlet has won this battle, of that there can be little doubt, and Gertrude pliantly awaits the instructions which will provide her with a new identity, her third in the play so far. Although Hamlet's answer is perfectly reasonable, his manner of wording it certainly is not. He wants her to protect his secret, but portrays her as the willing partner of a loathsome, semi-human lecher.[65]

Puzzlingly, Hamlet does not tell Gertrude anything about the ghost, although there is no injunction forbidding this. He has already told Horatio, so the most logical (and, given the circumstances, most serviceable) form of words would be one in which he explained how the murder was committed and how he found out. Perhaps he feels that this information would be overwhelming to such an obviously weak character, causing her to betray him inadvertently. There is also the possibility that he does not trust the sincerity of her conversion, arrogant as he is about his eloquence. What he does is to urge her to keep silent about the fact that he is:

> ...not in madness,
> But mad in craft. (189-90)

Again Hamlet does not attempt to enlighten Gertrude about this phrase. All she knows, so far, is that her marriage to Claudius has sickened her only child, and that Hamlet obviously has some other project in hand, a project about which he has revealed as much as he is going to, by his terse, if telling, hints of Claudius' crime.

Gertrude has been won over to Hamlet's side, but is less an informed ally, like Horatio, than a menial not trusted with any part to play except that of total obedience to any strategy Hamlet may devise. He does not seek her advice, as well he might in the business of how best to apprehend Claudius alone and unarmed. In fact, his only orders with regard to the King are to have her abstain from his bed – a good way to bring Gertrude under as much suspicion as Hamlet. The speech of morality must not, it seems, be attenuated by having to correlate to any common-sense considerations. Thus the illogical and, in terms of the plot, unproductive antic disposition is to be preserved at all costs, even though it is difficult to believe that Hamlet thinks his antic disposition is actually fooling Claudius – particularly after 'The Mousetrap'.

> Be thou assur'd if words be made of breath,

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[65] In Q1 Hamlet is more specific: "Forbeare the adulterous bed tonight, / And win yourselfe by little as you may, / In time it may be you will lothe him quite: / And mother, but assist mee in revenge, / And in his death your infamy shall die." (Bertram and Kliman, 174).

> And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
> What thou hast said to me. (199-201)[66]

Gertrude lacks the rhetoric which would enable her to comprehend, let alone express, the cataclysmic upheaval which has suddenly taken place in her life. She therefore relies on the traditional rhetoric of repentant sinner for her utterances. However, despite the major destabilization of her world, there is still one role which she can still fulfil, and that is the role of Hamlet's mother. She thus wholeheartedly pledges herself to assist him in any way she can, demonstrating a love as unconditional as it is unquestioning.

Hamlet knows he is being sent to England, and that his former friends will accompany him. He gloats a little – as usual – over deeds yet undone, and then verbally demonstrates how sincere his repentance for Polonius' death was. (214-16) All of which gloating was clearly not a part of his antic disposition, since Gertrude knows his secret, and it must therefore represent his true feelings about the deceased.[67]

Bowers considers this scene as the climax of the entire play. "The climax is that scene in a play in which an action occurs which tips the scales for or against the fate of the protagonist in terms of the future action."[68] This choice can be defended on the grounds that two important considerations must be present in a tragedy's climax. The first is that a climax must initiate a sequence leading to catastrophe; second, the climax must contain a specifically *moral* choice which justifies the ensuing catastrophe. The closet scene, then, with its killing of Polonius, sets in motion a chain of events which turns Laertes into an avenger. This does indeed seem to fulfil the first of the two considerations, but the second seems less certain. Hamlet stabbed Polonius through the arras, not knowing who he was, hoping that he might be Claudius. This event, which cannot be defended on any moral grounds, occurred in the midst of speeches which were intended to be the very epitome of moral admonition and instruction. Elsinore would seem a world devoid of clear moral definitions. Eloquence in expressing one's idiosyncratic ethics seems to be the norm, and, as Hamlet already noted, "One may

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[66] Q1 makes her oath more religious: "I vow by that majesty, / That knows our thoughts, and lookes into our hearts, / I will conceale, consent, and doe my best, / What strategem soe're thou shalt devise." (Ibid., 176)

[67] Levao comments that Hamlet is "...reverting to the cruel gloating and amoral hilarity of the vice as he anticipates new mischief" (Levao, 354). This, which will be dealt with in chapter five, points to one of the most intriguing of speech experiments within the play, that of Hamlet the hero, being also Hamlet the vice figure, and of having this anarchic potentiality as an ever-present resource, apt to erupt as an emergent property of Shakespeare's anatomising strategy throughout. Gertrude, however, due to her lack of participatory eloquence, remains in a submissive role.

[68] Bowers (1987), 46.

smile and smile and be a villain." Rather than a process which leads to a product, we have a process unfolding and almost making its own dynamic rule system as it goes.

The aftermath of this climactic scene shows us Claudius – fearful, yet vigilant, having totally returned to type after his experimental invocations, and now, stimulated by danger, planning his next move, about to take advice from "wisest friends", in order to prevent the finger of suspicion pointing at himself. Ironically, this is exactly what does happen, as Laertes, on hearing of his father's death, accuses the king, thus providing us with a telling commentary on Claudius' public persona, despite his best effort to amend it, Hamlet rather than the King, is "lov'd of the distracted multitude." (IV.iii.4)

Gertrude provides us with one poignant insight into her own mental state, consequent upon the closet scene, when she hears of Ophelia's mental collapse, and unwillingly agrees to meet with her:

> To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
> Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.
> So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
> It spills itself in fearing to be spilt. (IV.v.17-20)

The Queen's torment is manifold. Her love for Hamlet is probably the most powerful influence upon her, but at the moment, it seems to be a love whose only expression is subordination. Speech has again enabled Hamlet to construct a new heroic self-image for himself, and to affect the complete destabilisation of the hapless Gertrude. Speech has not, however, proved as successful when Claudius attempts to manoeuvre his way out of a dilemma.

We have now seen Hamlet utilize his rhetorical gifts in one of the most intellectually disciplined and successful enterprises in the play. In the next chapter I will examine this eloquence being used to conduct a complex experiment, an experiment which is presented in such a way as to make it seem more like Hamlet's than Shakespeare's, as though, anarchically, Hamlet is usurping a role of his own choosing. I refer, of course, to the antic disposition, which resembles the behaviour of the traditional vice figures, who, as Happé says, "...are comic, quarrelsome, and outrageous. They affront dignity and respectability, and by their disreputable behaviour threaten order and virtue."[69]

But what "order and virtue" is there in Elsinore for Hamlet to threaten?

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[69] Peter Happé, ed., *Four Morality Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1979), 17.

Claudius, as we have seen, is incapable of expressing and applying the vocabulary of compassion. Morality for him is a sterile system of rules which, once broken, are unamenable to the verbal repairs he tries to carry out. Hamlet similarly has an abstract notion of morality, which he creatively adapts, bending Gertrude to his will then constructing for himself a new self-image as a Christian avenger. His moral utterances, however, are as flexible as occasion demands. Rather than believing in a rule system, as the immoral Claudius does, Hamlet amorally constructs one to suit the requirements of the moment.

In the next chapter we will see Hamlet in the role of the traditional vice figure, one far removed from his classical posturings, as the rhetoric of a wholly different kind of drama sheds light on truth and reason.

Chapter 5

'Nonsense' and 'Non-Sense' – disrupting and interrogating order through speech.

> It is significant that the court of Claudius will permit no official jester. When the lie wears ermine, the truth cannot go even in motley.[1]
>
> How near tragedy and comedy lie to each other is a perception that Shakespeare has often employed and his keen awareness of the two-facedness of experience led him, as he worked the vein of satire, to develop the Fool from buffoon to tragic hero.[2]
>
> Hamlet is, in any case, the odd man out at the court of Denmark.[3]

Having looked at ways in which speech manipulates concepts of morality, and thus drives particular modes of behaviour, and having seen how difficult it is to apply a moral standard independently of speech, I now want to turn to another area in which a similar, experimental mis-match can be said to occur, and this is the whole business of what happens when speech is used either deliberately to mislead, or does so because the speaker is incapable of making sense.

This chapter is concerned with two related but dissimilar concepts, 'nonsense' and 'non-sense'. 'Nonsense' will be the term used to refer to utterance which simply lacks a coherent train of reasoning behind it, although it can be quite grammatically correct. Ophelia's mad scenes are full of exactly this type of speech. 'Non-sense', on the other hand, refers to any utterance whereby the speaker is deliberately subverting the accepted social norms and expectations by manipulating speech. Hamlet's "antic disposition" provides numerous examples of just such a self-conscious word game. Shakespeare is thus demonstrating the dual potentialities inherent in the metatheatrical mode which we have seen being investigated so far.

Ophelia, then, speaks incoherently but, as an unknown gentleman remarks, there is a danger that her audience will supply their own coherence:

> Her speech is nothing,
> Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
> The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
> And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts. (IV.v.7-10)

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[1] Calderwood, 201.
[2] Rees, 229.
[3] R.A. Foakes, *Hamlet Versus Lear : Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 170.

In general terms, the whole interactive 'game' of speaker and hearer is thus thrown into doubt. As Ghose observes, one feature which distinguishes mad people from sane ones is that the former have little or no hold over language. Rational speech is based on a model of communication whereby speaker and listener share a consensus of discourse.

> Words tell us not only what a thing is but also what is behind it, how it is to be interpreted. Also, language is our tool of epistemological enquiry...We live in a chaos of sentences, kept sane by grammar's illusion of order.[4]

Ophelia's madness participates in the rules governing this universe of discourse, yet, as I shall attempt to show, is an original product, the emergent property of a certain individual's failure to sustain an ultimately unviable world-view. I will suggest that her over-dependence on her father, coupled with her romantic and unsustainable perception of Hamlet are major forces for undermining her confidence and her relationship to reality. This reality she apparently rejects, with tragic consequences.

We can thus see how Shakespeare is setting up an experimental situation in order to examine how representation of self and reality are verbally constructed and maintained. Ophelia is, sadly, shown to be incapable of doing this with sufficient creativity and flexibility to protect her from the major alterations in her environment. Her mad speech, I will argue, epitomises 'nonsense'.

Hamlet's 'non-sense' is of quite a different order. His calculated, anti-social speeches have more in common with the literary figures of vice and folly[5]. In terms of the manifest plot line, Hamlet's behaviour is counter-productive, serving to draw suspicion rather than shield him from it. In terms of the sub-text, however, his verbal experimentation parallels Shakespeare's own desire to push speech beyond rationality – and yet to sustain the illusion of its presence.

I will begin this chapter by briefly looking at the concept of literary madness generally and Ophelia's particularly. I will then go on to examine the notion of the Renaissance 'solitary man' in relation to Hamlet's antic disposition, and discuss its rationale in terms of the play.[6] This role, I will argue, is a descendant of the vice figure, albeit one adapted to Shakespeare's experimental design, particularly in the word games and punning strategies Hamlet adopts.

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[4] Ghose, 29.

[5] See Happé for an interesting discussion of the later mediaeval manifestations of these figures (Happé, 11-20).

[6] In the period 1570-1700 'solitariness' denoted someone who deliberately chose to keep his own company to the detriment of his moral duty to contribute to society, but by the end of this period the term came to describe a respectable alternative, the preferred lifestyle of artists and intellectuals (Dillon, 59).

Finally I will concentrate on several textual examples, of both Ophelia's and Hamlet's 'nonsense' and 'non-sense', considering the issue of who exactly is in control of their speech and who is being controlled by speech.

As Belsey notes, the modern concept of madness involves a severance between mind and body. In sixteenth-century thought, however, "...the blend of humors defines disposition"[7] and in so doing, effects an interaction between mind, body and universe. The theory of the humours permeated every aspect of existence. Just as the natural world was composed of the four basic elements, earth, air, fire and water, so food eaten became the transformed by-products of these four elements.[8] This led to a situation whereby the permeation continued both socially and conceptually, so that, as Colie says, "Implied in this view of correspondence is that human speculation, even about external nature, must be to some extent self-referential."[9]

Madness, like most other afflictions, could be described and prescribed for, according to the humoral theory, but there were other definitions, particularly for those whose interest lay more in the artistic or intellectual domains than those of cure or treatment. Ideas from Greek tragedy and of possession in a Christian sense, were, Salkeld claims, fused in philosophical and poetic writings until a hybridised language was created, but one which was applied without any clear theoretical "guiding template".[10] Madness, therefore, was not a single concept but a single term for different shades or types of madness. Shakespeare, as Weimann notes, successfully "...reconciled the native antic tradition with the classical theme of madness," and he did so, as in the case of Ophelia, by "...treating it as an assumed or pathological dimension of character."[11] This 'dimension' was, however, not a separate or separable one, since Ophelia, as Dover Wilson says, could never draw the same line between herself and her madness as Hamlet repeatedly does between himself and his.[12]

As outlined in chapter two, Hamlet remains throughout the subject of both utterance and enunciation, but not so Ophelia, whose 'nonsense' speeches place her beyond either category. One problem with any consideration of Ophelia is, as

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[7] Belsey (1985), 46.
[8] For more on this subject see M.M. Badawi, *The Background to Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 46-69; also Bamborough. An interesting, if idiosyncratic account is in John W. Draper, *The Humors and Shakespeare's Characters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1945). See also Salkeld, 62-5.
[9] Colie, 222.
[10] Salkeld, 23.
[11] Weimann (1978), 129.
[12] John Dover Wilson, 222.

Showalter notes, our familiarity with representations of her in art and criticism, which seem to exist independently of theories about the play itself or about Hamlet, depending instead "...on attitudes towards women and madness."[13] If, however, her utterances within the play are concentrated on to the exclusion of preconception, then they can, I think, be seen as part of Shakespeare's on-going experiment with the rhetoric of drama in relation to truth and reason.

In the earlier 'sane' mode, we can observe something of a mismatch between the supposed character of Ophelia, that of the innocent, sheltered girl, and the "rhetorical finesse" with which she expresses herself.[14] It is an "...artificial style that calls as much attention to itself as to what is being said."[15]

This could, plausibly, be the result of having Polonius as a father (Laertes' wider sphere of influence may have spared him). The relationship of Polonius to speech generally as examined in chapter two is an interesting one. Polonius seems constantly torn between the urge to express his ideas in a complex, convoluted form, and being aware of the pretentiousness and impracticality of the enterprise. He cannot indulge himself in the indisciplined flights of Hamlet, since he is a mere politician and not a prince, and so he resorts to the compromise of self-deprecating asides. He uses this technique in criticizing the speech of others too, and, as Ghose says, Shakespeare's aim at these moments is "...to focus attention upon the way in which language is used."[16]

Ophelia, a much younger and less confident character, does not have the resources to play this kind of verbal game with herself and her audience. Her speeches are characterized by the use of much second-hand material, sane as well as mad. The impression given by listening to her brief soliloquies is that they do not convey either an "...adequate voice of selfhood" or "...the real depth of her distress".[17] However, they do represent responses to the reality of Elsinore, unlike her mad utterances, which, I will argue, are more in the form of a collage of second-hand material, rendered original and therefore significant in terms of Shakespeare's experimental design, by virtue of this juxtaposition.

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[13] Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism" in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* eds. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (London: Methuen, 1985), 92.
[14] Malcolm Evans, *Signifying Nothing: Truth's True Contents in Shakespeare's Text* (Herts: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1986), 126.
[15] Newell, 96.
[16] Ghose, 26.
[17] Newell, 96.

Ophelia's sanity has elements of her eventual mental collapse. Her sanity could, in fact, be seen as only one point along a continuum, rather than a separate, pre-morbid state which she will decisively leave behind. Two pieces of evidence in support of this position are provided: first her description of Hamlet's visit to her closet, and, secondly, the contents of the love poem which she attributes to his hand.

The visit, as Ghose observes, is highly implausible, since Hamlet's antic disposition is confined to a verbal plane and "...there is little else in the play to suggest Hamlet attempts to advertise his madness in any other way."[18] If this is so, then Ophelia's obviously sincerely expressed description represents "...a foreshadowing of Ophelia's own real madness."[19] Polonius, of course, eagerly seizes on the recital, because it provides support for his ambitious hypothesis regarding Hamlet's love-sickness. The scene thus stands as an example of the tendency to hear without really hearing, to manipulate incoming material in order to make it cohere with prior beliefs, ignoring anything which spoils the picture.

Ophelia's 'nonsense', then, because clearly and fluently expressed, is taken up as a factual recital, even though dishevelment of dress is a well-known characteristic of literary "love-madness"[20] – a genre with which Ophelia's later mad speeches reveal familiarity.[21]

Accompanying her story is a letter, which, she claims, Hamlet has written. Jenkins observes that it "...rather parodies than represents a typical Elizabethan love-address."[22] He also wonders when she received it, since she has already repelled Hamlet's communications as Polonius ordered. "We are", says Jenkins, "at liberty to infer that it preceded her father's prohibition."[23] I would suggest that we are equally at liberty to infer that Hamlet did not write it at all, and that, like the luridly described visit, it originated with Ophelia herself and represents yet another instance of her lack of a genuine voice with which to express herself. Ophelia attempts to customize the rhetoric of an established genre as though her own reality could somehow be made to correlate with those of the romance heroines whose role she envisages fulfilling. This is comparable to Hamlet's own striving to become, at least verbally, the embodiment of

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[18] Ghose, 24.
[19] Ibid., 25.
[20] Jenkins, 461.
[21] Shakespeare has previously also used it, for example see Rosalind's advice to Orlando on the dress of the lovelorn (*As You Like It*, III.ii.350ff), and Speed's teasing of Valentine (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, II.i.65-8.
[22] Jenkins, 462.
[23] Ibid., 463.

either a classical or Biblical avenging hero, yet, as we shall see, in Ophelia's case this constructed 'self' is too unstable a product to withstand the major upheavals which occur in her immediate environment. This lack of authenticity can, however, be viewed as part of Shakespeare's preoccupation with speech investigation, an investigation which, like anything which anatomizes or decontextualizes speech, stands in danger of destroying "...the values maintained through the opposition of good and evil, truth and falsehood, order and disorder."[24] We can observe Ophelia acting as a vehicle in both 'nonsense' and her earlier 'pre-nonsense' speeches for this process of anatomization, a passive vehicle, anatomized rather than actively participating, as Hamlet does. Shakespeare thus can be seen to provide the strategies for dismantling but without imposing any version of closure or resolution.

Ophelia's fate could however be potentially liberating, since merely being able to speak enables one to participate in the contest for meaning "...which issues in the production of new subject-positions, new determinations of what it is possible to be."[25] In other words, meaning, like speech, is mutable and rather than allowing oneself passively to be consigned to the category 'mad', 'harmless' and 'ignored', one could potentially negotiate a transcendence of these barriers and establish a novel and authentic position for oneself.

It is, however, difficult to see Ophelia as such an explorer. Granted she does, in the course of the play, move beyond the confines of 'daughter', 'sister' and 'lover' or 'love-object', but the 'beyond' she eventually occupies, while representing a certain liberation from these, does not seem a fully fleshed-out alternative.

Turning to the 'non-sense' of Hamlet's deliberately assumed antic disposition, we might wonder how different it is from his previous state. I think we can discount Ophelia's description of him as the "rose of the fair state" (III.i.152-5), as yet another example of the unoriginality of her romanticizing.[26] Similarly, Hamlet's own speech (II.ii.295-310), in which he bemoans his condition, seems an attempt to place a vivid, gregarious past in contrast to a melancholy present, rather than an attempt to be autobiographically accurate.

