The Death and Return of the Author: Hamlet and Much Ado about Nothing

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"Today the subject apprehends himself elsewhere, and 'subjectivity' can return at another place on the spiral: deconstructed, taken apart, shifted, without anchorage: why should I not speak of 'myself' since this 'my' is no longer the 'self'?"

[1] Roland Barthes's question is unanswerable to us now after over a century's worth of philosophical deconstruction of the Cartesian Cogito. Heidegger's Dasein is first and foremost a public construct, a creature of location, technology, present tense work and everyday language. The essential core self is a mere trick of rhetoric.

[2] The Lacanian subject is, as Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen puts is, "the originally divided, split subject of desire, the profoundly subjected subject of the signifier and of language [...] this infinitely decentered subject, reduced to only the desire for that part of itself that language simultaneously arouses and forbids it from rejoining" (Borch-Jacobsen 63). Deleuze and Guattari theorized a non-autonomous, subjectless, schizoanalytic self that is not confined to the individual, but is, in Paul Bains's words, a "fusional, transitivist 'emergent self'" (Bains 513). Kristeva argued that the subject was always already in process and under trial. Patriarchal semiotic systems kill off the maternal body, substituting a gendered, political and collective identity in the subject through the processes of abjection.

[3] Foucault set out to write a history of the different modes by which human beings are made subjects. For him, the subject comes to mean that which has been constituted through certain disciplinary discursive practices. He loudly announced the death of the subject, of the Subject in capital letters, of the subject as origin and foundation of Knowledge, of Liberty, of Language and History.

[4] So persuasive and powerful have been such philosophical and theoretical attacks that they have tended to drown out positions that have attempted to reinstate the subject however radically tranformed, as with late Foucault's theory of the souci de soi, Derrida's post-dialectical ethical subject, or Etienne Balibar's suspended citizen subject.

[5] More systematic, however, has been the assumption that the dismantling of the self-sovereign subject is exclusively the affair of theory, psychoanalysis and philosophy. The role of social science this century in decentring and pluralizing the central core Cogito has been overlooked, despite its influence on thinking in the humanities in the fifties and sixties.

George Herbert Mead, in his work early in the century (clearly influenced by Durkheim's Homo duplex and Cooley's looking-glass self), distinguished between the "I" (our "own" self) and the "me" (an aggregate of social roles constructed out of the gestures and discourses of those around us), effectively arguing that what he called the social self preceded the development of any sense of an introspective selfhood. In his 1913 lecture, "The Social Self," he argued that the mind was primarily a social construct, a construct that is self-generating according to an explicitly theatrical, performative process of individuation. We consciously adopt the gestures, intonations, even the facial expressions of other members of our social group:

The child can think about his conduct as good or bad only as he reacts to his own acts in the remembered words of his parents. Until this process has been developed into the abstract process of thought, self-consciousness remains dramatic, and the self which is a fusion of the remembered actor and this accompanying

chorus is somewhat loosely organized and very clearly social. Later the inner stage changes into the forum and workshop of thought. The features and intonations of the dramatis personae fade out and the emphasis falls upon the meaning of the inner speech, the imagery becomes merely the barely necessary cues. But the mechanism remains social, and at any moment the process may become personal. (Mead 377).

Erving Goffman, the quirky American sociologist, father of dramaturgy and frame analysis, in his 1959 The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, wittily and elegantly argued for the theatricality of the self, relocating the source of the generation of identity in social interaction rather than in inner psychobiology. He defined the individual as divided into two parts, the performer, "a harried fabricator of impressions involved in the all-too-human task of staging a performance," and the character performed, "a figure, typically a fine one, whose spirit, strength, and other sterling qualities the performance [is] designed to evoke" (Goffman 222). Goffman scoffs at our naive notions of the core self:

In our society the character one performs and one's self are somewhat equated, and this self-as-character is usually seen as something housed within the body of its possessor, especially the upper parts thereof, being a nodule, somehow, in the psychobiology of personality. (222)

Goffman's "something housed" is neatly annihilated by the donnishly scornful "being a nodule, somehow." To replace this naive model, Goffman has recourse to a dramaturgical model which at once complexifies the self, and renders it remarkably empty of anything we would recognize as inner resource or interiority.