The man we encounter in the first act both in dress and demeanour could be summed up by the word 'solitary'. He is physically and verbally present, yet remains in

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[24] Hodges, 71.
[25] Belsey (1985), 6.
[26] See Jenkins, 105 and 284, notes to III.i.154-5 for possible sources.

isolation. There was, in fact, a recognized category for such a stance, that of the 'solitary man', which Dillon sees as a possible contributory factor to the character of Hamlet. This notion of 'solitariness' had apparent connotations of the vice figure in Medieval drama, who like the immanent figure of Christ, stood apart from, though integrated within, the overall world of the play. Shakespeare could be seen to experiment with exactly this concept, first in the very vice-like Richard III, who not only refuses to confine himself within the limits of the play but dissembles rather than communes with the other characters and keeps the expression of his true self to soliloquies and asides. These have the effect of creating a relationship with the audience for which 'sympathetic' might be an inaccurate description, but which certainly involves some degree of familiarity.

Hamlet appears to treat the world of Elsinore as a play rather than an opaque reality structure. Nowhere is a sense of detachment more clearly in evidence than during Hamlet's episodic antic disposition.[27]

The reason for this can be seen to reside in the character of Hamlet himself, as Dover Wilson and Eliot have argued, as it provides him with a necessary form of emotional relief.[28] It could also be argued that the explanation is to be found partly in Hamlet, but more so in *Hamlet*. Maquerlot inclines to this view, referring to the antic disposition as pursuing "...a life of its own,"[29] almost irrelevant to the plot but designed to replace the whole revenge focus by re-centring the play around Hamlet himself.

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[27] According to the OED 'Antic' could mean: "Absurd from fantastic incongruity; grotesque, bizarre, uncouthly ludicrous." 1529 is the earliest cited use of the word as "A grotesque or ludicrous gesture, posture or trick; also figuratively of behaviour" and comes from Foxe (Supplic (1871) Introd. 9): "In soothe it maketh me to laugh, to see ye merry Antiques of M. More." The term was used in the mid- to late- sixteenth century for any architectural feature which was: "Grotesque, in composition or shape: grouped or figured with fantastic incongruity; bizarre", such as, for example, the gargoyles which spouted water from church towers. In several plays other than *Hamlet*, Shakespeare used the word in the now obsolete sense of "A grotesque pageant or theatrical representation". In *Love's Labours Lost* we find: "Some delightful ostentation, or show, or pageant, or anticke, or fireworke" (V.i.119) and "We will have, if this fadge not, an Antique" (V.i.154) In *Richard II* we see a reference to death: "There the Antique sits scoffing his state, and grinning at his pompe" (III.ii.162) reminiscent of Yorick. 'Grotesque' thus seems a common thread, a word evocative of that which combines the amusing with the amazing, the humorous with the horrific. 'Disposition' is a much older word, Chaucer being the earliest cited user example. It could refer to astrological influences, such as a planet's position in a horoscope and its subsequent influence on a person's nature or destiny (OED, obs.). It could also carry the modern meaning of being inclined to do something or an inclination (desire, intention, or purpose); state of mind or feeling in respect to a thing or person; the condition of being (favourably or unfavourably) disposed *towards* (OED). Only one example of Shakespearean usage is cited, from *As You Like It*: IV.i.113 "But come, now I will be your Rosalind in a more coming-on disposition."

[28] Dover Wilson, 92. Also T.S. Eliot, "Essays of Generalisation. 1918 – 1930. Hamlet." in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot,* ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 49.

[29] Jean-Pierre Maquerlot, *Shakespeare and the Mannerist Tradition : A Reading of Five Problem Plays* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 102.

Farnham, however, sees it as part of a search for knowledge, an exploration of folly as a means to enlightenment.[30] This, I agree, seems to make intuitive sense, but I wonder what exactly 'enlightenment' means in this context – does it equate with some notion of ultimate truth? This latter would undoubtedly represent Mercer's eloquently expressed view, which sees it as "...a device of art," which, while hiding truth, is also "...a true kind of art that, through the protection of mask and metaphor, expresses in obscure and riddling words a version of the truth."[31]

I would incline to the view that truth is not really the issue, and that Shakespeare deliberately subverts and undermines any attempt on either cast or audience's part to find it. The antic disposition is both metaphor and exemplar of this strategy, and Hamlet has no rival. Because there are no jesters at Claudius' court, Hamlet seems to have taken this role upon himself prior to assuming the antic disposition, since the "inky cloak" and "suits of solemn black" could represent "...the colour of his spirit, the sign of his role as melancholic bitter jester."[32]

Costume, in fact, as connected to the fool or vice figure, was originally part of a "...sympathetic magical function" and later became symbolic, a means of characterizing rather than invoking or appeasing. Therefore, "...even in Shakespearean drama it is not always quite clear just how representational disguise is, how much of an illusion of actuality it is supposed to invoke."[33] With 'disguise' one could include various forms of recognised convention, either of dress or speech or mannerisms, and compare Hamlet's antic disposition with the behaviour associated with fool or vice figures who "...are by constitution observers, detaching themselves, as far as they are able, from the situations on which they comment."[34]

Obviously, in order to comment, it would be necessary to maintain an observational distance from what is being commented on. However, in Hamlet's case, the antic disposition could also be seen as providing a welcome alternative to being "...drawn into the action of the play, committed to sharing the emotions and the events"[35] which instead he has the freedom to describe and disparage. He thus chooses a linguistic mode which provides distance.

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[30] Farnham, 152.
[31] Mercer, 180.
[32] Ibid., 142.
[33] Weimann (1978), 47.
[34] Rees, 222.
[35] Ibid.

Shakespeare, then, in allowing Hamlet this latitude, has placed him in the position of being not only the most sophisticated character in the play but also one who paradoxically remains closest to the early ritual heritage of the fool/vice figure, a figure of such dramatic utility that he can both "...enchant and disenchant" using "...parody, criticism or cynicism"[36] to debunk, at the same time generating what amounts to almost an extra dimension, inverting everyday norms and thus questioning the entire value system which they represent.

Hamlet and Ophelia between them, in 'nonsense' and 'non-sense' modes, appear to cover most of this ground, operating from contradictory yet complementary positions which are outside of the main play, yet deeply embedded within it. This results in the effect of having the world of Elsinore being periodically evaluated from a novel perspective, one which exists outside the thematic and moral assumptions of the main play.

It would be a mistake to view the antic disposition episodes as merely some form of comic relief. Their purpose, as was the purpose of the traditional fool or vice contributions, was to transcend, momentarily, the perspective of the play world and act as a bridge between it and the world of the audience – albeit in a mockingly subversive manner.[37]

The eventual fate of such an anarchic figure is disintegration. Anarchy and subversion, like all forms of parody, cannot exist without a host, because they are essentially parasitic, for all their ferocious energy. A host, similarly, cannot exist unless it triumphs over such figures, in the process destroying them utterly, or accommodating to allow of their – subordinated – existence within itself. Paradoxically, the very antic behaviour which defines the anarchist is also self-limiting.

Hillman sees this necessary development as being disappointing for the audience, who may experience a sense of loss at losing the "...ongoing revelatory potential" of the antic, and his or her ability "...to keep elusive truths sceptically in view."[38] This sense of disillusionment on the audience's part is scarcely compensated for by some awareness that harmony has been restored, and that the energy thus spent has performed its task successfully in the playworld.

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[36] Weimann (1978), 11.
[37] E.g., the gravediggers in act five or the drunken porter in *Macbeth*.
[38] Richard Hillman, *Shakespearean Subversions : The Trickster and the Play-Text.* (London: Routledge, 1992), 47.

The strategy of celebrating anarchy's lack of resolution is mimicked microcosmically by Hamlet's antic disposition, and works by adopting a number of sleight of hand, or rather of tongue, tricks.

One of these is repetition, which Hamlet uses more often than any other Shakespearean character.[39] A rationale for this, in the light of my argument so far, could be that it contains an awareness that speech is somehow inadequate or insufficient for the purpose of communication, hence the same words, reiterated, without forward movement. Granting this, the same problem would apply to soliloquies, wherein the speaker has to provide their own point of reference, and it would also apply to the use of mirror metaphors such as 'reflection' for introspection which "...record our recognition that epistemology is a mirror-process with all the limitations, as well as the limitlessness, that such a process implies."[40]

One way to avoid this, as I mentioned in chapter four, was to use a character, such as the player King, to speak prematurely for a Hamlet who will not be capable of such mature insights until act five. This method, an externalised voice, will be passively accepted but not verbally acknowledged at the time of its reception by Hamlet himself, since its effects are subliminally insidious and could be seen as a component part of an ongoing maturational process.

A more active way of benefiting from externalised voices occurs during the antic disposition, where Hamlet provokes other cast members to act as both reflectors of and reactors to his thoughts. The strategy here, as I will demonstrate during my ensuing textual analysis, is flawed. The same problems Hamlet encountered, especially in the 'To be' soliloquy, where he attempted to order his musings towards the composition of "some dozen to sixteen lines", will recur throughout the antic disposition. Lack of discipline is an obvious shortcoming, as speech is seen to seduce the user, undermining Hamlet's best efforts to control it, until Hamlet actually succeeds in endangering and undermining his own enterprises.

Returning, then, to the use of 'sleight of tongue' as I termed it, one obvious and very effective device of Hamlet's is humour. *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* says that humour serves: "...as a way of preserving order, changing group esteem and cohesion, expressing allegiances and revealing attitudes with relative impunity, testing the standing of a relationship, maintaining or undermining a status hierarchy ...

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[39] Charney, 119.
[40] Colie, 218.

(defusing) threats by others by engendering a debilitating discomfort … making light, or (pretending) to make light, of…misfortunes and predicaments."[41]

Shakespeare, as part of an attempt to investigate the disruptive power of speech, is mining this motherlode of potentiality, exploring the humour inherent in situations of genuine and deliberately orchestrated misunderstanding. Puns, for example, are one of Hamlet's favourite word-games, and these not only "…increase semantic richness" but also drive "…a wedge between words and their ordinary meanings."[42] For 'ordinary' I think 'usual' could be inferred. In other words, puns are not so much creating senses as taking existing ones and problematizing them, forcing the listener to attend to meanings which he or she can understand, but which are unexpected, because the tacitly assumed conversational conventions are inadequate to contain them. Thus, puns not only "…block any straightforward movement of meaning by turning language into a playground of mimicry and revolution"[43] but can also have a greater, almost therapeutic, value for the one who employs them. In situations which seem beyond or outside control, a form of order can, paradoxically, be maintained by using puns. Disorder is thus internalised, interacted with and becomes a game to be enjoyed actively rather than endured in a state of passive bewilderment. It could be argued that Hamlet is in need of some such stabilising strategy on a personal level. It could also be argued that *Hamlet* is using techniques formerly under the provenance of the vice figure in order to investigate speech.

Weimann notes that Hamlet transcends the frame of dramatic discourse, which affects not only the speech of his fellow cast members, but also their relationship to the audience: "…with the help of popular proverb and aside he momentarily dissociates himself from the illusion of the world of the court and revives a late ritual capacity for reckless sport and social criticism."[44] This in turn gestures backwards towards a more communal type of theatre, where direct speech, audience aside, cast, storyline and everyday life are overtly and entertainingly blended. Although linked to the vice and fool figures, the imagery with which Hamlet adorns his speech, be it punning or otherwise subverting expectations, is unique and creative.

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[41] A.J. Chapman and N.P. Sheehy, "Humour", in *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, ed. R.L Gregory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 321.
[42] Ferguson, 293.
[43] Gorfain, 307.
[44] Weimann (1978), 150.

Hamlet has even been described as "...a visionary, a seer, for whom the living things of the world about him embody and symbolize thought."[45] I would go further, not restricting this ability to merely the animal world, but seeing Hamlet as extracting – or implanting – meaning into inanimate objects also. It has also been noted that Hamlet proceeds in the opposite way to what one might expect from a maker of simile and metaphor. Rather than turning abstracts into particulars, he "...refers the generalization to the events and objects of the reality underlying the thought."[46]

Not only, then, does Hamlet subvert expectations, but he subverts at the earlier stage of constructing the very metaphors and similes, subverting often without the need for a bewildered listener, whose attempts to respond are the fuel for further anarchic games. In fact, Hamlet's speech in the antic episodes "...is so compacted by ironies, ambiguities and figurations as to become an impenetrable barrier to communication",[47] thereby using what appears to be a barrier to communication as a method of creatively breaking those rules which constrain both speech and thought. Bearing this in mind, and also acknowledging Hamlet's links with the vice and fool figures, I now wish to suggest that Shakespeare is going far beyond anything envisaged by their authors, players and audiences, because, in those dramas, a solid Judaeo-Christian edifice was assumed – an indissoluble background against which the action on the stage took place. In *Hamlet*, however, although Christian values and iconography are used as a common frame of reference, they seem no more integral to the plot than the references to the classics, philosophy or folklore with which it is plentifully sprinkled.[48] It is as though Christianity and its attributes are being portrayed, but in a questing and questioning mode. Possibly an 'evolving psychomachia' would describe the play's genre – an original venture, one which places speech, and the thought which precedes it, in an experimental scenario. The experiment, however, like the drama, as the final chapter will demonstrate, ceases rather than comes to any conclusion, an experiment begun as Hamlet in act one, scene five announces the antic disposition as something more in the nature of a possibility than a definite course of action. It is as though he is reacting to his father's revelatory reappearance by dealing with the simplest and most obvious problem first: that of preventing Horatio and the others from testifying to what they have seen – or might yet see. (This is a characteristic of Hamlet's, as I have tried to

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[45] Clemen (1986), 64.
[46] Ibid, 65.
[47] Calderwood, 128.
[48] Foakes, 155.

show in chapter one, where he attempted, by a formula of words, to bind himself, present and future, to the mission of becoming his father's avenger.) To convince his companions of the need for silence, he playacts – aping the words and mannerisms of a projected gossip at a future time, as though he cannot, even at a moment of such solemnity, refrain from the theatricality which is second nature to him. To be Hamlet is not enough. He must play invented roles, making them up as he goes along. Parallel to this, as also examined in chapter one, the drama itself suddenly slips into antic disposition, as Hamlet, Horatio, the soldiers and the voice from under the stage join together in a surreal slapstick orchestration.[49]

The first example of the antic disposition in action occurs when Polonius, thinking to prove himself right, and impress the royal couple, decides to assay Hamlet's feelings for Ophelia, feelings which, he conjectures, will result in a highly favourable marriage. In response, Hamlet's antically dispositional "fishmonger" interlude demonstrates many of the characteristics he will subsequently repeat, with variations.

Initially he calls Polonius by an erroneous title, one which apparently is open to various bawdy interpretational strategies.[50] Polonius does not, or does not choose to, pick up on any of these. Any agreement the two men arrive at is merely verbal, superficial "...for they have two opposed understandings of reality."[51] It is true, up to a point, that Polonius' understanding involves a good exploitable possibility that Hamlet might be infatuated with Ophelia. Polonius expresses this in a series of commentator-like asides. This could be seen as a flaw, a failure on the author's part to adequately 'show' what he was forced to 'tell'.[52] Presumably, according to this understanding, Polonius should have revealed himself inadvertently – or Shakespeare should have been able to create an illusion of Polonius doing so, but, given the fact that he is Hamlet's social inferior, it seems implausible that genuine verbal sparring could take place. The exchange does, however, highlight the technique of having the kinds of misunderstanding which will later occur during Ophelia's ambiguous utterances in her mad scenes. Polonius never says that he doesn't understand and never requests clarification on any point. Instead he interprets as he would like to the case to be. He

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[49] In both Q2 and Folio versions, Hamlet's mention of putting on the antic disposition appears in brackets. Q2, in fact, brackets all of the material he uses to describe the ways in which the others might betray knowledge of his ruse, and concludes awkwardly thus: "Or such ambiguous giving out, to note / That you knowe ought of me, this do sweare / So grace and mercy at your most neede helpe you." (Bertram and Kliman, 66)

[50] Jenkins, 464, note to II.ii.174.

[51] Margolies, 65.

[52] Ibid., 52.

sees an augmented copy of his own juvenile ardour in Hamlet's supposed confusion (186-90). Heartened by the apparent confirmation of his hopeful suspicions, Polonius continues the investigation. His question is general: "What do you read my lord?" (191) He seems to be attempting to draw Hamlet out in conversation, thereby acquiring more material, however diverse, for interpretation. He therefore avoids anything resembling a leading question and tries merely to sustain the interaction.

Previously Polonius himself (II.i.1-66) gave Reynaldo some advice on how to "By indirections find directions out."(66) Here he is attempting it for himself.

Hamlet's reply, "Words, words, words" (191) is such a literal one that Polonius dexterously shifts his position, accepting 'words' as the next step in the duet and asks "What is the matter, my lord?" (193) Again there is a brilliant shift from material to verbal and back again.

"Between who?" (194) Hamlet rejoins. Ferguson refers to this as "...perverse, ungrammatical and fascinating." She goes on to say that this points "...to the problem that has always plagued classical theories of metaphor, which is that a word or phrase may not *have* a single 'literal' sense."[53]

The 'sense' both single and literal, however, is found in the context. The context is based on a conversational pact being voluntarily entered into and maintained. Compliance cannot successfully be coerced, since, aside from a person's verbal and behavioural responses, how can his or her understanding be gauged? Hamlet has broken out of normal consensual constraints, and therefore, according to Polonius' reasoning, he must be in a state of love madness.

Even when Hamlet becomes positively insulting, Polonius is content – even laudatory:

> How pregnant
> Sometimes his replies are – a happiness that often
> Madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not
> So prosperously be delivered of. (208-10)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive and Hamlet greets them with all the warmth of one genuinely pleased at the occurrence. His responses have been seen as too smooth and eloquent for spontaneity, his adjustments from stateliness to banter showing "...how little he could have been involved in any depth of emotion."[54]

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[53] Ferguson, 294.
[54] Mercer, 184.

I think it is more likely that at some point in the conversation Hamlet realizes that not only have they been sent for, but also that they come as willing accomplices of Claudius. In the opening of the exchange all three seem to be participating in a carefree piece of badinage, but from the moment Hamlet realizes the truth, he becomes isolated. His remarks do not diminish in wit, but become the remarks of one who is alone, who is performing for an audience made up as much from the denizens of Elsinore as of playgoers. The only exception to this isolation – apart from the ever-faithful Horatio – will come at the end, when Hamlet meets the gravediggers, a scene I will examine in chapter six. Hamlet's speech, "I will tell you why" (292-310), could be seen as a verbalization of his perceived present position. Although much of the material is unoriginal, "Shakespeare achieves a magnificent result by combining elements, which, taken separately, are almost clichés."[55]

The small exchange between Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Polonius prior to the Players' arrival would seem to be a kind of halfway point between Hamlet in suspicious and self-preserving mode and Hamlet in fully-fledged antic disposition. He does not elaborate, merely throwing out a few cryptic witticisms. His meteorological metaphor about madness (374-5), for example, is an economical piece of informational dissemination. He uses the moment to introduce the self-diagnosis of madness and does so by making it look as though Claudius and Gertrude have already suggested it. In this they are 'deceived', since his madness is attenuated by being directional, by being, in other words, less than all-embracing. (375) This again suggests the dual nature of the traditional fool or vice figure, whose truths are expressed as riddling paradoxes. Built into Hamlet's esoteric 'hawk' and 'handsaw' remark is a threat to Claudius. The threat is operative because, although Hamlet is apparently claiming he can tell one thing from another, the two things he has chosen – a saw and a trained falcon – are both dangerous tools, lethal in the right hands – such as Claudius'. It is also worth noting that the speech was preceded by a handshaking ceremony with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he now, neatly, by his moving outside this zone of tactile affinity, numbers among the opposition.