The character self is an image imputed to one in social interaction: "A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed caracter, but this imputation--this self--is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it" (223). The "whole machinery of self-production" (223) is dependent on others, dependent on the other actors we team up with, on the audience we are wishing to impress, dependent, in short, on "social establishments" (223). In any ordinary scene of self-production, Goffman asserts: there will be a back region with its tools for shaping the body, and a front region with its fixed props. There will be a team of persons whose activity on stage in conjunction with available props will constitute the scene from which the performed character's self will emerge, and another team, the audience, whose interpretative activity will be necessary for this emergence. The self is a product of all of these arrangements, and in all of its parts bears the marks of this genesis. (223)

Behind the scenes, back of backstage, is the only core self Goffman allows, the harried performer:

he has a capacity to learn, this being exercised in the task of training for a part. He is given to having fantasies and dreams, some that pleasurably unfold a triumphant performance, others full of anxiety and dread that nervously deal with vital discreditings in a public front region. He often manifests a gregarious desire for team-mates and audiences, a tactful considerateness for their concerns; and he has a capacity for deeply felt shame, leading him to maximize the chances he takes of exposure. (224)

These attributes of the individual qua performer self are, Goffman admits, psychobiological in nature, "and yet they seem to arise out of intimate interaction with the contingencies of staging performances" (224).

Goffman is claiming here that interiority is a provisional back-of-backstage identity wholly concerned with preparations for, or broody post mortems of, frontstage performances of the socialized, theatrical self. The private self is under these lights defined entirely in terms of training for, and reflection on, roles played and to be played in social situations among similarly theatricalized teams. Goffman thus deftly wipes out the possibility of a core identity identical over time somewhere within the body, secretly at deep work upon its own interiority. Emotions are defined as role appraisal, mostly centring on social embarrassment and wish-fulfilment. Our public identities, however much we distance ourselves from them, however far ironically exposing their sham pretence, constitute and generate our private minds, since the self on its own is entirely taken up by critical thinking and feeling about our public performed selves.

Goffman's manoeuvres wipe out any gap between the subject of utterance and the subject of enunciation by reversing the conventional liberal humanist hierarchy--the true self within, as the mystery behind the mask, is now a mere bundle of emotions about masks, constructed through social interaction. By theorizing the

individual as performance, Goffman also gives us a wry explanation as to why we enjoy going to the theatre. We go in order to learn some good techniques in impression management:

A character staged in a theatre is not in some ways real, nor does it have the same kind of real consequences as does the thoroughly contrived character performed by a confidence man; but the successful staging of either of these types of false figures involves use of real techniques--the same techniques by which everyday persons sustain their real social situations. (225)

Goffman's opposition between "real" and "false" or "contrived" is not disingenuous since the whole effort of Presentation of Life has been to prove that what we took to be the source of our sense of real being, our own nodular psychobiological self, is a contrivance, a confidence trick, a mere performance of false figures of the self. The only valid source of the real is in social situations themselves proven to be thoroughly and incontrevertibly staged.

What interests me in this paper is the rhyme between Goffman's sociological theory and intense debates that occurred in the 1980s over representations of interiority in early modern drama. Stephen Greenblatt, in Renaissance Self-Fashioning, argues that the sixteenth century saw the emergence of a fashion for autonomous self-creation, through performance, but a fashion which was itself almost entirely governed by the governing culture's power relations (Greenblatt 256). Othello's self-fashioning is dependent on "a language that is always necessarily given from without and upon representation before an audience," therefore selfhood is defined as a "theatrical identity, where existence is conferred upon a character by the playwright's language and the actor's performance" (245).