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[55] Jenkins, 468, LN to II.ii.298-303. Possibly Shakespeare's audience would have found the Biblical passages in Hebrews 2.6-7 and Psalms 8.4-5 a familiar source. Bright uses a similar list in his *Treatise of Melancholy*. See Timothie Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie*, reproduced from the 1586 edition printed by Thomas Vautrollier, with an introduction by Hardin Craig, published for the Facsimile Text Society (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 70

Polonius' entry provides a moment of light relief allowing Hamlet to join, perhaps for the last time, in a little light-hearted banter with his former friends. He moves from the theme of old men as infants to that of fathers – particularly those who, like the Judge of Israel, are prepared to sacrifice their children if necessary. Both the ballad[56] and the story in Judges Chapter XI underline the recklessness of hasty and ill-considered vows. Polonius apparently does not see any self-applicable criticism, but happily notes in an aside: "Still on my daughter." (405)[57]

The arrival of the players curtails this episode, and in act three, scene one we witness the 'debriefing' of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The term 'lunacy' is mentioned by Claudius as a descriptor for that which Hamlet has lately "put on", and it is difficult to see Guildenstern's reference to a "crafty madness" as anything other than a willingness to follow where Claudius leads. This, it must be noted, is in contrast to Polonius' belief that Hamlet's problems are the reactions of a disappointed lover. It would, in respect of the antic disposition's supposed role as a defensive strategy, make sense for Hamlet to allow Polonius' theory to gain currency. That Hamlet does not do so argues for both his unawareness that the encounter with Ophelia has been overheard, and Shakespeare's need to allow certain facets of the antic disposition free rein in order to fulfil his experimental design. We know that Hamlet has been paying attention to Ophelia since his return from Wittenberg. Polonius has apparently been told this (I.ii.91-5). We do not, apart from Ophelia's own, and I believe unreliable, testimony, have any clue as to the nature of these attentions.

Turning now to the first encounter which Shakespeare portrays between the two supposed sweethearts, Hamlet concludes the 'To be' soliloquy, and speaks, at first, to Ophelia in perfectly civil terms,

> Nymph, in thy orisons
> Be all my sins remember'd. (88-9)[58]

Dover Wilson finds this both structurally pretentious and ironic, indicative that the 'sins' were mutual.[59] (Further evidence for this notion is provided by Ophelia's mad speeches, which will be looked at later.) There is also apparent a shift in the tone of Hamlet's attitude which occurs at line 95. According to Claudius, Hamlet has been

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[56] Quoted by Jenkins in full, 475, LN to II.ii.399.
[57] No one has apparently seen the parallel between Jephtha and Old Hamlet.
[58] In Q1 this meeting occurs in act two, directly following from Polonius suggesting that an arranged meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia be spied upon. It also carries a resonance forward which we will encounter in Claudius' Prayer Scene.
[59] John Dover Wilson, 128.

"closely sent for" (29) so that he may "Affront Ophelia" (31), apparently accidentally. As a strategy this seems somewhat clumsy for Claudius, but, it must be remembered, he has, as yet, no reason to doubt Polonius' diagnosis of love-sickness.[60] Hamlet, however, has suspicion enough already, and, going towards a meeting with Claudius, he comes upon Ophelia, who immediately starts pressing him to accept the return of his gifts.

Hamlet could scarcely be expected to avoid connecting the sender of the summons with the presence of Ophelia, and this, I think, is enough to convince him of her involvement in the schemes of the enemy. There is, in fact, another aspect which I believe is relevant, and that is the unreliability of Ophelia's supposedly sane speeches as previously mentioned. This over-fertile imagination of hers has, I suggest, produced the 'remembrances' which she now seeks to give back. Hamlet's "I never gave you aught" (96) now makes more sense than as a mere misogynistic repudiation, and looks rather like the kind of reaction appropriate to someone who feels trapped, and quite possibly suspects he is being spied on. It is possible that Hamlet did, at some point, behave towards Ophelia as she now suggests, but it is definitely the case that throughout this scene he very effectively administers a negative dose of antic disposition to his former lover.

He begins by questioning her honesty as he already has that of her father (II.ii.176). Polonius, Hamlet is sure, works for and with Claudius, and it now seems inescapably the case that his daughter does likewise. The term 'honest' however, has an extra dimension when applied to a women, since besides integrity it covers the whole area of chastity. Ophelia's presence, after Claudius' summons, and her desire to return the gifts, actually or imputedly given by Hamlet, argues involvement in a plot. Her honesty as integrity is therefore open to question, and the universal, tacit assumption seems to be that if a woman's integrity is doubtful, then so must be her chastity. It is this particular aspect which Hamlet targets for his attack.

It is difficult not to read into this impassioned bitterness something of a gesture towards previous intimacy, and I believe much of Ophelia's later mad speeches will bear out this suggestion. Here, however, Hamlet uses the occasion to express a revulsion which includes both himself and Ophelia in its scope. If she is representative of deceptive and seductive femininity, then he represents deceptive and amoral

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[60] In Q1 the more plausible expedient of noting when Hamlet's usual walking time in the gallery occurs and having Ophelia waiting there is adopted (Bertram and Kliman, 86).

masculinity. The exchange at 114-120 which includes, "I did love you once/I loved you not," seems a direct reference to the relationship they once had, based on what he now denigrates as lies on his part, designed to ensnare and betray.

Ophelia's reaction to this is to assume that he is mad. She knows nothing of any antic disposition, and so tries to make sense of what she is seeing and hearing. In her speech (152-63) unoriginality and resort to hyperbole resemble Hamlet's worst Pyrrhic excesses. It is a foreshadowing of her eventual fate that even here, in the depths of unhappiness, Ophelia's voice is merely the medium by which second-hand material is recounted. Hamlet, it should be noted, swiftly exits the scene, apparently without obeying the summons from Claudius, as though he knows full well that this summons, like the accidental meeting with Ophelia, was part of a plot. Claudius is not deceived. The antic disposition may have convinced Ophelia, but neither king nor counsellor sees it as a plausible enactment of insanity. Claudius initiates the actions necessary to exile Hamlet, Polonius proposes using Gertrude as the next data-gathering decoy.

In act three, scene two, Hamlet, after instructing Horatio to watch Claudius during 'The Mousetrap', declares, "I must be idle." (90) When Hamlet refers to his antic disposition in this way, by distancing himself from the role he is going to play, I think we can infer that he believes he is in control of the situation, a method Shakespeare uses as a kind of subversive strategy, in this case, of subverting Hamlet's own perception of the situation and his ability to master it.

Hamlet's stated intent is to create the means whereby Claudius will, inadvertently, betray his guilt, and yet the ensuing banter would, logically speaking, have a totally counter-productive effect, since it touches upon the succession and Hamlet's disappointed position with regard to it.

Weimann sees the illogicality of Hamlet's wordplay in the context of the plot, as illustrative of Shakespeare's deliberate manipulation of audience expectations, and notes the "...flexibility in the levels from which Hamlet speaks," which reflect "...the multiplicity of social and theatrical perspectives"[61] from which he is given the freedom to operate. Claudius' civil enquiry, "How fares our cousin Hamlet?" (92), is met with

> Excellent, i' faith of the chameleon's dish. I eat the
> air, promise-crammed. You cannot feed capons so. (93-4)

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[61] Weimann (1978), 132.

This could be seen as "...an ominously sane and perhaps lethal would-be-King"[62] speaking. It unnecessarily baits Claudius by hinting at matters of legitimacy and the election, but does allow for an almost juvenile game of punning to develop with 'fare' and 'air', which might leave "...the Globe audience dumbfounded with too much and too little meaning."[63]

Claudius' enquiry, civil enough and regarding Hamlet's health, becomes transformed into 'fare', as in dining, and is then neatly coupled with the 'air' chameleons are fabled to eat. The sounds of 'air' and 'heir' are, of course, identical, so Claudius, not surprisingly, disassociates himself from the entire game: "I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet. These words are not mine." (95)

This seems an intelligent course of action. Claudius does not want to provoke some overt declaration of insurgency from Hamlet. Rather, he observes and plots quietly. Hamlet, however, uses the disassociation to further play with words: "No, nor mine now" (96), a tactic which could be taken as an example of Hamlet's "...revealing that he can distance himself from the...antic mode as easily as from the self-contained illusion of the scene."[64]

In a way two kinds of game-playing clash in this episode, Claudius' deadly earnest political manoeuvrings in the world of Elsinore and Hamlet's deliberate manoeuvrings with the language and hence the illusion of reality.

I turn now to 'The Mousetrap' itself, where Hamlet's antic running commentary appears totally counterproductive to the business of unmasking Claudius. His envenomed baiting of Ophelia also seems superfluous and gratuitously vicious, although it must be borne in mind, in terms of the plot line, that he now sees her as Claudius' tool, since Claudius' summons caused their 'accidental' meeting in the nunnery scene. In terms of Shakespeare's experimental design, however, Hamlet is allowed to flit verbally between the world of Elsinore, with his references to "how cheerfully my mother looks," and his undermining of the spatio-temporal reality of that world: "and my father died within's two hours." (125)

As the action of the play proceeds and Claudius becomes uneasy (227, 231), Hamlet cannot resist the urge to frolic with words and his insatiable desire to play the

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[62] Calderwood, 82.
[63] Evans, 127.
[64] Weimann (1978), 132.

vice figure's role, to prod and goad verbally, becomes farcical as, rather than furtively observing Claudius, he virtually crows:

> You shall see anon how the murderer
> Gets the love of Gonzago's wife (257-8)

Paradoxically, this piece of subversion has the exact opposite of the desired effect. Claudius rises and flees, but Claudius could quite logically be doing so because Hamlet's attitude, words and choice of play are legitimately readable as threats against the throne – even if its occupant had been totally innocent of the murder. It is almost as though Shakespeare is here magnificently undermining the very plot Hamlet has so meticulously set up, and is doing so in the character of Hamlet himself – arch-trickster and tragic hero.

The scheme was plausible. Hamlet, as I suggested in chapter two, had mused in the 'To be' soliloquy on the material for his dozen to sixteen lines of inserted speech – a speech, I believe, designed as a conscience-stricken monologue for the successful poisoner, Lucianus. Yet Hamlet, by a predisposition for hinting, alluding, threatening and finally explicitly declaring where he stands, has given Claudius not only ample warning of the danger that he is in but also a perfectly valid reason for proceeding against him. The "talk of the poisoning" (283) which Hamlet triumphantly suggests to Horatio as the catalyst which caused Claudius' "occulted guilt" to 'unkennel' was actually Hamlet's own talk of poisoning, and Claudius' ensuing 'choler' is an understandable reaction to a speech which played with recent events in such a way as to make Hamlet seem like a mutineer in the making. Claudius is not unreasonable in requiring both explanation and apology, or, if these are withheld, in using Hamlet's antic disposition as the ideal excuse for his exile. Hamlet has, in fact, outmanoeuvred himself. It is difficult not to feel, at this point, that the splendid momentum of Hamlet's antics is working against rather than with his plot.

Rosencrantz and Guildernstern, sent to summon Hamlet to the meeting with Gertrude (a meeting already arranged prior to the play, at III.i.183-7), use 'choler' on Claudius' part as the reason Gertrude "in most great affliction of Spirit, hath sent me to you" (302-3). Hamlet counters, antically, claiming that the 'wholesome' answer required of him is impossible: "My wit's diseased." (313)

It is difficult, in this scene, to separate Rosencrantz' and Guildenstern's reactions from their social status. They could, as Hamlet believes, be willing participants in Claudius's schemes; on the other hand, they are bound to address a

prince with deference at all times, including those times when he chooses to misinterpret and wilfully mishandle them. It is difficult not to feel a certain sympathy for Rosencrantz when he declares: "My lord, you once did love me." (326)

The duo, like Ophelia and even Gertrude, seem caught up in matters they do not fully comprehend, rather than knowingly seeking to further the schemes of a villain.[65] Hamlet, of course, is totally convinced of their worthlessness and is using the recorder to demonstrate this, when the arrival of Polonius inspires him to another bout of gaming. He reserves most of his punning antics for the old counsellor, possibly because, like Shakespeare, Hamlet relishes the subversion of sophistry (which Polonius manages in a socially acceptable way), and because, in terms of the plot, he knows he can rely on Polonius to report everything to Claudius in detail and with augmentation.

It has been noted that no audience can ever see the 'cloud'[66] (366) for itself or know whether it does appear camel, weasel or whale-like. In fact it is the arbitrariness of words, rather than the cloud's resemblance, that is at stake here, and that, even in an increasingly dangerous situation, Hamlet "...cannot avoid testing correspondences between words and the reality they represent."[67] This seems like "...intellectual irresponsibility" based on conceiving some point seriously, then probing "...till it appears untenable or wearisome: and so, with a final bitter touch, he tosses it away or mockingly overstates it."[68] In other words, he plays the vice/fool role, even though he is nominally cast in that of the hero.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do, it seems, have some legitimate grounds for obeying Claudius. Their former friend, Hamlet, has now cold-bloodedly slain a defenceless old man, and when, in act four, scene two, they accost Hamlet, they do so without knowing anything of the ghost, the guilt of Claudius, or the antic disposition (aside from being the victims of it). It is difficult to see what other course of action is open to them. Their request, that Hamlet should tell them where Polonius' body is and accompany them to the King, seems, under the circumstances as they understand them, perfectly reasonable. Hamlet, however, instantly subverts every utterance, with hints both Biblical and proverbial. His likening them to sponges, soaking up favour to be

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[65] In III.iv.205-7, in leaving Gertrude's closet, Hamlet mentions trusting these two as "adders fang'd" and says: "They bear the mandate, they must sweep my way / And marshal me to knavery." With Jenkins (331) it might be wondered how Hamlet knew any of this, but it can plausibly be taken as yet another example of his suspicious building upon the known facts that they are to accompany him to England.
[66] Jacobus, 85.
[67] Ghose, 46.
[68] Chaudhuri, 138.

eventually squeezed out and discarded (14-20), is provocatively rude. Rosencrantz' "I understand you not, my lord," is a statement more diplomatic than factual. Hamlet has so manipulated the situation that no one can really speak as they truly feel. He has, in effect, forced the two to play roles in his antic interlude, subserviently to indulge his royal caprices, as he did with virtually everyone except Horatio and the ghost.

> A knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear. (22)[69]

Hamlet's Biblical allusions would seem an extra verbalization of the righteous position he sees himself in with regard to the rest of the cast, and when pressed to say where Polonius' body is hidden he replies:

> Hamlet: The body is with the King, but the King is not with
> The body. The King is a thing –
> Guildenstern: A thing my lord?
> Hamlet: Of nothing. Bring me to him. (26-9)

If Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had been anything other than perfectly civil, or if Shakespeare had given us any reason to believe they were other than two obsequiously sycophantic nonentities, then we might wholeheartedly enjoy Hamlet's heckling of them. Shakespeare does not do so, and thus it seems more like bullying than banter.

It does require effort to distance oneself from Hamlet's seductive humour, even here, as we automatically warm to someone whose considerable wit, we feel, is being expended in order to amuse us. As noted previously, the power of the humorist compels more than mere laughter; it places us on his side, emotionally and intellectually.

Barker highlights the notion of self, particularly the self of royalty which the talk of 'Kings' and 'bodies' suggests. The ruler's physical body is that which constitutes self-hood for his subjects: "...with a clarity now hard to recapture, the social plenum is the body of the King, and membership of this anatomy is the deep structural form of all being in the secular realm."[70] This, then, as opposed to the modern notion of self-definition by interiorised self-recognition.

Scene three has Hamlet directly sparring with Claudius. Sparring might not be the correct term, since it carries implications of mutuality, and Hamlet spars one-sidedly. Claudius refuses to take part; all his responses are firmly rooted in the rational language scheme of Elsinore. Hamlet refuses to disclose Polonius' whereabouts until

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[69] In Ecclesiastes we read: "Who so telleth a fool of wisdome, is as a man, which / Speaketh to one that is aslepe: when he hathe tolde his tale, he saith, what is the matter?" Ecclesiastes, 22.10.
[70] Barker, 31.

Claudius personally questions him, and then answers deviously and in a way which demonstrates his abandonment of the social limits of language: "At supper." (17)[71] Polonius apparently *is* the supper, and Hamlet embellishes with aphoristic gusto. Claudius', "Alas, alas" (26) seems an aptly plausible expression of regret at Hamlet's sick state, since the audience is not taking place in private. Finally, Hamlet capitulates, combining insult and information in one statement:

> In heaven. Send thither to see. If your messenger
> Find him not there, seek him i' th'other place your-
> self. (33-35)

When the attendants have been ordered to seek the body, Hamlet observes, "A will stay till you come." (39)

As Davison notes:

> As we laugh we might well check our response; we are laughing at murder, and as such become, as it were, Hamlet's accomplice. We don't think out these possibilities as we hear these few lines in performance.[72]

What Hamlet says is indeed funny and clever, but on the other hand it is grotesque, since it makes light of the slaughter of a man who, like Priam, was old, and who, unlike Priam, was mistaken for someone else. Hamlet cannot boast in a Pyrrhus-like manner about the deed, but instead, vice-like, gloats, jests and, crucially, seduces us to laugh with him. This said, the effect of Hamlet's 'grave' humour is attenuated by context because scene three is sandwiched between two of Claudius' communications. The first, an apparent summing up of a policy discussion he has just been having with his "wisest friends", concludes that, due to his popularity, Hamlet has to be dealt with covertly (1-11). The second, a private soliloquy, informs us that Hamlet is going to death rather than exile. This neatly relieves us of any doubts about Claudius' morality:

> For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
> And thou must cure me, till I know 'tis done,
> Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun. (69-71)

As I pointed out in chapter four, Claudius has no conception of any 'joy' which is not earthly and material. He has tried, and failed, to solve the problem of his fate in the next life by prayer. He now turns, ruthlessly and efficiently to solving the problem of

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[71] In the Book of Revelation (ch 19 v 9) we read: "Then he said unto me, write, Blessed are they / Which are called unto the lambes supper." This is glossed as: "Whom God of Fre mercie calleth to be partakers of / His heavenlie graces, and delivereth from ye filthie / Pollucions of Antichrist." The implication could be that Polonius is delivered from ever being used as a tool by Claudius again.

[72] Peter Davison, *Hamlet* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 34.

Hamlet in this one. Again, it is impossible to locate a source of uncontaminated virtue in this play, a benchmark from which to judge the events and characters of Elsinore.

Gertrude certainly seems to avoid rather than judge, as she refuses even to speak with Ophelia at the beginning of scene five. It is not clear, at this point, whether Gertrude is aware of Ophelia's state, beyond knowing that the girl is distressed and that her own son has been the major cause of it. The unknown gentleman, however, continues:

> She is importunate,
> Indeed distract. Her mood will needs be pitied. (2-3)

Gertrude is now moved to ask, "What would she have?" (4) Ophelia's state is then described, using what seems a very sophisticated piece of analysis, which takes into account not only the tendency listeners have to read sense into nonsense, but also, in this instance, the very real danger that

> She may strew
> Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds. (14-15)

Gertrude yields, then speaks a sad little soliloquy:

> To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
> Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.
> So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
> It spills itself in fearing to be split. (17-20)

Possibly, at this point in the play, the strange half-world of the mad seems an easier option than her own tormented sanity. She seems to be in a state of guilty paranoia, seeing threatening portents in every occurrence.

Ophelia enters, enquiring after the 'beauteous' Queen, as though aware of where she is and whom she expects to encounter there. She answers Gertrude's enquiries (22, 27) with requests to "pray you mark." (28, 34) She is not, therefore, totally oblivious of the world of Elsinore, and sings a dirge-like refrain which ends,

> At his head a grass-green turf,
> At his heels a stone. (31-2)

Jenkins cites a traditional burial custom, which refers to a turf placed on the chest and a stone on the feet, [73] but this seems unlikely to be Ophelia's meaning, since she mentions head rather than chest, and heels rather than feet. The image seems more the inversion of normal burial with the headstone in the wrong position, and could possibly indicate her awareness of her father's "hugger mugger" rites. Jenkins also notes that when Claudius arrives, he assumes, like those present, that Ophelia is alluding to Polonius

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[73] Jenkins, 349.

when she speaks and sings of graves and burials, "...and is blind to Ophelia's frustrated love for Hamlet."[74] This seems difficult to believe, since Claudius was present during the nunnery scene and, additionally, heard Polonius' instructions to her as to how she should receive Hamlet. It is far more likely that the wily Claudius is carefully omitting any mention of Hamlet's romantic involvement in the situation. It must be borne in mind that by this time Claudius already knows that a vengeful Laertes has returned from France. (88)

There also exists the possibility that Ophelia has some notion, some suspicion, about Claudius' involvement in the sequence of recent events (as I noted in chapter three, she is the first to comment on the King's departure from 'The Mousetrap'). It is clear, however, that such notions, if present, are beyond her present capabilities to express.

Her mad speeches could be characterised as "...a failure of language to be rational."[75] That which separates the mad from the sane is the fact that the former have no control over speech, but have failed in, or transcended the convention of communication based on "...a tacit assumption between the sender and the receiver of a message that they both speak 'the same language'."[76]

What, it might be asked, can speech like Ophelia's be communicating to her listeners? It is a collage, a collection of material from sources both lay and scriptural, akin in its scope to that which Hamlet uses. Unlike Hamlet, however, Ophelia merely utters everything in an apparently spontaneous and unexamined way. Individual items can be recognized , such as

> Lord, we know what we are, but know
> Not what we may be. God be at your table. (43-4)

The first part of this speech is reminiscent of Saint John Chapter 3, Verse 2.

> Dearly beloved, now are we sonnes of God, but yet it doeth not appeare what we shalbe: and we know that when he shal appeare, we shal be like him: for we shal see him as he is.[77]

In chapter one I noted that both Hamlet and the Ghost freely utilize Christian sayings, but do not appear to heed the underlying spirit. In this passage Ophelia seems to be doing much the same, yet her heedlessness arises from inability rather than indifference. Where Hamlet seems to devour a multitude of materials, which he then

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[74] Ibid., 350.
[75] Ghose, 29.
[76] Ibid.
[77] See Jenkins, 350 note to I.43-4.

expels, re-framed as idiosyncratic expressions, Ophelia merely allows the words, songs and images to leave her mouth, strewing them as her flowers will be strewn later on. Her utterances are mainly on the themes of death and betrayal, and can be seen as part of an extended metaphorical strategy whereby she chooses – rather than creates – a vocabulary of expression for her situation.

Her Valentine's Day song (48-66) could be read as a vehicle to express her real relationship with Hamlet, although Ophelia has often been seen as purity embodied. Coleridge, for example, relegates the 'bawdy' content of her speeches to

> ...the guileless floating on the surface of her pure imagination of the cautions so lately expressed, and the fears not too delicately avowed by her father and brother concerning the danger to which her honour may be exposed.[78]

In other words, Ophelia has somehow internalised the warnings of act one and combined them with various popular ballads. Hillman, in agreement with Coleridge, notes that her very choice of expression shows that she "...had internalised the licentiousness"[79] Hamlet imputed to her in the nunnery scene. Foakes similarly and succinctly observes: "If Hamlet perceives in his mother passion without virtue, in Ophelia he encounters virtue without passion."[80]

All of this seems to ignore the obvious explanation that Hamlet and Ophelia were lovers and that the extreme revulsion he vented during the nunnery scene sprang from his finding that someone he had been physically intimate with was now apparently acting as Claudius' tool. For her part, Ophelia seems to have idealized both Hamlet and the relationship, and her own unstable and impressionable imagination seems quite capable of constructing an ethereal castle and situating herself in the position of its princess bride.

She leaves, and is placed in the care of Horatio, who, as Granville Barker notes, never once upon Hamlet's return mentions Ophelia's madness to him.[81]

Ophelia's second 'mad-scene' is witnessed by her brother, who originally warned her against Hamlet by using an "...inversion of the usual *carpe diem* theme, twisted to support the argument for economical chastity."[82] Laertes is obviously his father's son, yet Ophelia is as obviously her father's daughter, except that in her case

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[78] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets*, ed. T. Ashe, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1885), 365.
[79] Hillman (1992), 180.
[80] Foakes, 159.
[81] Granville Barker, 322.
[82] Colie, 226.

we have the 'matter' minus the 'art'. She has inherited the ability to memorize and repeat, but fails to personalize, so that her speech, sane or insane, has always been characterized by its second-hand quality. Originality, in her case, is confined to mere juxtaposition.

> Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine
> It sends some precious instance of itself
> After the thing it loves. (161-3)

Laertes is here talking about Ophelia's feelings for Polonius, but the lines apply to her feelings for Hamlet just as accurately. It might, however, be queried as to what exactly the type of 'love' someone of Ophelia's constitution might be capable of. Idealization seems to play a great part in it, since she seems to have had little real knowledge of Hamlet, and would have needed to be capable of a great deal of overesteem to render the domestic tyrant, Polonius, lovable.

It has been suggested that "...many of the parallels in her mad talk work by opposites; indeed the agony of it ...is that we see her approaching recognition of the truth and then wincing far away again."[83]

I would agree that her parallels – like Hamlet's puns – work by opposites, but I would not attribute this to recognition of the truth. Ophelia may well have been told that her father made a good end, but we have no reason to believe that anyone, other than Hamlet, Gertrude, Claudius and his "wisest friends", ever knew the facts of the situation. Secondly, the concept of 'truth' in this particular play is so elusive and ambiguous that it seems impossible to accuse Ophelia of approaching and then retreating in the absence of a clearly defined truth.

On the theme of Ophelia's flowers, Jenkins provides much horticultural miscellany, but warns against misconstruction, since "...the meanings of the flowers are more suggested than defined."[84] Violets, for example, occur prior to the mad scene when Laertes refers to Hamlet's love as "A violet in the youth of primy nature" (I.iii.7) and again during Ophelia's funeral when he prays,

> ...from her fair and unpolluted flesh
> May violets spring." (V.i.233-4)

In this scene, however, Ophelia says,

> I would give you
> Some violets, but they withered all when my father
> Died. (181-3)

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[83] William Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 107.
[84] Jenkins, 536-542.

Apparently they symbolize faithfulness, so we could read into Ophelia's cryptic remark something about her attitude towards that virtue, now that her world seems bereft of both father and lover. It is, however, difficult to read much of significance, unless we attribute detailed floral-lore to most of Shakespeare's audience, which was unlikely to be the case. Ophelia herself seems to have had an interest in the genre of romance and its associations, so she may be displaying some of her specialized knowledge at this point.

The song she next sings is altogether more allusive, referring as it does to "Bonny Sweet Robin". Robin Hood was a familiar figure in the early folk dramas, and, as I mentioned in chapter three, Shakespeare's use of "Herod", "Termagant" and "the hobby horse" may all have been references to the older theatre's preoccupation with allegory, personification and the major themes of good, evil, truth and universal reality. This is emphasised, I think, as Ophelia prays

> God a mercy on his soul.
> And of all Christian souls. God buy you. (196-7)[85]

Finally, Ophelia's death, as recounted by Gertrude, is akin to a commentary made by someone who has watched a play, and then, if asked, can repeat those aspects of it which had personal resonance.

The question to ask is – what does Shakespeare mean by giving such a beautiful version of an ugly incident? One possible answer is that Gertrude speaks in envy, envy at the way in which the problems of Ophelia's life have been so completely solved. A second point which I think can be legitimately derived from the story is that Ophelia was innocent. She may have acted as Claudius' tool and, as seems likely, became Hamlet's lover, but there is not any shred of evidence that she did so with any malicious or self-seeking intention. Claudius wanted to use her to investigate Hamlet, Polonius wanted to use her to satisfy his ambitions, but in each case she was an instrument in their schemes, unaware and uninformed of their darker purposes.

> To muddy death. (182)

In the final line of her aesthetically appealing oration, Gertrude allows a minor key to sound. 'Muddy' is not lovely, it is disgusting, implying not only water, but also the

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[85] Milward notes that although prayer for departed souls was officially "...rejected by the Protestants on account of its implications of the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory" we are still operating within the ambiguous theological climate of Elsinore, where the ghost's origins remain as puzzlingly unspecified as Hamlet's own eventual fate (Milward (1973), 27).

muck of the lower levels filling the poor girl's lungs. Her mouth, so long used for unoriginal utterances, is finally filled by the sewer-like silt of a brook, as though to provide a poignant if pathetic epithet on one whose life seemed as verbally non-productive as the silence which ultimately settled upon it.

Throughout this chapter I have been looking at examples of 'nonsense' and 'non-sense', together with their literary, dramatic and cultural antecedents. In terms of Shakespeare's experimental appropriation of these traditions, I believe Ophelia's utterances, both pre- and post-madness, are characterized by a lack of originality. This leads to a situation whereby her represented world, one based on external referents, fails to withstand a major alteration. The alteration occurs firstly with Hamlet's rejection of her in the nunnery scene, and secondly with the death of her father. Lacking an inner coherence from which to derive strength, she collapses into a state of disorder, portrayed by the collage of verbal material which she subsequently utters. The material itself, again unoriginal, is at least grammatically correct and does appear to bear some relation to the world of Elsinore, in that she answers enquiries, not validly, but with appropriate turn-taking conversational behaviour. The tendency, when dealing with such pseudo or 'nonsense' speech is, as the unknown gentleman observes (IV.v.7-10), to make one's own sense of it. Mainly, in the play, this results in the attribution of her problems entirely to Polonius' death, thereby excluding Hamlet's involvement, leaving the audience with greater knowledge of the situation than Ophelia's fellow cast members. This knowledge, however, remains tenuous and ambiguous, since nowhere in the play does Ophelia ever sanely declare that she loves Hamlet.

Hamlet's 'non-sense' is linked in one crucial particular to Ophelia's 'nonsense' because, albeit setting out with the declared intention of controlling the situation and manipulating the environment, Hamlet actually becomes the victim of his own eloquence. He would sooner talk than act, or more precisely, sooner act in the sense of playing than act in reality.

In chapter two I argued that the 'To be' soliloquy represented an attempt to compose the "dozen to sixteen" lines for insertion into 'The Mousetrap', and I illustrated the way in which this enterprise, due to lack of discipline on Hamlet's part, rapidly escaped from his control. The antic disposition, I believe, suffers a similar fate, and, rather than a viable defensive and offensive strategy, becomes self-defeating and futile. It is not convincing, given the world of Elsinore, to successfully negotiate a

revenge by pretended madness. In Shakespeare's sources, as previously mentioned, the situation is sufficiently different to allow of such a ruse. Amleth's strategy, of pretending to be a harmless imbecile, successfully puts his enemies off their guard enabling him to plot and execute their downfall. Amleth triumphs, whereas Hamlet undermines his own plot with a carelessness bordering on genuine madness. We can see that speech, however eloquent, is inadequate to negotiate Elsinore's many-layered ontology.

Genuine madness, if episodic, seems a component part of Hamlet's make-up; this is the type of madness which characterized the original vice or fool figures and which seemed to possess a wit and wisdom transcendent of their surroundings. In the context of the earlier dramas, as I have stressed, the notion of a being who repeatedly slipped outside the play world and verbally insinuated himself into that of the audience was both entertaining and enlightening. The vice figure, it must be borne in mind, was, for all his perversely engaging and energetic wit, doomed. In Judao-Christian terms, he was allowed only a temporary and contingent freedom. The inevitable and eternal framework of order had to be restored, thus curtailing the existence of vice, either by destruction or by re-absorption into the scheme of a divinely ordained universe.

In the case of the present play, however, it seems a bizarre anomaly to witness the hero of a tragedy doing the same thing. The inevitable entertainment and enlightenment this occasions has a surreal nature, as though genres of great dissimilarity were being forcibly combined.

In terms of Shakespeare's ongoing experiment with speech, however, the seduction of Hamlet and us by his eloquence is a powerful and resonant spectacle. The conclusion of this spectacle, together with my judgement as to whether the diverse threads have been successfully orchestrated in act five, will provide the basis for the next and final chapter.

Chapter 6

"To Say One": Speech as the consummation of loose ends.

> "The Hamlet who dies is a soldier and a scholar, courageous and compassionate, spirited and thoughtful, self-confident and self-critical, remarkably aware yet striving for greater awareness, passionate yet rational, humane yet thoughtful. The wholeness he seeks attains reality through the harmony of opposites."[1]

> "Now no comfort any longer avails, desire reaches beyond the transcendental world, beyond the gods themselves, and existence, together with its gulling reflection in the gods and an immortal Beyond, is denied. The truth once seen, man is aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence, comprehends the symbolism of Ophelia's fate and the wisdom of the wood sprite Silenus; nausea invades him."[2]

> "Hamlet receives injunctions from the Ghost, his father-figure, kills the king, and receives from Horatio a benediction for a blameless life. If the play were as simple as that, we should not be attempting to pluck out its mystery. The application of the triangulation should be, but is not, easy: Fortinbras receives injunctions, obeys, and succeeds; Laertes receives injunctions, disobeys, and dies. Fortinbras and Laertes perceived that they had an obligation to avenge their father's deaths; Hamlet was directly commanded to do so. They went out and gathered gangs of armed men; Hamlet stayed at home and hired players. They made a show of force; he staged a forceful show – he indulged in metaphor, in seeming."[3]

Bloom makes a provocative observation: "Hamlet knows he deserves the prime role in a cosmological drama, which Shakespeare was not quite ready to compose."[4] In order to make sense of this, I would argue that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the beginning of an experiment, one for which Shakespeare had to construct the tools at the same time as carrying it out. These 'tools' include form and structure as well as language. It could be claimed that the conclusion of the play represents a compromise on his part, that the death of Hamlet and the arrival of Fortinbras are necessary in order to conform to the outward pressure of having to conform to audience expectations and provide a plausibly tragic finale. On the other hand, he manages to make this ending somewhat surreal and less than conclusive by the very language in which it is embodied.

It is a commonplace observation that the Hamlet of act five differs markedly from the Hamlet of the previous four acts, notably in that he has sacrificed "...the play

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[1] James P. Driscoll, *Identity in Shakespearean Drama* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1983), 67.
[2] Friedrich Nietzsche *The Dionysiac Greek* in Laurence Lerner ed., *Shakespeare's Tragedies: A Selection of Modern Criticism* (Penguin, 1982), 281.
[3] George Walton Williams, "Hamlet and the Dread Commandment" in John M. Mucciolo (ed.), *Shakespeare's Universe : Renaissance Ideas and Conventions : Essays in Honour of W.R. Elton* (Aldershot, Hants: Scholar Press, 1996), 62.
[4] Bloom (2003), 88.

of infinite regress"[5] which involves also sacrificing his characteristically speculative intellect. Calderwood notes that transcendence, in an orthodox sense, is not much in evidence during act five. He does, however, see a progression, noting that Hamlet's later speeches do not "...represent merely a bland return to the unexamined values of his school days."[6] It might be wondered whether this "seeming acceptance" solves any of the play's dilemmas and whether the transformed perspective is indeed genuine, since Shakespeare fails to provide enough insight into the inner life that culminated in these outward manifestations,[7] and since, as I claimed in chapter one, Hamlet is a vehicle designed by Shakespeare to further an ongoing investigation.

Shakespeare's investigation concerns the way in which the rhetoric of drama sheds light on notions of truth and reason in *Hamlet*. One of the ways this occurs is by facilitating the very speculations which, as noted above, are curtailed so drastically in act five. This ability was one which allowed Hamlet to "...remain in doubts and uncertainties without grasping for easy solutions that violate the integrity of experience."[8] The ability to question and interrogate the answers was shown most prominently in the 'To be' soliloquy. This set out, I argued, as Hamlet's attempt to compose a conscience-stricken monologue for the poisoner Lucianus, but strayed, becoming a series of debating points covering various aspects of life, and notions of selfhood. Hamlet's omissions, I noted, are often as informative as his inclusions, so that the case he strove to construct was selective by virtue of ignoring, or failing to see, various counter examples. I suggested that Gertrude's "If it be" (I.ii.74), spoken out of concern for Hamlet's unsociably extended mourning, had acted as a catalyst, working silently, yet significantly, as a verbal resonance which, although decontextualized both semantically and syntactically, yet emerges to function as a leitmotif throughout the play, culminating in the final act, as I will attempt to show.

I noted in chapter two that, in Belsey's terms, Hamlet fulfills both the subject of the enunciation and the utterance. Shakespeare thus enables us to observe the way in which speech shapes both the process and the product of Hamlet's 'self' within the world of Elsinore. This 'self' can act as a microcosmic exemplar of the way in which words are socially originated, modified and maintained. I also looked at some theories of how 'meanings' are culturally constituted, with particular reference to Hanson's

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[5] Charney, 75.
[6] Calderwood, 124.
[7] Levao, 356.
[8] Driscoll, 50.

argument that words can arise almost spontaneously in order to negotiate novel situations. The words, or word combinations, thus generated, can succeed in becoming established and enter popular parlance. In the same way, Hamlet himself, by verbally distorting and adapting the current modes of speech, can be seen to push their potentialities into hitherto unimagined actualizations. Hamlet also had a tendency, as does the ghost, of detaching words from their original contexts, as when using the language, but not the spirit, of Christianity. We are therefore left with the vocabulary, minus the grammar, of Judaeo-Christian orthodoxy. Hamlet's various experimental scenarios, then, can be seen to operate under the aegis of the larger experiment that is *Hamlet*, as though the diverse and verbally mediated episodes were, in Berry's words "...a prolonged description of a single consciousness".[9]

It might be useful to consider a parallel with the figure of *Everyman*, who, in Hillman's view,[10] proceeds linearly from a state of confused instability to a final transcendence which abandons soliloquizing in favour of prayer. Within this scheme of reality, humankind's purpose is to bend its will, intellect and emotions towards the goal of achieving oneness with its creator. Any obstacle, or series of obstacles, only serves to make the final victory over a sinful world (and over one's sinful nature) all the sweeter and more precious. Such a story, naturally, can only be told if its background rationale – i.e. the Judeao-Christian cosmos – is sufficiently illuminated to be distinct, and sufficiently unambigiously presented as to be unassailable. In *Hamlet*, however, no such frame of reference exists and the protagonist's journey is not so much linear as circular, a series of trial-and-error strivings towards an enlightenment whose terms he fails to articulate, let alone attain. Value seems to adhere, momentarily, to specific viewpoints or sets of circumstances, only to be subsequently overturned or undermined as a new viewpoint or different set of circumstances arises. Truth is similarly difficult to discover. Wilks urges us to "...accept it as Shakespeare intends – as a chastened and attenuated thing, moulded and sculpted by a thousand equivocating ironies."[11] As Girard suggests, possibly the optimal strategy would be one of attending to the dramatic unfolding of events, while simultaneously reading between the lines for the critique Shakespeare has supplied for the discerning.[12]

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[9] Ralph Berry, *The Shakespearean Metaphor* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 62.
[10] Hillman (1997), 46-7.
[11] Wilks, 78.
[12] Rene Girard, *A Theater of Envy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 158.