Francis Barker, in The Tremulous Private Body, argues that the teatrum mundi commonplace in early modern England should be taken literally, insisting on "the exteriority of meaning" enacted in the foregrounding of role and part which the theatrical figuration of early modern culture deploys (Barker 26). Hamlet is therefore a play about doubled up surfaces rather than profound depths and seeming: "In Hamlet, social life is a succession of brightly lit tableaux set against black backgrounds whose darkness is not the symbol of a mysterious alterity, but simply the meaninglessness of the void beyond the surface of signification itself" (Barker 26). This world of surfaces, this "complex of signs, devices and visualities," is figured in Hamlet's own play of subjectivities, pretending to disguise an undramatisable mystery announced with such bruised fervour by the prince in the line "I have that within that passeth show" (1.2.85). Barker uses Hamlet's recorder speech to prove that this mysterious core is a vacuous hollow, since the recorder is a hollow pipe: "At the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing" (Barker 37).

Catherine Belsey, in The Subject of Tragedy, picks up on Barker's lead, and argues that it is impossible to believe in Hamlet as a unified subject, since early modern plays are so cunningly pitched between emblematic modes of representation and emergent illusionism. She, like Barker, looks at the world as theatre metaphor in Hamlet, particularly Hamlet's "sterile promontory" speech in Act 2:

Is the audience invited to see Hamlet expressing his deepest feelings, displaying the subjectivity, complex and contradictory, of the sensitive prince? Or, since he is talking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern here, is this a pose, an antic disposition designed to delude them, an assumed melancholy? Or, if the world is a stage, what is Hamlet but an actor, expressing and concealing nothing, but offering a performance, a form which does not imply an anterior substance? Or, since conversely the stage must be a world, does this fiction, this conceit, lay claim to a kind of truth? But which of the possible truths? (Belsey 27- 8)

Both Barker and Belsey accept the teatrum mundi metaphor as essential to both their arguments about Hamlet's displays of interiority--Barker to argue that the residual subjectivity left over to Hamlet after he has refused or quizzed to death the social roles "of courtier, lover, son, politician, swordsman, and so on" (Barker 35) turns out to be a mere vacancy; Belsey to argue that the plurality of actorly possibilities available when acting and interpreting Hamlet deconstructs the unity essential to liberal humanist definitions of the self.

[6] My point is less the rather obvious one that interaction theory has influenced literary criticism, but

rather the possibility that the culture we are reading when we turn to the early modern period may be our culture's mirror. Early modern drama is so concerned with metatheatrical descriptions of the self because the Reformation, early capitalism and the Renaissance as cultural forces were fashioning an emergent idea of the individual. This construction is heavily mixed in with allegorical, familial-political and functional descriptions of the self as a communal, hierarchical unit. Our culture has been taking its leave of liberal humanist ideology of the individual, and is attempting to move into forms of credence in communal, multi-functional and politicised identities. It has therefore become as intensely obsessed with the linguistic and metatheatrical constructions of subjectivity as its 16th and 17th century counterparts, finding in early modern culture the opening moves to its endgame.

[7] So we have Goffman theorizing the need for social distance and mystifying heirarchies in cultures, for instance, as a strategy of the powerful to preserve their status, disguise their shame, and indeed to create power:

The audience senses secret mysteries and powers behind the performance, and the performer senses that his chief secrets are petty ones. As countless folk tales and initiation rites show, often the real secret behind the mystery is that there really is no mystery; the real problem is to prevent the audience from learning this too. (Goffman 61)

Goffman's statement is echoed by Michael Mangan, in his preface to Shakespeare's tragedies: "Hamlet's rôle-playing, and the audience's uncertainty as to when he is playing a rôle and when he is not, serves to compound the sense of Hamlet's impenetrability" (Mangan 139).

Goffman defines sincerity as belief in the impression fostered by one's performance, but argues that most people have a certain role distance by which they are consciously not taken in by their own routine: "This possibility is understandable, since no one is in quite as good an observational position to see through the act as the person who puts it on" (15). Goffman's cynicism is echoed in Barbara Freedman's Staging the Gaze, particularly in the sections on The Taming of the Shrew: "Kate has learned to be a spectator to herself as an actor, and so to conceive of herself as simultaneously inside and outside of the world of play" (Freedman 23). Indeed, Freedman's thesis that the Shrew stages theatricality in order to show how theatre can degenerate into mere show, whilst also "explicitly [calling] out for a performative mode capable of interrupting and revisioning social roles" (142), can be usefully set beside Goffm an's discussion of discrepant roles and misrepresentation.