Belsey would doubtless take issue with the notion of a Hamlet who embodies any form of unified subject, arguing that only a retrospective rationalization could see him as such and that the eye and ear of the modern day beholder is necessary to pull the various strands of Shakespeare's creation together. The "strands" she characterizes as "...a succession of morality fragments, wrath and reason, patience and resolution".[13] Her reading of act five, however, would see Hamlet as ceasing to struggle against these contradictions, no longer soliloquizing, but surrendering to become "...an inhabitant of a much older cosmos".[14] However, I see Hamlet's journey as essentially one from which no traveller returns because the voyage is itself a transformation, a key element of which is its lack of adherence to any orthodox frame of reference. As already noted, Hamlet's free utilization of Christian terms tends to stress his distance from the underlying belief system. This can be seen to parallel the way in which, during the play, he radically alters his representations of other characters, such as Ophelia and his mother. Accompanying this is a change in self-representation, occuring more subtly, and more insidiously.

In chapter five I concentrated on the vice/folly figure, suggesting that its position as being both within and outside the world of Elsinore allowed a certain relationship to develop with the audience and a specific viewpoint to emerge and be articulated. To an extent, the playgoers can find themselves being manipulated by this relationship so that responses are more at an affective than a reflective level, thus creating a tendency to side with an attractive figure rather than subjecting his views to scrutiny, particularly when, as in a theatre situation, the action cannot be suspended in order to check some textual point. *Hamlet*, I believe, exploits this same technique, as Hamlet occupies much of the traditional vice figure's position within the play, establishing himself as both player in, and interpreter of, the drama, even making us laugh with him – at often quite unsavoury examples of bullying or insulting others. The older theatrical form was, however, situated within an orthodox Judaeo-Christian background from which Shakespeare extracts it before using it as part of his investigative strategy. The whole idea of externalizing and personifying abstract and psychic elements is here being re-energized and exploited to create what might be termed an "evolving psychomachia".

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[13] Belsey (1985), 41.
[14] Ibid., 42.

Although Hamlet ceases soliloquizing in act five, he speaks in a way which shows he has continued evolving, and seems in fact to have internalized, integrated, and now to express, the more mature speech of the player King from 'The Mousetrap'. This wisdom, however, will be undermined by the play's ending, as Shakespeare experiments with the ethical framework of both sources and genre until, as Greenblatt notes, the logical structure of the original is replaced by the aesthetic structure of the present work.[15] Once one steps outside the constraints and comforts of orthodoxy, the questions which were formerly and formally answered now return as menacing enigmas. None is more menacing than the whole issue of humankind's identity, origins and eventual fate. Hamlet raises these questions but *Hamlet* cannot satisfactorily answer them, and what I wish to stress is that, by act five, we do not have the conclusion to the play but rather its curtailment.

An example of Shakespeare's aesthetic rather than logical structure arises in act four when Claudius is revealed to be under threat, not from Hamlet or the ghost, but from a vengeful Laertes, who manages to summon a 'rabble' so easily that Bloom wonders why Hamlet never considers anything similar.[16] There seems no logical reason why he should not try, yet, since Shakespeare has other ends in mind than those of his sources, Hamlet acts with an aesthetic rather than a logical agenda, pursuing the experimental rather than the avenging priority.

Laertes' attack is met by Gertrude with a show of extreme anger (IV.v.109-10) and a desire to protect Claudius from harm, even to the extent of hazarding herself as she physically restrains Laertes (123). This again may seem counter-productive, because, if events took their course and Claudius was killed, not only would a man loathed by her son be removed from power, but that same son would be thereby protected from suspicion of Polonius' death. Yet Gertrude protects Claudius, thus proving beyond doubt that neither Hamlet's overt condemnation of the relationship nor his covert references to fratricide have managed to extinguish her love and loyalty.

Claudius (and this to his credit) shows no fear, even making a speech about the divinity of kingship which, Levao notes, provides a good example of Shakespeare's technique of undermining by juxtaposition: "Passages that appeal to us as exemplars of

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[15] Greenblatt (2004), 324.
[16] Bloom (2003), 86.

the Renaissance world-view prove, upon closer inspection, to be ironically framed, even radically compromised."[17]

Gertrude continues protesting the King's innocence (128), apparently unaware of how likely it is that he will find a way to harness Laertes' anger and misery for his own ends, and the detriment of Hamlet's, which is indeed what happens.

Laertes is praised for speaking "Like a good child and a true gentleman" (148), which plaudit Walton Williams dismisses as carrying contamination with it, linking Laertes and Claudius in an unholy alliance.[18]

Events now assist the king's scheme, as Ophelia's timely entrance converts Laertes' remaining anger to deep sadness, and renders him easier to manipulate. As Polonius and the ghost demonstrated in act one, heightened emotion tends to diminish the ability to reason logically and augments suggestibility. Ophelia, Hamlet, and now Laertes all fall under the spell of self-serving eloquence. Laertes is vulnerable, exhausted by his speedy return from France, disturbed by his father's sudden death, and still more sudden interment, and now devastated by the fate of his sister. Claudius knows exactly how to exploit Hamlet's unhappy and unsophisticated counterpart. Claudius also knows, if he did not already, that the ease with which Laertes summoned his riotous supporters bodes ill for the success of his reign.

It is possible to see the limitations Shakespeare has written into the parts of every character except Hamlet. They do not develop during the action of the play, but remain bound by the constricted, even static outlooks which prevent them from emulating Hamlet's fluid and fecund philosophical frame of reference.

Hamlet is not present as a stage character during any of this, and "…absences in Shakesperean tragedy usually warn us to be on the watch for a new phase in the development of the character."[19] Hamlet is present, however, as the writer of a letter to Horatio, who, present or absent, never seems to develop for better or worse and who is never suborned by Claudius, "…which renders him unique at Elsinore."[20]

Marcus highlights the difference in presentation between the Q2 and Folio versions of the letter itself. The Folio's text renders it more reader-friendly, and is printed in italics, thus disengaging it from the rest of the text and in fact, making it

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[17] Levao, 367.
[18] George Walton Williams, 61.
[19] Mack, 104.
[20] Bloom (2003), 15.

resemble "...an actual royal letter or warrant, complete with initial large capital."[21]

Who, she queries, is the intended reader of this missive? Horatio would be the obvious answer, but Horatio's name is missing from the stage directions in the Folio, and what we have is the sailors' speech, followed by "reads the letter" then the letter itself. Marcus concludes that the cumulative effect of these alterations and omissions is to make the Folio reader, rather than Horatio, the target of this letter, because "...the presentation of Hamlet's letter becomes increasingly 'literate' as opposed to oral, increasingly private and orientated towards visual rather than aural reception."[22]

This can be seen to function as a tool for highlighting one major difference between Hamlet's Vice-like activities and those of a more traditional Vice figure throughout. When the older more familiar Vice steps outside the confines of his playworld and into that of the audience, the same basic ontological structure of reality is assumed. When Hamlet, however, performs this manoeuvre, it is to enter a surreal speculative dimension without certainties or safety nets.

This observation highlights a possible extra-dramatic audience for the play – those who read the text rather than attend the theatre – and also gives an added dimension to the somewhat colourless figure of Horatio.[23] If, as here, Horatio could become the audience, and vice versa, then, as Bloom observes, his value consists in being "Shakespeare's instrument for suborning the audience even as Claudius manipulates Elsinore: without Horatio, we are too distanced from the bewildering Hamlet for Shakespeare to work his guile upon us."[24] The letter itself contains one cryptic reference: "They have dealt / with me like thieves of mercy. But they knew what they did: / I am to do a turn for them". (18-20) This mysterious favour could be added to make the rescue more plausible, or to give the episode a dimension of reality which it would otherwise lack, a reminder that a world exists beyond the claustrophobic confines of Elsinore.[25]

By scene seven Claudius has already persuaded Laertes that Hamlet not only killed Polonius but also "pursu'd my life". (4) The only thing which seems to puzzle Laertes is the reason why Claudius allows all this to happen without proceeding against

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[21] Marcus (1996), 169.
[22] Ibid.
[23] In Q1 Horatio has already received and read a letter whose contents he relates to Gertrude. The entire plot against Hamlet's life, and the part played by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are included. Gertrude is horrified, swears to help all she can, and declares that there is 'treason' in Claudius looks "that seem'd to sugar o're his villanie" (Bertram and Kliman, 208) (recalling Polonius' words at III.i.47-8).
[24] Bloom (2003), 16.
[25] No rationale exists in any of the source material for this 'favour'.

Hamlet. Claudius' answer consists of two reasons – the first is Gertrude. Gertrude idolizes Hamlet, Claudius idolizes Gertrude and therefore Claudius cannot injure Hamlet. The second reason Claudius gives for enduring Hamlet's behaviour is highly politic. Like Laertes, Hamlet is a very popular figure, a fact which Honigman sees[26] as a necessary reminder to an audience which, by now, might be feeling less than sympathetic to the volatile hero. Laertes, volatile as Hamlet, but lacking his intelligence, is heaping praises upon the memory of both father and sister (25-9) (although the play gives no evidence of a 'noble' Polonius nor any 'perfection' on Ophelia's part except beauty and canine obedience), when another of Hamlet's letters erupts onto the scene. The Folio renders this missive in italics, and includes a signature. Its postscript, however, comes to us only from Claudius' reading of it. "Can you devise me?" (52), the King asks, and in asking, seems to be setting himself the task rather than the intellectually inferior Laertes. "How should it be so, how otherwise?" (57) he asks – again addressing himself in subtext, almost soliloquizing in fits and starts as his plan materializes and solidifies.

We learn, and are surprised, that Claudius has not only seen, but "serv'd against" (82) France. This seems perfectly appropriate for the King's younger brother, yet it jars against the image we have of him as a scheming, stay-at-home politician, and adds to the complexity of his character. The strategy Claudius finally decides upon involves the Norman 'Lamord', and the precise wording, "Upon my life, Lamord" (91), alerts us to the death-like resonance of the name, as does the term "incorps'd" (86), used in praise of the man's centaur-like skill, a word which, according to the OED, is used here for the first time.

Gently, insidiously, Claudius drips verbal venom into Laertes' ears. Love, he says, begins as a burning energetic flame which eventually consumes itself and dies. He then goes on, in what can only be described as an echo of the 'To be' soliloquy, to make the point that, like enterprises losing the name of action, 'would' and 'should' are words which replace deeds, sighs which weaken while fostering undeserved feelings of self-satisfaction in the sigher.[27] The obvious analogy, if we seek one within the logic of the plot, would be that, despite her courage and loyalty in shielding Claudius from Laertes,

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[26] E.A.J. Honigman, *Myriad Minded Shakespeare : essays, chiefly on the tragedies and problem comedies* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 225.

[27] The simile he uses is of a sigh that somehow uses up blood to the detriment of the sigher, but since authority for this has not been found, Bamborough concludes that it must be the result of a popular tradition (Bamborough, 128).

Gertrude has become somehow less than loving towards him, a fact he acknowledges with regret and which he attempts to account for in generalized speculations about the emotion of love, failing to consider the possibility that something of significance may have occurred during the closet scene. He then suddenly breaks off and recalls himself to the present by approving Laertes' desire to cut Hamlet's throat "i' the church". (125) This represents the revenge genre ethos which sets honour up almost as a rival to the Christian religion, with a rival system of demands, rewards and punishments.[28]

Claudius goes on to praise Hamlet's integrity in order to make Laertes believe Hamlet will easily be fooled and therefore eagerly adopt the strategy. This is unlikely to be Claudius' genuine view of Hamlet, since the King is an acute judge of others, and has been exposed to 'The Mousetrap' - a contrivance orchestrated by one supposedly "free from all contriving". (134) Hamlet has also, apparently, eluded the plot against his life and is set to return, again, evidence of one who can counterplot successfully. Claudius, however, is still not satisfied, and, as previously, we are given a glimpse into the master manipulator's mind at work (153-155), rapidly calculating algorithms, and culminating in the flash of inspiration "I ha't!".[29]

Walton Williams draws attention to the unholy ritual aspect of the entire interchange.[30] Laertes will "anoint" his sword with the "unction" and Claudius will prepare a "chalice". Besides these ecclesiastical terms, there is the solemn unfolding of the plot, the incantation-like description of Laertes' poison and the almost legalistic provisos and default schemes which Claudius contributes. Their speech is a telling contrast to the sophisticated but ineffective reasoning of their intended victim. Claudius verbally poisons Laertes in order that he, in turn, may genuinely poison Hamlet. Two victims are thus targeted in a reversal of the ghost's original scheme of setting up Hamlet as the instrument of his revenge against Claudius. In each case the would-be killer has to move by an indirect route in order to achieve his aim, using the full force of dramatic rhetoric to suborn the reason of his victim into accepting a specific version of the truth.

Act five takes this sepulcheral theme further by opening in a graveyard, a scene which, according to Gorfain, dynamically parallels the "...processes of living and dying, the polarities of Genesis and doomsday, the interchanges of questions and

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[28] Empson, 121.
[29] A misprint in Q2 renders it as "I hate". Possibly a pre-Freudian slip on Claudius' part? (Bertram and Kliman, 222).
[30] Walton Williams, 68.

answers, the exchanges of subjects and objects".[31] She sees this as an attempt to gain some verbal mastery over these issues by relating them to word games with rules which, if adhered to, yield answers, unlike their real-life counterparts. She goes on to highlight the essential power relationship this type of riddling interchange represents "...in its dialogic structure of challenge and answer, confusion and clarification".[32] I see this as an interesting reversal of Hamlet's own role, since the maker of puns and word games is himself subjected to them, in his quest for answers to even the most innocuous of questions. One thing undeniably present is an excellent grasp of legal knowledge on Shakespeare's part[33] and I think the notion of two manual laborers using such elaborate jargon alerts the audience to the fact that some verbal subversion is underway and that Shakespeare is once again utilizing the mismatch between speaker and spoken. As Rees says, "The clown's eye view eliminates metaphysics"[34] - eliminates, perhaps, in the sense of purges, whereas Hamlet's treatment of metaphysics is always convoluted, leading to unfinished speculations rather than the good closure of purgation. We have another manifestation of this treatment here, as Hamlet, who has "...symbolically been sitting on the edge of a grave throughout"[35], remarks: "That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once." (74) We could use the term 'sing' rather than 'speak', as though, besides being a comment on the tuneful grave digger, who is presumably singing away meanwhile, it also indicates a preference for song over speech, because song "...in the hierarchy of sounds is a superior activity, for speech is condemned to observe responsibility to meaning, while song is a self-contained poetical structure of which the idea can be comprehended intuitively."[36]

Hamlet however resorts to speech, and in the medieval "Dance of Death" mode describes death in terms of class after class, profession after profession, with one significant difference. The whole point and purpose of the medieval original was to remind sinful humanity of the need for repentance – for those who heeded the call, salvation was assured, but in Hamlet's bitterly gloomy satire: "...defeat and futility are rendered absolute."[37] Levao agrees, noting the similarities between Hamlet's speech and that of a spiritual meditation, except of course that it never mentions anything about the

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[31] Gorfain, 309.
[32] Ibid.
[33] See relevant entries in B.J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare's Legal Language: A Dictionary* (London: Athlone Press, 2000). For a possible biographical link see Ackroyd, 79-82.
[34] Rees, 194.
[35] Ghose, 61.
[36] Ibid., 65.
[37] Ibid., 144.

soul's existence, let alone its destination.[38] Hamlet seems here to delight in the language of legality (96-110) in much the same way as he formerly delighted in the language of the classics, and for mainly the same reasons, and that is because legal jargon is as artificial and removed from everyday life as the tale of Troy, allowing him to speak about some of life's greatest and most disturbing mysteries, albeit from the oratorically distant stance of a lawyer.

The gravedigger now provides Hamlet with the experience of being target rather than missile. Previously, with underlings like Polonius or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet had it all his own way. He, as Prince, was licensed to insult; now, as disguised Prince, he is at the mercy of someone who feels free to spar verbally. Hamlet, if he wishes to gain any information, must play the game, and this time the game is not of his own devising. "How absolute the knave is" (132) he declares, surely with some admiration.

This whole exchange seems to represent a learning experience for Hamlet, besides being a novel one. In addition to its impact on the drama, we can observe the experimental rationale, as Hamlet, heading towards his own death, encounters speech from "Death itself".[39] Previously his father's ghost laid a heavy burden, of knowledge both descriptive and prescriptive, upon his son. Now a figure who can, I think, legitimately be seen as a personification of a future event, speaks as a leveller. Hamlet's rank is no defence; it is not even acknowledged. Hamlet is merely speaking to someone whose words he must disentangle and try to make sense of, in the same way he will shortly have to accept the events leading up to his own death.

Hamlet now speaks *about* Hamlet since circumstances have provided him with a verbal mirror, a situation both sinister and satisfying at the same time. This leads to mention of the notorious yet beloved Yorick, a man like Hamlet: "...of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy" (170). As Levao says, "The antic of Claudius' court meets his predecessor in office, his father's fool ... perhaps the most famous interview in theatrical history."[40] Now Yorick – or rather, his skull – replaces the ghost "...as the form of the dead".[41] Unlike the ghost, this fixed and stable personification of death cannot move or talk or manipulate the living.

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[38] Levao, 357.
[39] Farnham, 116.
[40] Levao, 358.
[41] Muriel Bradbrook, *Muriel Bradbrook On Shakespeare* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester, 1984), 115.

Like most jesters Yorick seems to have been a commoner who used his talents to achieve a certain type of power in Old Hamlet's court. Even though a King can ultimately make or break a jester, the two usually, particularly in drama, developed a symbiotic relationship whereby "...the fool joined with the King in the power of the ruler's office and the King joined with the fool in the power of the jester's office."[42]

Hamlet examines the skull with a horrified fascination, and after playing an intellectual if macabre game of re-animating the other unknown skulls and verbally clothing them with their presumed occupational idiosyncrasies, returns to something highly personal. Yorick was not 'a' jester but the particular one Hamlet knew and loved. The gravedigger also knew Yorick and seems to have had some affection for him despite his practical jokes. (172-5) Hamlet is thus faced with the transformation of a friend to a piece of dirty endo-skeleton, a transformation which he is unable to reverse, for all his vivid, anecdotal memories, and Yorick almost dies a second death in Hamlet's hands.[43] Almost, because for one dramatic instant, a verbally constituted Yorick is manifested as the subject of Hamlet's utterance.

The memories suddenly alter, becoming "abhorred" as Hamlet experiences strong physical revulsion which could be attributed, in part, to his awareness that his own skull will suffer a similar fate.[44] Possibly, the subsequent attempt to trace Alexander and Caesar's passage from burial to bunghole represents a desire to subvert the horrific reality which Hamlet must eventually face, to turn death into something which has a vitality, a "...form of life, albeit the life of decay."[45] For the first time in the play, Hamlet has been faced with the revelatory experience of having to speak about a disembodied self, a Hamlet who is treated as existing in some vague but distant location, an England populated by the humourously labelled 'mad'. Despite all of his dramatic efforts throughout the play, Hamlet is now faced with relegation to the ranks of those who, eminent, notorious or mediocre, can no longer verbalize the reality of their existence, but must be spoken about, must become the subject of someone else's utterance. That great ultimatum is now part of Hamlet's own awareness he sees, and even more crucially accepts, that there is nothing he can do, no piece of brilliance, no form of words, which will allow him to evade his fate.

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[42] Farnham, 118.
[43] Calderwood, 101.
[44] Levao, 358.
[45] Calderwood, 101.

Ophelia's funeral now comes into view. Milward, noting that in Q2 the minister is referred to by the Anglican title 'Doctor' wonders whether this is an allusion to Claudius having instigated some form of religious new order, replacing that of his predecessor.[46] I think this unlikely, since Laertes addresses him as "priest" (232), and consider it to be another of Shakespeare's deliberate contributions to Elsinore's denominational vagueness.

Gertrude's sad little eulogy (235-9) seems to suggest that the ambitious Polonius may well have been justified in hoping Hamlet might have been his son in law. Certainly there seems to have been none of the impediments Laertes previously voiced (I.iii.17-24). Ironically, Hamlet's actions have brought Ophelia to this sorry end, in a way neither her brother nor her father could have foreseen.

Laertes, leaping into the grave, gives vent to the same kind of hyperbolic excesses we usually associate with Hamlet. Possibly his verbosity is a necessary trigger for Hamlet to move into self-revelatory action, since words, rather than deeds, seem the way to animate this most verbally oriented of heroes.

The challenge at 249-50 "...is as if Hamlet were attributing to Laertes a thought that would be natural to him, but not to Laertes."[47] Levao casts doubt – a doubt I share – on Hamlet's change of character, as portrayed in a scene "...shot through with sardonic laughter and muted hysteria."[48] Yet, "This is I, Hamlet the Dane" is taken as evidence that he has become a social entity "...no longer the subjective, isolated consciousness aloof from the play."[49] I think also that since the bizarre depersonalization of the graveyard, Hamlet at last takes upon himself his genuine role in the play, thereby becoming both more real in Elsinore's world, and, in a way, less so in ours.

Laertes does not at this time mention Hamlet's killing of Polonius. The entire quarrel seems to hinge upon Hamlet's protestations of love for Ophelia,[50] and the speech at 269-79 seems to be antic - dispositionally pitched, yet unlike the previous examples, it targets specifically the words of Laertes and engages with them, rather than distorting or subverting. Laertes has made exaggerated outpourings of grief – so Hamlet's will be even more exaggerated. Laertes, however, seemed moved by genuine love of his sister and willingness to give his life, if necessary, in avenging his father. In

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[46] Milward (1973), 32.
[47] Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (Cambridge University Press, 1943), 96.
[48] Levao, 359.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Empson, 99.

contrast everything Hamlet says in this particular speech seems designed to insult, and at the same time convince the listeners that he is not really sane. Gertrude is quick to underwrite the instability of her son's mental state (279-83), presumably keeping to the agreement they reached in the closet scene.

If we do wish to consider this speech as an example of the antic disposition in action, then it must be observed that it represents a major change from its predecessors. Hamlet is now augmenting rather than ignoring or contradicting the speech of his victim. His sentiments are appropriate, in their way, to what is being said, although exaggerated beyond what is socially appropriate. There is an absence of the punning, mischief-making gamesmanship of the vice or fool figure as outlined in chapter five. However, Hamlet returns, almost, to form in his concluding line, "The cat will mew, and dog will have his day." (287)

Jenkins sees this[51] as a proverb being utilized to clothe a boast of triumph to come, but, given the highly original and acrobatic language Hamlet earlier employed, it seems a poor adjunct, something thrown down to finish a rhyme rather than make a point, as though Hamlet's role in Elsinore, rather than his role as the rhetorician of drama, seems central now to *Hamlet*.

Scene two provides us, and Horatio, with an explanation of Hamlet's unexpected return. The explanation is couched totally in the form of dialogue; there are neither soliloquies nor asides. Kerrigan suggests this is acceptable, even dramatically effective, saying that Hamlet's disclosed memories "imply others, lying deeper, unspoken.[52] While this may be true, it is also a highly subjective appraisal and does nothing to answer the question of why in act five Shakespeare switches to a technique of having Hamlet talk to another cast member, rather than to the audience. Naturally, we have by this point of the play grown so familiar with Hamlet that we can infer an inner life we are no longer allowed to overhear, but it seems overly inventive to assume, as Kerrigan does, that some mnemonic strategizing is involved. Hamlet has, I would suggest, become integrated into the world of Elsinore since his enlightenment in the graveyard and no longer strives verbally to subvert its reality, since that reality is the only one in which he can operate in any physical sense.

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will (10-11)

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[51] Jenkins, 393.
[52] Kerrigan, 173.

The lines are not original. Jenkins cites Montaigne and the Book of Proverbs as possible sources[53] but although obviously God, in the Judaeo-Christian sense, is being invoked in these sources, here I think we can see Shakespeare re-claiming control of the drama, subordinating his most anarchic speaker by having Hamlet paraphrase the player King (III.ii.208), whose lines have now been added to his own vocabulary, suitably altered to accommodate the awareness of a higher power.

As Hamlet relates recent events to Horatio, he has apparently managed to "...escape from the regressive labyrinth of his revenge" by "asking a different set of questions."[54] He is operating outside the restrictions which his previous speculative inertia had imposed, yet, paradoxically, his choices now seem constrained by adherence to an externally generated value system. In other words, Hamlet no longer replaces actions by words. Chaudhari agrees, noting that 'honour' previously provided Hamlet with a fulfillment which was basically aesthetic in nature, and therefore, in terms of action, no more than an exercise in futility. "'Honour' is at once the crowning glory of man and the strongest proof of his inconsequentiality."[55] Hamlet now needs to display honour in the world of Elsinore. My contention, however, is that rather than Hamlet having reached such a conclusion as the culmination of a philosophical or psychological process, Shakespeare thrusts it upon him, curtails his subversiveness in order to bring the drama to something resembling a finale. It can thus be seen as an ontological dramatic recognition, illustrative of the way in which the rhetoric of drama can illumine truth and reason within this play.

Horatio seems as surprised as any member of the audience. His comment, "That is most certain" (12), cuts across Hamlet's speech regarding divinity and rough-hewing. It is as though he expects Hamlet to meander on and off the point, and is anxious to keep him on track and so to hear the story. His concern is unwarranted, since Hamlet no longer indulges in verbal wanderings, but continues his narration with, one feels, the same reckless energy with which he carried out the actions. We might be surprised to hear that he once considered it "A baseness to write fair" (34) and attempted to lose that ability. This clashes with the learned, even pedantic intellectuality Hamlet has hitherto displayed, and seems to harken back to the older, more chivalric code represented by

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[53] "The heart of man purposeth his way: but the Lord doeth direct his steppes." Glossed as: "He sheweth the Folie of man." (Proverbs 16:9)
[54] Charney, 74.
[55] Chaudhari, 145.

the ghost, wherein a nobleman distinguished himself by deeds of valour rather than book learning.

Hamlet's forgery commands the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "Not shriving time allowed." (47) In defence of this piece of apparently wanton cruelty, Frye notes[56] that Hamlet did not know pirates were opportunely about to arrive, and therefore had to ensure his former schoolmates would not have time to reveal the true nature of their commission. The play gives no evidence that they were in a position to do so, but Hamlet had already made up his mind that they were Claudius' willing tools, and therefore worthy to share his fate. Jenkins adds, "...we are probably meant to assume it too and to accept the poetic justice of their end."[57] I disagree. I think we are meant to abreact to this, together with Hamlet's casual justification (57-62) in which he refers to the "baser" nature of the pair, and to himself and Claudius as "mighty opposites".

Although no longer substituting speech for action, these comments betray Hamlet's previous tendency to see himself – and in this case Claudius also – as figures from a classic or chivalric tale.

"Why, what a King is this!"[58] (63) exclaims Horatio, affirming his recognition of the metatheatricality of the play throughout and reminding us of all the kings we have encountered in this regally replete drama. It also perhaps heightens audience awareness of Hamlet's own status, since he has become one more King in a hierarchy, a link in the chain-like super-structure of Elsinore.[59] Empson wonders whether "this" refers to Hamlet or Claudius. Hamlet will go on to give a list of reasons why, in his opinion, Claudius deserves to die, prompting Empson to conclude that Hamlet assumes Horatio to be referring to Claudius, when actually he is saying that Hamlet is now acting as a King should. While not ignoring the ambivalence of the line, I wonder whether Horatio's comment is prompted more by the fact that Hamlet now speaks like a King, and, as I suggested, one with a rather romantic view of that role. Claudius, formerly denigrated as "base" and "villanous", is now elevated to the status of a "mighty opposite", because Hamlet has altered the terms and conditions of the role in which he sees himself, and now requires a formidable, and dignified, foe. For example, although Hamlet now has Claudius' incriminating commission in his possession, he

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[56] R.M. Frye, 260.
[57] Jenkins, 397, note to I.57.
[58] In Q2 the exclamation mark is replaced by a question mark (Bertram and Kliman, 247).
[59] Empson, 116.

never mentions public justice, but "he always talks of using his 'sword' or his 'arm'."[60] This, I think, is because of the unrealistic and idealized view Hamlet takes of the situation. Common-sense is not really a factor. Glosses and omissions are, however, as Hamlet proceeds to catalogue the rights and wrongs of the situation in order to fit them into the neatly expressible category: "is't not perfect conscience / To quit him with this arm?" (67-8) This list, however, is insufficient, so Hamlet adds to it the belief that: "is't not to be damn'd / To let this canker of our nature come / In further evil?" (67-9) We might genuinely be forgiven for assuming these lines should be spoken by Claudius.

Claudius, according to this reasoning, deserves to die and Hamlet, according to this reasoning, deserves damnation if he does not bring this death about. Thus, using the language of excess, Hamlet would speak for providence.

It has been noted that, in this play, "...the past becomes the repository of the goodness lacking in the present and judgement becomes nostalgia, an emotional index of the present degeneration."[61] This, in fact, seems to represent Hamlet's conception of his father's reign, a time of almost pre-lapsarian perfection which seems to have existed only in his fantasy world and not in that of Elsinore. Cavalierly, almost casually, 'conscience' is tossed in. We wonder whether this is for Horatio's benefit, the audience's or Hamlet's own. The statement makes no sense according to any Judaeo-Christian reasoning, nor according to any pagan warrior code, since it involves 'conscience' in its premise.[62] The obvious conclusion to draw is that Hamlet, as he frequently does, has concocted a patchwork out of the pieces of theological and literary material which suits his case, and that now, operating within the confines of Elsinore's ontology, 'conscience' itself has been divested of all its metaphysically speculative surrounds, and means no more than consciousness.

Horatio, rationally, resonably and logically brings us back to reality by pointng out that Claudius will very soon be informed of affairs in England. Hamlet's reply is, in effect, agreement but also dismissal:

> It will be short. The interim is mine.
> And a man's life no more than to say 'one'. (73-4)

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[60] Bradley, 76.
[61] Margolies, 46.
[62] Interestingly, the scholarly *Shakespeare's Words* makes no mention of a specifically moral dimension to 'conscience' listing only the following as Shakespearean usage: "1) internal reflection, inner voice inmost thought; 2) real knowledge, internal conviction, true understanding; 3) sense of indebtedness, feeling of obligation." The example of usage for 1) above is III.i.83 (David and Ben Crystal, 94).

Hamlet seems to foreground metaphysics rather than common-sense planning. Berry comments that 'one' is the most resonant of all numbers, implying unity, and goes on to ask whether "...man's life is a quest for unity, for the oneness of self and situation?" If so, "...is not the final scene the statement of a profound accord between self and situation, action and awareness?"[63] I disagree – not about man's life being a search for unity, but about the final scene of the play as a demonstration of this. I believe Shakespeare is once more using a subtle yet subversive technique, setting up resonances and expectations which he will later undermine.

Hamlet's use of the word "interim" recalls the speech of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*:

> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
> The Genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection. (II.i.63-9)

Brutus makes the point that the "interim" between conceiving and executing the deed is a time of great, even nightmarish, inner turmoil. Hamlet's point is that the interim belongs to him, in the sense of being fully under his control, and that this enterprise of great pitch will not lose the name of action. He has not formulated any strategy, and the cryptic "to say one" could refer, as Jenkins believes,[64] to a fatalistic outlook, whereby life is seen as short. Montaigne, however, says: "In all antiquity it is hard to pick out a dozen men who set their lives to a certain and constant course, which is the principal good of wisdom. For, to comprise all wisdom in a word, says an ancient [Seneca], and to embrace all the rules of our life in one, it is always to will the same things, and always to oppose the same things. I would not deign [Seneca says] to add 'provided the will is just'; for if it is not just, it cannot always be whole."[65]

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[63] Berry, 62.

[64] Jenkins, 398, note to V.ii.74.

[65] I tracked down the following references: *The complete works of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957) Book 2, 240. The reference to Seneca is found in Epistle 20: "Therefore to omit the ancient definitions of wisdom and to include the whole manner of human life, I can be satisfied with the following: 'What is wisdom? Always desiring the same things, and always refusing the same things'." (*Seneca ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. Richard M. Gummere (London: William Heinemann, 1961) vol 1, 135. Seneca was in fact quoting Sallust on friendship, *The War With Cataline* 20, 1-9: "I perceive that you and I hold the same view of what is good and evil; for agreement in likes and dislikes – this, and this only, is what constitutes true friendship." Sallust, trans. J.C.Rolfe (London: William Heinemann, 1971).

Possibly Shakespeare is hinting at some vast schematic design, one as all pervasive as the Judaeo-Christian cosmos, whereby morality become a natural kind, transcendent of speech – a consummation devoutly to be wished - yet a consummation never explicated, never explored by Hamlet, who is, of course, running out of time. Instead of soliloquies, we are being given statements, conclusions without premises. We are, in effect, severed from the sense of participation in Hamlet's inner life,[66] which contributes to the difficulties we might have in accepting unsupported utterances, such as the one in which Hamlet regrets his recent treatment of Laertes, and attempts to rationalize it thus: "the bravery of his grief did put me / Into a tow'ring passion." (78-9)[67] As an explanation this leaves much to be desired. The claim seems to be that the flamboyance of Laertes' expressions were responsible for Hamlet's violent reaction. In other words, Laertes was to blame. With no more than this stilted rationale to go on, it is difficult to see Hamlet as anything other than the ungracious recipient of his own medicine. Throughout the play Hamlet's own 'bravery' of expression has gone unchecked, because of his social position, but in act five we have seen this reversed, firstly by the gravedigger, who did not know Hamlet's rank, and now by the son of the man he killed, who knows his rank and does not care. Hamlet's desire to make peace with Laertes, however, is as commendable as his justification for his own recent behaviour is not.

The hapless Osric now appears, prompting Grene to observe that Hamlet "…is not a totally transformed character in the final act; he can take as much pleasure in satiric cat-and-mouse games with Osric as ever he did with Polonius."[68] I agree that Hamlet's treatment of Osric could be described as satiric, and also, for Hamlet, pleasurable, but there is a crucial difference between this and his previous, antically dispositional harassment of Polonius. Formerly Hamlet, as described in chapter five, subverted the very sense and meaning of the words used. Here he does not. He merely repeats the tactic he used with Laertes over Ophelia's grave; he plays the same game as the person he is speaking to – only with greater emphasis, because he is now operating within the playworld, rather than as a semi-transcendent element.

As he previously out-ranted Laertes, now he out-hyperbolizes Osric. There are no puns, no anarchic substitutions of one word's sense for another. Even when Osric,

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[66] Grene, 58.
[67] In Q2 we see a more understandable "for by my selfe me thinkes I feele his griefe / Though there's a difference in each other's wrong" (Bertram and Kliman, 248).
[68] Grene, 58.

having uncovered his head, pleads heat as a reason for leaving it so, Hamlet's meteorological contradictions (94-100) are still firmly within the context of the exchange. Rather than a Vice-like subversion, Hamlet is parodying the essentially vapid, yet loquacious small talk of polite society. Osric – and the dandified gentry he represents - have been described as the "perversion of intellectuality for whom speech is decoration rather than expression."[69] Hamlet may thus have submitted to becoming a character within *Hamlet* – but, if such a thing is possible, Hamlet is a 'mega'-character indeed.

Hamlet's description of Osric (85-9) suggests that he is acquainted with him already, and therefore knows how to casually push the young man to the limits of his eloquence (130) thus forcing him to speak plainly. (It is possible, of course, that there is a kind of game-playing involved, and that Osric, the amateur, is playfully engaging in a little verbal skirmish – ironic, under the circumstances). Once Osric ceases being verbose, he becomes merely tedious, so that the exact nature of the King's wager against Laertes remains obscure and garbled. (161-4).

Claudius, perfectionist and opportunist, as ever, presses home the advantage that he sees and speedily dispatches an unnamed lord to summon Hamlet at once, if that is agreeable. Hamlet declares himself ready, but Horatio is not so sure: "You will lose my lord" (205). Hamlet replies by first contradicting Horatio's doubts, then declaring: "Thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter" (209) The entire exchange seems to be a prelude to the sweeping utterance at 215-20, with its proliferation of variations on the 'To be' theme.

Hamlet's use of 'we' (215) has been seen as a generalizing strategy[70] but, having witnessed his monarchical assertions (V.i.251) I think the royal plural may be involved, thus keeping this speech as self-referential, rather than one in which Hamlet presumes to voice universal adages. It could be wondered whether the "...serene faith" Hamlet professes is "indistinguishable, in practice, from a suicidal fatalism."[71] Defiance might be a more appropriate term, but even if it is, Bloom comments, "Hamlet's defiance is not easy to categorize".[72] This could represent a "passive wisdom"[73] which significantly curtails the need for Hamlet to construct his own representation of reality,

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[69] Ghose, 68.
[70] Jenkins, 407.
[71] Hillman (1992), 184.
[72] Bloom (2003), 85.
[73] Charney, 75.

his own providential design. "This reduces his image-making, histrionic function."[74] One could also interpret this acceptance as acquiescence to the world of the play itself, to being a subordinate player within the drama of Elsinore, as, traditionally, man was seen as a subordinate player within the Judaeo-Christian cosmology of life.

What must surely strike us as anomalous about the exchange is its total contrast to what has gone before. Hamlet, moments earlier, has been triumphantly relating the events in which "heaven was ordinant", and now both he and Horatio are reduced to pessimistic forebodings. We have simply not been given anything in the way of preparation for such a reversal of mood, and no longer enjoy that illusion of shared intimacy which the soliloquies provided, or have direct access to the two levels on which the play proceeds. Only one, the world of Elsinore, now predominates, whereas previously we encountered Elsinore as an element in the world of Hamlet.