[8] Goffman, in short, is useful to an understanding of the shift, in the 1980s, into a theory of the theatricality of subjectivity that underlies much of the new work in Shakespeare studies generated by new historicism and cultural materialism. What I would like to demonstrate now, is how Goffman's interpretative framework and key terms can still be useful for us when interpreting performances of Shakespeare's plays.

In the orchard scene in Much Ado in Act Three, Hero and Ursula conspire to be overheard by Beatrice in order to convince her that Benedick loves her and that she ought to fall in love with him. The scene is one of the most highly theatrical scenes in the play, with Beatrice duped into being a gullible audience to the play put on by Hero. The real audience watches and overhears Beatrice watching and overhearing Hero and Ursula deliberately misrepresenting Benedick as lover, and castigating Beatrice as too proud and scornful and "self-endeared" (3.1.56).

[9] Hero and Ursula are really staging public versions of Beatrice and Benedick, and use the overhearing trick to convince Beatrice that she is secretly party to what Goffman would call the opposite team's dark secrets. The scene, in being so successful in provoking love in Beatrice, raises the possibility that private emotions are generated by social pressures and role status.

Shakespeare makes this very clear in Beatrice's monologue at the end of the scene, where she contemplates marriage to Benedick as much because she is horrified at being thought a contemptuous froward scold as she is attracted to the idea of Benedick. Ursula's and Hero's stratagem is to combine both tactics to ensure their metatheatrical triumph. They at once proffer an idealized portrait of Benedick as a public figure--"foremost in report through Italy", "an excellent good name" (ll. 97-8)--and a satirical portrait of Beatrice both

as overly cynical spectator--"her eyes,/Misprising what they look on" (ll. 51-2)--and actress of an unfashionable and uncommendable role--Hero's sarcastic "not to be so odd and from all fashions/As Beatrice is cannot be commendable" (ll. 72-3). The dangerous corollary of the scene is that love is fabricated by social scenes, and that the way one lives out one's self is conditioned by team performances of ideal and satirical role versions of one's supposed interiority.

This possibility is linked to the play's exploration of report, reputation and slander and its rhetorical counterpart in the consequences of the bifold authority of language in wit. Cupid's arrow is defined as hearsay in this scene (ll. 22-3), as fabricated rhetorical dramatisation of false figures of the self. Hero explicitly condemns Beatrice for double-dealing with her witty scorn: "I never yet saw man,/How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured,/But she would spell him backward" (ll. 59-61). Beatrice's tactic in wit is to trope the object of her scorn into its satirical extreme, defined here by Hero as its opposite. Yet this , of course, is precisely what Hero is doing with Beatrice. She is fabricating a public reputation for Beatrice by spelling her backward. This has the unsettling effect of being witty about her wit, troping her tropes, slandering her slander, creating a vicious circle of rhetoric about rhetoric that may be one of the meanings of the "nothing" of the title.

Hero is particularly subtle when she accuses Beatrice of loving herself too much: "her wit/Values itself so highly that to her/All matter else seems weak" (ll. 52-4). She is subtle because she defines Beatrice's self-endearment as a function of her wit's internal economy, and it is characteristic of the self-entangled rhetoric of the play that we cannot say whether Hero means "wit" in the sense of seat of consciousness, or the more modern sense of playful use of language.

[10] Beatrice's mind, Hero suggests, is being generated by the way her public discourse fabricates her identity for the world.