The orthodoxy of Hamlet's readiness has been queried, since it does not so much rely on God's will "...as the guarantor of our efforts, the protector of our meaning"[75] but instead represents a deliberate abandonment of one's duty, as a Christian, to exercise the faculty of 'conscience' in the sense of judgement, of discerning good from evil.

Some texual ambiguity exists between the Folio and Q2 versions regarding the line: "Since no man of ought he leaves, knows" (Q2) and "Since no man ha's ought of what he leaves" (Folio). Jenkins sees the latter as an attempt to tidy up and clarify the former, but notes "...the sense it makes is not the sense required".[76] The issue is not one of possession but of knowledge, which follows logically from the previous talk of uncertainty, concluding that it is impossible to regret what one does not know.[77]

Noble, however, appears to include Jenkins' argument in his own reading, and also that which Jenkins rejects, seeing Hamlet's previous forboding (22-3) as cancelled by a fatalism which "...keys up excitement in the audience. A theatrical device that never fails."[78] While acknowledging both views, I wonder whether more is at stake

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Bonnefoy, 35.
[76] Jenkins, 565, LN to V.ii.218-20..
[77] Ibid., 566. He cites Montaigne as a possible source. Essays (Florio) 1.19: "what matter is it when it cometh, since it is unavoidable? ... No man dies before his hour. The time you leave behind was no more yours than that which was before your birth, and concerneth you no more."
[78] Noble, 209.

than merely knowing or even possessing. To answer this, let us look at the word 'it', glossed by Jenkins as death,[79] however in Q1 we see

> If danger be now
> Why then it is not to come, there's a predestinate providence
> In the fall of a sparrow heere comes the King[80]

Danger, rather than death could well be the focus of the enquiry, since, as we recall:

> The dread of something after death,
> The undiscover'd 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? (III.i.78-82)

Death, thus portrayed, is not an end but rather a portal to potential dangers, the contemplation of which causes fear so great that we prefer the evils we know, however painful they may be.

I think it is legitimate, therefore, to see fear itself, as depicted by one's own imaginings, as the main problem to be faced, and I think that, in this present speech, Hamlet is setting up an almost incantatory antidote to the fears which, I suggested, were unleashed in his mind as a result of attempting to compose the dozen to sixteen lines for inclusion in 'The Mousetrap'. Since we do not have any soliloquizing to prepare us for the content of this speech, I think it reasonable to infer that it represents Hamlet's habitual practice of using verbal means to solve emotional problems – as examined in chapter one - problems which were, originally and ironically, verbally initiated and sustained.

Hamlet's apology to Laertes (222-39) again participates in the incantatory theme, since he reduces "…his own behaviour to a verbal formula, making his own name into an object."[81] It might be added that Hamlet turns everything in this speech to mere objects, utilizing the language of the schools, as he previously did in the 'To be' soliloquy, yet with a much greater discipline and precision. "If't be so" (233) is a proviso rather than a definitive statement, yet, paradoxically, this speech manifests all the tightness of control the 'To be' soliloquy lacked.

What, precisely, is Hamlet apologizing for? We know, as do Laertes and Claudius, that Hamlet killed Polonius, but the bystanders do not. Hamlet, therefore, so far as the court is concerned, elaborately apologizes for the much lesser wrong of leaping into Ophelia's grave. The validity of this speech as an apology is questionable,

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[79] Jenkins, 407, n to V.ii.216..
[80] Bertram and Kliman, 254.
[81] Ghose, 70.

entailing as it does "...the unsavoury casuistry with which Hamlet absolves himself of blame for the deaths of Laertes' father and sister."[82] He does this by blaming his 'madness'.[83]

The so-called 'madness' can only refer to the antic disposition, and the antic disposition, as Hamlet is fully aware, was a means to an end, and not, as is here being claimed, an overwhelming alteration of consciousness during which the sufferer could argue that he had no control over his actions. This debases Hamlet's long apology even further, offering as it does a spurious and invalid excuse, a mere lie of convenience.

Laertes, though, shows signs of wavering, since after first declaring, "My word, I'll hit him now" (298), he admits, "And yet it is almost against my conscience." (300) However, Laertes does not seem inhibited by the doubt he expresses, or perhaps, by expressing it, he frees himself up for action, and can now successfully wound Hamlet.

Claudius anxiously cries, "Part them; they are incensed" (307), as though fearing that since the rapiers have been changed, Laertes may, if wounded by the poisoned one, confess the truth[84] (This seems to be a major weakness in the well-thought-out scheme). Gertrude's death temporarily intervenes,[85] as she cries, "O my dear Hamlet". (315) The surrounding action would lead us to assume her words were directed at her son. She is, after all, telling him and the court at large that she has been poisoned.[86] Hamlet himself does not immediately make the appropriate connections and realize who has poisoned her. Claudius has never shown himself to be anything but a loving partner to Gertrude, and in his proceedings against Hamlet he has carefully avoided confrontation with the woman who lives "almost by his looks" (IV.vii.14). Thus it is not clear to Hamlet who or what has caused his mother's death. It is Laertes who virtually tells Hamlet what to do, by giving a swift round-up of relevant events (319-26) which empowers Hamlet finally to deal the death blow to Claudius.

The King's verbal reaction to being stabbed (329) is puzzling. He speaks as though in ignorance of the poison's true potency, yet this potency was well described to

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[82] Levao, 361.

[83] In the Folio we read the surreal: "Free me so far in your most generous thoughts / That I have shot mine arrow o're the house / And hurt my Mother" (Bertram and Kliman, 257).

[84] Bradley, 159.

[85] Bowers, commenting on it, cites Chief Justice Coke who ruled that first degree murder could be said to occur once malice aforethought preceeded a killing thus, he claims, Claudius "...is guilty of first-degree murder, and not of manslaughter, when Gertrude dies of the poison he has intended for Hamlet." The point is merely speculative since we do not have any evidence that Shakespeare sided with Coke or intended the legal system of Elsinore to resemble that of Tudor England (Bowers (1959), 59).

[86] However, one other possibility exists, which is, as she leaves this life, she is at last reunited with her first husband, whom she addresses as 'dear'.

him by Laertes. Possibly, Claudius cannot face the imminence of a death he is unprepared for, and so refuses to clothe the negative event in the words which would affirm its reality for him.

Hamlet's forcible administration of the poison seems more of a kinetic rhetorical gesture than an efficient way to kill someone, as though, right up to the very moment of his own demise, Hamlet has constantly to act the part he has scripted for himself, in this case pouring venom into an orifice, a parodic and parasitic restaging of Claudius' original crime. Hamlet has failed, however, in getting Claudius to act his part and publically admit to either guilt or sorrow. This reduces the poetically just aspect of Hamlet's avenging role, rendering it incomplete, although as we will see, he finds a substitute in Horatio's protracted retelling of the tale.

Laertes' final words (332-6) have a beauty and nobility based upon simplicity. He dies without knowing anything of Claudius' fratricide, although Hamlet could have enlightened him, had he so wished.[87] Old Hamlet, in fact, is conspiciously absent from the scene, unless Gertrude's dying words could be interpreted as a reference to him.

Hamlet seems too self-occupied, too intent on creating one final piece of drama, to spare a thought for anyone, even his own father, although Laertes' reference to Polonius' death could, reasonably, have acted as a reminder. Neither is Ophelia mentioned in the scene; she has apparently also been forgotten by Horatio, who, as we recall, failed in his commission to look after her (IV.v.74)).

Hamlet, meanwhile, is now totally involved in his own concluding act, in which he portrays himself as himself – but a self without doubts. "I am dead Horatio" (337) he announces almost triumphantly. "Wretched Queen, adieu" (337), a poor enough epitaph for one who supposedly lived "almost by his looks" (IV.7.14)

If Hamlet expects to encounter his mother in the next life, she will be something other, something transformed from the mother he knows and whose imperfections he is so convinced of. We are reminded of I.ii.129, where Hamlet craves that his own flesh might melt into "a dew" – a phrase close enough phonetically to 'Adieu' and, in a play of such multiple and sonorous resonances, it might be plausible to see an echo of Hamlet's original, untenable wish, reverberating in the final farewell he now utters

> Had I but time – as this Fell sargeant, Death,
> Is strict in his arrest – O, I could tell you (341-2) [88]

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[87] Greenblatt (2001), 227.

[88] In the Folio we see: "Had I but time (as this fell Sargeant death / Is strick'd in his Arrest) Oh I could tell you" and in Q2: "Had I but time, as this Fell Sargeant Death / Is strict in his arrest". Note the Folio's

He is promising a revelation that death will prevent him from making, leaving us with a totally empty rhetorical flourish, although his life is spared for another twenty lines or more. The ghost, it will be remembered made a similarly void and teasing remark (I.v.13-22) claiming that some powerful, presumably divine prohibition forbade his elaborating on the 'secrets' of his 'prison-house'.

Possibly, on a more mundane level, all Hamlet means is that he could reveal Claudius' crime and its consequences to the assembled court – something he should, logically speaking, have done previously.

But let it be (343)

But let *what* be? The mundane fact that Hamlet has run out of time and therefore must delegate the task of narrator to Horatio could result in this verbal shrug – an admission of incapacity and nothing more. On the other hand, in a play as multi-layered as *Hamlet*, how can we avoid thinking of 'To be' and the incantatory material with which Hamlet subsequently prepared himself for the swordfight (215-20)? We seem, in this phrase, to be transported back to the frenzied gropings after some means of transforming speculation into speech, and of not contaminating the original in the process. Collins, concentrating on the notion of 'being', wonders if 'To be' is to be authentic as self? Hamlet measures this against "not to be" – to become. Can one be self or only become self? Can self only be known and expressed potentially? Indeed can there *be* self in time, in history? Can self exist within a social context? Is it possible to finalize self-potential in a creative, expressive act?[89] The point seems to involve the authenticity of a 'self' that is not expressed in some way, an embryonic self. Hamlet has already verbally created a distance between himself and his 'madness' (229-35) and now seems to be opening another, between himself and his past – albeit a past which will be a product of Horatio's observations and judgements, since Hamlet's dying preocupation concerns his good name, rather than the fate of his soul.[90]

Horatio at first refuses the commission (345-7), acting in a way which seriously undermines Hamlet's earlier remarks on his equanimity of temperament (III.ii.65-73). Draper, however, is full of praise for Horatio, who represents, he claims, a man in whom the four humours are perfectly balanced, "...to offset by contrast, the psychology

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use of capitals for 'Sargeant' rather than 'Death' and also for 'Arrest', as though to emphasize the judicial nature of the sequence. Notice also the slower tempo occasioned by the removal of the Arden edition's modern "-" punctuation marks. (Bertram and Kliman, 264-5)

[89] Collins, 61.

[90] Levao, 361.

of the Prince". He goes on, "He is a silent chorus, an influence seen and felt but scarcely an actor in the tragedy."[91] Macquerlot, however thinks that "...Hamlet's praise of Horatio's temperance sounds more like the projected fantasy of an unattainable ideal than an accurate portrayal."[92] (One thing we may definitely affirm with regard to Horatio is that he is the only named character to prosper under all three reigns.[93])

In chapter two I made the point that Hamlet represents both the subject of the utterance and of the enunciation and that in the scene with the gravediggers he was forced to relinquish both roles. Here, he is voluntarily doing so, becoming the subject of Horatio's utterance. He is confident that the story Horatio will tell will be the version Hamlet wants to be told. Rather than letting it be, he seeks to have Horatio give "a redundant sense of himself and explanation of what has happened".[94] Redundant perhaps, but surely living up to Hamlet's own theatrical view of the self he would like to have been. Calderwood refers to it as a "bad quarto" or "pirated edition"[95] of Shakespeare's play, resembling an actor's memorial reconstruction and destined to augment its limited perspective with much eulogistic material. This projected rendition will allow Hamlet "...to achieve a continuing verbal life ... both 'to be and not to be'."[96] Speech, even the speech of a reporter, may allow Hamlet to influence the future.

There remain very few things Hamlet can do before he dies. The first thing, of course, is to prevent Horatio's premature suicide and the second is to nominate Fortinbras as his successor. "The rest is silence" (363)[97]

If the play is seen to be about "...acting out rather than revenging",[98] then Hamlet's overwhelming anxiety to avoid leaving a "wounded name" makes sense. Barker, however, thinks Hamlet's last words are evidence that he "...goes to his death inserted into the traditional Christian values"[99] which earlier he had questioned, both verbally and by his 'opacity' as a character.

If we pause and examine the word 'rest', we find plenty of Scriptural allusions which would have been apparent to a contemporary audience. The Old Testament Israelites rebelled against God's will, and in Exodus 17.1 we read how they were then

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[91] Draper, 84-5.
[92] Macquerlot, 113.
[93] Levao, 434.
[94] Robinson, 184.
[95] Calderwood, xii.
[96] Ibid., 110.
[97] In Q1 Hamlet says, "Farewel *Horatio*, heaven receive my soule" (Bertram and Kliman, 266).
[98] Bloom (2003), 11.
[99] Barker, 40.

condemned to wander in the wilderness, an event which St. Paul uses as he updates the message in his letter to the Hebrews,[100] warning them that their rebellious attitude could present a barrier to salvation. 'Rest' thus is a desirable state, and indeed, Hamlet's own attitude throughout seems to reinforce this characterization. For example, in the 'To be' soliloquy, he praises death as a "consummation / Devoutly to be wished" (III.i.63-4), provided it manifests itself as a dreamless sleep. Similarly in II.ii.254 he declares, "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."

Rest is presented in a totally positive light, opposed to horrors such as the ghost's restlessness, which extends beyond the world of man into eternity. Conversely, Hamlet has been urging Horatio to inform Fortinbras of recent events, particularly those which have led to his being nominated as successor to the Danish throne,[101] so it now looks plausible to suggest that all Hamlet is doing is instructing Horatio to give Fortinbras the facts pertinent to the case, in other words, a suitably censored version, while the 'rest' as in 'remainder' need not be related. Jenkins, and several other editors, however, render the line: "which have solicited – the rest is silence." The dash, it seems to me, has the effect of distancing the latter half of the line from the former both syntactically and semantically. One explanation is offered by the Norton edition: "Some editors assume that the sentence is grammatically incomplete, broken off by death."[102] This seems inadequate as a rationale, since death does not silence Hamlet until after the dash, so what is being broken off? Possibly Jenkins, an editor of no little erudition, wanted to accentuate the punning potentialities of Hamlet's last words. As Marcus

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[100] Hebrews 4. "3. Therefore I sware in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. 5. And in this place again, if they shall enter into my rest. 6. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter there into, and they to whom it wast first preached, entered not therein for unbeliefs sake: 7. Again he appointed in David a certain day by Today, after so long a time, saying, as it is said, This day if ye hear his voice, harden not your hearts. 8. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not after this day have spoken of another. 9. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10. For he that is entered into his rest, also ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his" (glossed as "hath cast off his appetites, mortified his flesh, renounced himself, and followeth God"). "11. Let us study therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of disobedience. 12. For the word of God is lively, and mighty in operation, and sharper than any two-edged sword and (glossed as: "for it mortally woundeth the rebellious, and in the elect it killeth the old man that they should live unto God") entereth through, even unto the dividing asunder of the soul (glossed as: "where the affections are") and the spirit (glossed as: "which containeth will and reason), and of the joints, and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart."

[101] In Q2 the line is punctuated thus: "which have solicited, the rest is silence" (Bertram and Kliman, 266), and in the Folio: "which have solicited. The rest is silence. O, o, o, o" (ibid., 267).

[102] Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E Howard and Katherine Eisaman Maus (eds), *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1997), 1755.

warns, "...we need to go back to the early texts in order to keep ourselves from premature closure, from passively accepting readings which may have been generated by the ordering activities of editors."[103]

Horatio in fact echoes the word 'rest': "And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." (365) It is perhaps worth noting, on the theme of ambiguity, that there were bad as well as good angels, the bad being those who rebelled against God along with Satan; and who lurked around on earth tempting men to sin. [104] I mention this as a reinforcement of the potentialities for ambiguity inherent in the scene, ambiguities which Shakespeare was constantly introducing as part of his experimental strategy, and which, it seems plausible to suggest, here culminate in a last verbal acknowledgement of the limits of drama, couched in the evocative terms of the Requiem Mass.

Horatio at once sets about completing his mission. and as Calderwood notes, "...will transform the present-tense immediacy of tragic life into the mediated pastness of narrative, imparting point and order into what seems a chaos of death and destruction ... he is, as his name implies, a 'speaker'."[105] I find it fascinating that a speech we never actually hear can exert such dramatic power over commentators that they discuss its unwritten merits and defects, as presumably, a contemporary audience may have left the theatre doing. Horatio's speech could be seen as potentially lacking in any of the "problematic distance between event and interpretation",[106] which is the space inhabited by our, or rather, Shakespeare's version.

We can see a parallel between Horatio's unspoken speech and Hamlet's dozen to sixteen lines for insertion to 'The Mousetrap'. We never hear those extra lines, which, I argued, were to be a conscience-stricken monologue for the poisoner Lucianus, but instead we hear Claudius', the poisoner's, prayer scene. Similarly, Horatio's tidied-up eulogy is never uttered, but instead we have Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Neither Horatio nor Hamlet would be in a position to narrate all the play's events, having been absent for many of them.[107] Hardy picks up on exactly this point, noting that an illusion of realism is fostered by having the audience

> ...imagine the viewpoint of characters within the play ... while we briefly entertain the idea of fictitious characters 'real' enough to know or not to know the story we know, the sense of fiction is

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[103] Leah Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare : Local Reading And Its Discontents* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1988) 46.
[104] R. Chris Wassel Jr, *Shakespeare's Religious Language: A Dictionary* (London: Continuum, 2005) 16.
[105] Calderwood, xi.
[106] Levao, 363.
[107] Kerrigan, 189.

asserted. The act of comparison asserts the nature of the art in which we participate. The repeated emphasis of telling underlines all the acts of telling that have been performed.[108]

Fortinbras, whose line, "with sorrow I embrace my fortune" (393), reminds us of Claudius' "auspicious and a dropping eye", (I.ii.11) now inherits Denmark. Foakes sees him as a representative of the 'older' value system where deeds of arms rather than political manoeuvres dictated the fate of kingdoms.[109] As Ghose says, "Fortinbras, with an irony which he will never comprehend, fully deserves to succeed to the throne of Denmark and, in his own terms, inherit the earth for which Hamlet no longer has any use."[110]

Is this true? It seems to imply that Hamlet, by the time of his dying, had somehow reached a point of transcendence, as I doubt is demonstrably the case, since his hyper-preoccupation with a "wounded name" implies absorption in worldly concerns.

Fortinbras speaks:

> Bear Hamlet like a solider to the stage
> For he was likely had he been put on
> To have prov'd most royal (401-3)

These words, coupling 'soldier' with 'royal' seem used with irony, hinting at where this Prince is coming from, exactly what kind of reign we can expect.

There remains, before the entertainment ceases, one more occurrence, and this is the 'jig'. Gurr highlights the fact that, although the orders for the removal of Hamlet's body are precise (400-1) that for the disposal of the others is vague (406). He wonders if perhaps "...the three corpses might not have sprung back to life to dance a final jig".[111]

Shapiro notes that the popularity of these 'jigs' was so great that some people arrived only at the play's end in order to see them. These entertainments consisted in "...clowning, repartee and high-spirited dancing and song" and were written "in traditional ballad form". They seem to have functioned as somehow rounding off the performance with a counterpointing antidote to either, as here, the seriousness of tragedy, or perhaps "the fragile closure of romantic comedy".[112] In either case it is difficult to avoid seeing a touch of the older mystery and morality play ethos as being involved.

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[108] Barbara Hardy, *Shakespeare's Storytellers : Dramatic Narration* (London: Peter Owen, 1997) 189.
[109] Foakes, 93.
[110] Ghose, 57.
[111] Gurr (2004), 129.
[112] Shapiro, 47.

It might now be asked – is the 'rest' silence and "To be" answered by "Let it be", or are these mere incantatory attempts to solve the insoluble? If this is the case, then Shakespeare could be using a chastened Hamlet to make the statement that all metaphysical speculations, however brilliant, are inferior preludes to the desired end of accepting Providential governorship.

Alternatively – but equally negatively – the message could be that the only way to silence the tormenting inner controversy of speculation is to embrace a belief system – not so much because it represents the outcome of those speculations, but because it puts an end to them, as though speculations constituted an insoluble "sea of troubles".

Keast, speaking of *King Lear* but in a way applicable to *Hamlet*, notes that the "philosophical yield" of the play is meagre, even platitudinous, if extracted from the overall composition. The value lies in its method of expression, which he characterizes as adumbration and implication, "...usually in a paradoxical fusion of what normally appear to be incompatible areas of experience."[113] This could be read as an example of Shakespeare providing exactly the right amount and type of information, and at the right time.[114] I would tend to argue, however, that it is the speeches themselves which gain momentum, eluding strict control, and would even propose a parallel between the structure of the play and the structure (or lack of one) in Hamlet's own 'To be' soliloquy.

Wilks, summarizing the drama, thinks it provides the audience with insights "...more profound than that attenuated awareness attained to by Hamlet".[115] These insights are based on assuming a strong Judeao/Christian ethos as underwriting the play, one in which a "chain of coincidence" results in evil being defeated, and thus rendering the finale as the "...analeptic convulsion by which the moral order reconstitutes itself".[116] I have argued throughout that this orthodox reading is not textually supported, and that, as Walton Williams notes, the whole business of the ghost's injunction is contrasted with the "simple responses" of the play's other three avengers – Pyrrhus, Laertes and Fortinbras, which "...set clear standards that bear only tangentially on the complex personality of the Prince."[117] The 'To be' soliloquy, as examined in chapter two, is replete with the kind of speculations which only someone operating on

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[113] William R. Keast, "The 'New Criticism' and *King Lear*", in Russ McDonald (ed.), *Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1945-2000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 76.
[114] Driscoll, 82.
[115] Wilks, 123.
[116] Ibid., 124.
[117] Walton Williams, 66.

the outside of orthodoxy could utter. Ironically, Hamlet's attempt to speak as the poisoner, Lucianus, covers ground which the poisoner Claudius never treads. The prayer scene soliloquy is totally orthodox, and Claudius' outsidership is that of a sinner, not a spectator.

During 'To be' Hamlet confronts a universe of possibilities which ignores the Christian certainties. The only antidote Hamlet seems to find for the terrifying vistas he has opened in 'To be' are various incantatory variations on the original leitmotif. Words cannot shore up these vistas, since they form part of a gradual, ongoing disillusionment with the whole edifice of reality as created and maintained by speech.

A comparison with *Everyman* again seems apt, since, during the route to his eventual author-ordained fate, *Everyman* is abandoned by all his companions, companions who, as Hillman notes,[118] were not the firm friends or, in the play-world's personificatory scheme, were not the stable aspects of *Everyman*'s externalized self that he originally assumed. Similarly, Hamlet's representations of those around him undergo massive, negative alterations, or simply, as in the case of the ghost, cease to have any recognizable presence within the play. In fact these characters, with the exception of Horatio, come to resemble the various classical, literary, philosophical and religious tags with which Hamlet embellishes his speeches.

Hillman says of *Everyman* that "...the text's interechoing proverbs, commonplaces, and key spiritual terms comprise a signifying network that negates discrete identity."[119] I would argue that in *Hamlet* something more is occurring, and that an experimental search for authenticity is conducted via an eliminative investigation or negation of all these kinds of verbal semantics, thus casting them into stark relief. The investigative strategy operates partly through the wordplay of Hamlet, and partly through the various episodes which comprise *Hamlet*, as I have tried to show.

In the case of *Everyman*, a more distinct transcendence can be achieved, with the hero turning from soliloquizing, introspective attempts to find truth and instead seeking it by prayer. This works because *Everyman* is set firmly within a Judaeo/Christian framework, and progresses from ignorance to an orthodox enlightenment. However, "in the tragedies...the religious imperatives of piety and consolation are withheld."[120]

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[118] Hillman (1997), 45.
[119] Ibid., 46.
[120] Ackroyd, 447.

Hamlet then, seeks but does not find, because the play does not presuppose the goal of his search, but rather, excludes all presuppositions. As Bloom says, "There is an end to *Hamlet* but not to Hamlet."[121]

I do not believe that Shakespeare abandoned his investigation into how the rhetoric of drama sheds light on truth and reason with the ending of this play. That it had to finish was inevitable, but, I believe, with equal inevitability, Shakespeare pursued the theme, most notably in *King Lear*, whose protagonist I would see as an older Hamlet figure, and finally with Prospero in *The Tempest*.

[121] Bloom (2003), 120.

Conclusion

> "It is hard for us, belonging as we do to a Christian or post-Christian culture, to see how Genesis might read to an outsider. We have built into us before we begin to read the presumption that the serpent is Satan, the enemy of humankind. But the text of Genesis never says that. The serpent is just a snake"[1]

In my concluding chapter, "To Say One", I made the point that a tragedy requires a tragic ending but that Shakespeare, while providing *Hamlet* with such an ending, manages to subvert it. I compared *Hamlet* to *Everyman*, a comparison which only works up to a point, the point being that both truth and reason are, in *Everyman*, part of an orthodox Judaeo/Christian system, whereas in *Hamlet* individuals seem to use reason to construct rather than discover truth, then face the additional task of convincing themselves that there is some objective rightness about these subjective creations.

At the play's end Hamlet apparently returns to something resembling a more orthodox outlook, yet this is not presented as the result of speculation, since he has ceased soliloquising and merely gives us the outward manifestations of his dramatic existence as though he finally accepts his role within the playworld, the world of the tragedy, and can hope to take effective action only by doing so. The triumphant affirmation, "It is I, Hamlet the Dane" (V.i.250), could be seen as the culmination of his abandoning the labyrinths of speculation and embracing the given. He has not so much answered his own frenzied questions as ceased articulating them. Rather than a transcendence, we have a turning away from his former uncertainty.

The gravedigger, personifying the unknowable yet inescapable mystery of death, is given a riddling quicksands of a voice but one which Hamlet finds perversely attractive. After his interaction with this figure, Hamlet retains an awareness of its potency and is impelled to become the simplified subject of another's narrative creation. Horatio is the obvious choice for narrator since the rhetoric of his limited dramatic abilities will provide an account where imperfections are ironed out, mysteries solved, and the existence that was Hamlet's is ultimately justified. In other words a version of 'truth' will be the end product of a loving and laudatory commentator. Thus Hamlet's "wounded name" obsession seems the logical dying wish of one whose life denied him the simplicity and solidity of those heroes he admired – Pyrrhus, Fortinbras and even the chivalrous and lionized image of Old Hamlet. Rather than truth or reason, the final

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[1] A.D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 108.

goal of the rhetoric of drama in *Hamlet* is "to be" – in the sense of to be re-written or re-spoken, leaving the rest as silence, a silence deep enough to engulf and overcome all fears by denying them the existence of a voice.

My final comments hint at what I believe is Shakespeare's continuation of the dramatic experiment begun in Hamlet. I query Hamlet's state of awareness at the end of the play, after his apparent conversion to something resembling orthodoxy. I argue that *Hamlet* stops rather than concludes and that, having tidied up the loose ends, loosely, Shakespeare will return to the themes he has been examining, first in *King Lear* then later in *The Tempest*, both of which present versions of a Hamlet figure grown old and both of which will form the basis for further studies.

What could be referred to as echoes of *Hamlet* sound throughout *King Lear*, as has been well documented. Bloom claims that *King Lear* develops from act five of *Hamlet*[2] while Rees sees the 'To be' leitmotif occuring as a subliminal link in both *King Lear* and *The Tempest*,[3] and several commentators have highlighted the similarities between Hamlet's antic disposition and King Lear's madness.[4] Clemen sees Hamlet as combining elements of both Lear and the Fool,[5] Battenhouse arguing that Poor Tom most closely resembles Hamlet's antic disposition[6] and Bradbrook even claiming that Yorick was resucitated as the Fool.[7]

Some of *Hamlet*'s themes have been seen as continuing and even being partially resolved. For example, if words are seen as inadequate in *Hamlet*, then Collins believes the Fool's role is to point towards a possible alternative,[8] since, as the quest for the meaning of action was a major driving force in *Hamlet*, so the quest for the meaning of suffering is in Lear.[9] Hamlet could be seen as largely concerned with the unfolding of the self, whereas Lear exposes it.[10] Thus it might be appropriate to note, with Levin,[11] that Hamlet never arrived at the point of saying "The worst is not/ So long we can say

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[2] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999). 486.
[3] Rees, 211.
[4] For example, S.C. Boorman, *Human Conflict in Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1987), 213; Thomas Van Laan, *Role Playing in Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 206.
[5] Clemen (1987), 172.
[6] Battenhouse, 300.
[7] M.C. Bradbrook, *The Living Monument : Shakespeare and the Theatre of his Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 147.
[8] Collins, 63.
[9] Michael Goldman, *Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 98.
[10] Patterson, 113.
[11] Harry Levin, *Shakespeare and the Revolution of the Times : Perspectives and Commentaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 173.

this is the worst" (*Lear*, IV.i.28), and in fact both plays involve a misguided attempt to control the future by a verbal control of the present[12] (Lear's love test, for example, and also the use of a map to simplify and quantify – an attempt which events totally thwart).[13]

With regard to the status of *Hamlet* as a speech experiment, a parallel can be discerned in *Lear*[14] of seeing a breakdown in both speech and order. Lear's mode of utterance can be compared to Hamlet's, in that both microcosmically represent the wider issues of society in a state of flux and language as an evolving medium for its documentation. Lear's utterances have been characterized as soliloquizing speeches rather than soliloquies,[15] since he talks 'at' instead of 'to' others, particularly in act one.[16] Van Laan notes that Lear comments on his surroundings rather than on himself,[17] and later, on the heath, his ranting issues as a series of dreamlike proto-thoughts,[18] exceeding the dramatic conventions of soliloquies which address the audience[19] and demonstrate that unlike Hamlet, Lear remains very much within the world of the play but in a totally egocentric way.[20]

The role of speech in *Lear* has been characterized as being shown to be inadequate for conveying emotion and describing experience.[21] Hawkes sees this as a comment on the role of speech in society,[22] reduced to the status of mere Babel by disillusion.[23] This highlights one of *Hamlet*'s preoccupations which is, I have argued, to strip words of their meaning via the use of puns and other verbal eccentricities failing to replace them with any viable alternative. In *Lear*, however, a movement has been discerned towards discovering, or more accurately creating, a replacement,[24] perhaps some form of periodic table where words signify natural kinds, irreducible elements of meaning allied to experience. The language of reason can thus be superseded by that of

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[12] Hillman (1992), 242.
[13] James R. Siemon, *Shakespearean Iconoclasm* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1985), 257.
[14] Boorman, 199.
[15] Clemen (1987), 171.
[16] Wolfgang Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (London: Methuen, 1961), 134; Battenhouse, 281.
[17] Van Laan, 204.
[18] Clemen (1961), 151.
[19] Clemen (1987), 176.
[20] Van Laan, 198.
[21] Robert Grudin, *Mighty Opposites : Shakespeare and Renaissance Contrariety* (London: University of California Press, 1979), 150.
[22] Terence Hawkes, *William Shakespeare's King Lear* (Plymoth: Northcote House, 1995), 46-9.
[23] Salkeld, 100.
[24] Dillon, 130.

prophecy,[25] which is akin to madness, a movement I observed in the close of Ophelia's life. It thus becomes possible to comment, with Wilson Knight, that in Lear "a tremendous soul is ... incongrously geared to a puerile intellect ... Lear is mentally a child; in passion a titan."[26]

As with *Hamlet* Shakespeare's technique of undermining by juxtaposition is present in *Lear*, particularly so when villains utter universal truths.[27] We have seen this linked to what I argued was the older mystery and morality play ethos re-energized and adapted to an experimental scenario. As Weimann comments, Shakespeare's use of the ritual past is often incomplete,[28] indicating, as I stressed throughout my reading of *Hamlet*, that Shakespeare is constructing the tools as he proceeds, especially with regard to 'types' or characters whose scope and limits are dictated by the need for clarity of exposition,[29] rather than by orthodox constraints, as was traditionally the case. Thus we can again witness the ingredients common to the morality genre, but extracted from its Judaeo/Christian schema.[30] The Fool has been viewed as a benign vice figure, who addresses the audience as much as he does his master.[31] Cavell has suggested that the soul of humanity is being depicted[32] not, as formerly, a voyager across an orthodox landscape, but more as though the soul itself were the ground and cause of events. Kott sees *Lear* very much as a morality play[33] – but minus the crucial restoration of order as a finale.

This disruption of expectations applies both to those expectations the play's narrative structure suggests and to those the audience might reasonably infer due to their familiarity with the older tradition.[34] (Shakespeare, it must be recalled, deliberately alters the conclusion of his sources in order to create a tragic end).[35] Grudin sees a subversion of the "wheel of fortune" symbol,[36] which I would liken to

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[25] Clemen (1961), 143-4; Northrop Frye, *Fools of Time* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 120.
[26] George Wilson Knight, *"King Lear* and the Comedy of the Grotesque", in Lerner (ed), 132-3.
[27] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 339.
[28] Weimann (1978), 41.
[29] Margolies, 74.
[30] Boorman, 201.
[31] Clemen (1961), 142.
[32] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge In Six Plays Of Shakespeare* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 81.
[33] Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (London: Routledge, 1991), 120-1.
[34] Brian Gibbons, *Shakespeare and Multiplicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 83; David Young, "Hamlet, Son of Hamlet", in William G. Holzberger and Peter B. Waldeck (eds), *Perspectives on Hamlet* (Cranbury, NJ: D.C. Heath, 1975), 83.
[35] J. Stampfer, "The Catharsis of *King Lear*" in Lerner, 147; Joseph H. Summers, *Dreams of Love and Power : On Shakespeare's Plays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 101.
[36] Grudin, 143.

Hamlet's subversion of the "dance of death" in the graveyard scene, and Nuttall, commenting on Cordelia's pitiful death, notes that a "mythic logic" seems operative,[37] a logic which dictates the disappearance of the Fool once Lear has reached a certain stage of awareness.[38]

The religious dimension in *Lear* is, I believe, more obscurely realized than in *Hamlet*. In *Lear's* pagan setting the suggestion could be that morality without orthodoxy is being examined.[39] Northop Frye refers to "...tensions between a tragic structure and a framework of assumptions derived from Christianity."[40] Stampfer, however, argues that a notion of Christian ethics is being portrayed, but without the accompanying notion of salvation,[41] and that therefore repentance for evil does not work.[42] In a similarly subversive way, Orwell sees the love test as a demonstration of the idea that, although giving – in an orthodox sense – is good, giving in order to gain is not,[43] so that the concept of 'time' in this play is as a retributive rather than restorative agent.[44] And, as Cavell notes,[45] any claim made by any character to somehow know the future is evidence of a mind closed to potentialities, since, unlike the temporo- spatial security of a divinely upheld cosmos, as Kastan notes, Lear's world lacks "the coherence and structure that characters so insistently seek".[46] In fact, the enigmatic Edmund, whom Bloom sees as not occupying the same playworld as Lear,[47] comes across as a kind of proto-atheist,[48] in whose world it could be said that "Reason seems able to overthrow the deification of everything but itself."[49] Stampfer refers to Edmund as a 'real' atheist, implying that in contemporary terms the definition may have been less conclusive than the above quotations suggest. Further research would be needed

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[37] Nuttall, 305.
[38] Farnham, 118-9; Hillman (1992), 203; L.C. Knight (1960), 95. Kastan refers to it as the play's "characteristic technique of arousing optimism only to crush it" (David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 115).
[39] Stanley Wells (1997), *Shakespeare The Poet and his plays* (London: Methuen, 1997), 266.
[40] Northrop Frye, *On Shakespeare* (Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1986), 102.
[41] Stampfer, 147.
[42] Ibid., 152.
[43] George Orwell, "The Moral of *King Lear*" in Lerner, 128-9.
[44] Kastan, 104-7.
[45] Cavell (1987), 93.
[46] Kastan, 108.
[47] Bloom (1999), 501.
[48] The OED lists the earliest use of the term as 1568: Coverdale, *Hope of Faithf.* Pref. Wks. II. 139 Eat we and drink we lustily; to-morrow we shall die: which all the epicures protest openly, and the Italian *atheoi*; Golding's 1571 usage is more akin to the modern notion: Golding, *Calvin on Ps.* Ep. Ded. 3 The Atheistes which say..there is no God, as is Rowlands 1604: *Looke to it* 23 Thou damned Athist..That doest deny his power which did create thee.
[49] Cavell (1987), 96.

for a conclusive categorisation of Edmund, or indeed any other amoral Shakespearean character as operating definitively outside of the Judaeo/Christian scheme. Edmund's pagan setting allows for a more fluid and moral outlook.

I have suggested that both Lear and Prospero could be taken as Hamlet figures grown old, Lear representing the honour-obsessed, martial figure for whom, as Frye says "we can feel dramatic sympathy where we don't necessarily feel moral sympathy,"[50] and Prospero representing the scholarly introverted aspect.

This framework would enable a study to be undertaken, possibly using, as a linking device, Berry's provocative statement that *King Lear* is made clearer if we see the final plays, particularly *The Tempest*, as containing "... an autobiography of Lear and a biography of Cordelia".[51] Hillman notes that *The Tempest* as a whole can be seen as an attempt to validate Lear's opening wish[52] and suggests that all three plays are involved with the notion of cheating mortality,[53] but that in *The Tempest* any movement towards a resolution is itself subverted, since, rather than as a play which subverts, *The Tempest* can be read as an interrogation of the subversive principle itself.[54] 'Tempestas' as Frye notes is Latin for 'time' as well as a storm.[55]

For now, then, I conclude that these plays, but especially *Hamlet*, are exemplars of Shakespeare's construction of an experimental model, which, as Altman says, gestures towards a Senecan legacy by opening with a deliberately simplistic, deterministic scenario, which is then undermined by the ensuing complexity of motivation and emotion portrayed, so that the audience can observe 'a variety of attitudes towards the tragic story being unfolded'.[56] To bring this to its final conclusion, I would add that the audience can also observe speech being portrayed in an equally interrogatory and dynamic mode.

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[50] N. Frye (1986), 103.
[51] Berry, 156.
[52] Hillman (1992), 236.
[53] Hillman (1992), 244-250.
[54] Ibid., 230.
[55] N. Frye (1986), 178.
[56] Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind : Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (London: University of California Press, 1978), 269.

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