What makes interpretation difficult here is that Hero is using this point as a theatrical manoeuvre to persuade Beatrice that this is indeed her reputation. What we are being given as ironic spectators of this staged act of spectatorship is a complex chain of fabricated misrepresentations as generators of identity. Beatrice habitually tropes others into satirical versions of their public roles. Hero stages Beatrice's misrepresentations as functions of her love for her own power to trope. Beatrice overhears this and takes Hero's misrepresentation of herself as a definition of her public interiority. We as spectators watch her fashion herself anew, see her change roles in midstream, as it were, effectively seeing her trope her self-as-wit into a self as self-spectating performance. "Contempt, farewell; and maiden pride, adieu" (l. 109), cries Beatrice, collapsing together her power to be witty, and her power to remain unmarried. "She cannot love," Hero had said, "Nor take no shape nor project of affection,/She is so self-endeared" (ll. 54-6). By saying so, Hero creates love in Beatrice. The staged criticism designs the shape and the project. It fabricates a subjectivity for Beatrice by shifting her affections from herself (defined as witty rhetoric) to Benedick (defined as ideal audience for the putative role of lover/ wife.) The self is defined, then, as a decision to credit reports on one's public self, and to act on those reports by taking on the shape and project of their figures of speech.

Shakespeare makes this radical point about subjectivity, though, in a comedy that stages slander as rhetorical murder. Hero has literally to act out her dead reputation, when falsely accused, by playing dead. The effect of this dark theme on the comic orchard scenes is to warn the spectators not to take the Beatrice-Benedick love story too facetiously. It may be true that the self is generated by other teams' performance of one's self-as-character. It may also be true that the self is defined as a product of the mind's use of language in public, not as source of public speech. Nevertheless, Shakespeare, by staging these potential truths as dangerous manipulations, by comparing them to acts of vicious slander, goes against the grain of his own radical propositions.

The orchard performance that tricks Beatrice is "treacherous bait" (l. 28) according to Ursula, and, in the context of the play as a whole, we cannot help wondering whether there is real treachery here. Precisely because the culture was moving so tremendously towards the construction of a privileged subject-position for its constituent members away from more communal definitions of the individual, so it had become so very much more easy to dupe and manipulate the identities of

solitary victims through staged acts of imputed reputation as misrepresentation.

[11] Much Ado is a play about the vulnerability of the individual to performed slander as much as it is about the troping of subjectivity. "What fire is in my ears? Can this be true?" asks Beatrice after her friends' performance of her self (l. 107).

Hamlet as a play is similarly preoccupied by slander, misrepresentation and selves fabricated from the nothings of rhetorical tropes. The fire in Hamlet's ears is his memory of the ghost's narrative of the poisoning of his father, itself an emblem of slander as rhetorical murder.

[12] Hamlet, as performer (especially in the monologues which are perfect examples of the discourse of Goffman's "back region with its tools for shaping the body"), is also obsessed by theatrical duplicity, and uses the players to act out a version of the Claudius team's dark secrets, thereby underlining the corrupt court's abuse of theatrical techniques. His antic disposition is at once symptomatic of the warped theatricality of the court, and diagnostic of the madness of its discourse and ceremonies. It is by acting out its theatricality that Hamlet performs the role of minister and scourge, at once victim of the court's theatrical ascription of role identities, and parody satirist of its exploitation of the space of government as stage for the acting out of Claudius's self-endeared rhetoric.

[13] To perform this complex role means, unfortunately, that Hamlet must sacrifice the very stable identity that the court offers him as a sop to his conscientiousness about the ethics of succession.

[14] Hamlet's backstage performer identity is revealed, then, in a sternly proud attack on the theatricality of power (as opposed to the more ethical theatricality of the real stage), and it is his defence of an authentic core performer-self beneath the theatrical self-as-character that motivates much of the play, and inaugurates, as Barker has argued, "the figure that is to dominate and organize bourgeois culture," the inner reality of the subject (Barker 35). Barker times the moment of this anachronistic inauguration down to Hamlet's line "I have that within which passeth show," and is seconded in this by Belsey. I'd like to look at this speech in context to examine the dramaturgical and performance theory of the self outlined above. Hamlet has just acknowledged that death is common:

HAMLET. Seems, madam? Nay, it is, I know not 'seems'.
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play;
But I have that within which passeth show--
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.74-86)

[15] Barker and Belsey clearly seem to have a strong case here.

[16] Interiority is being proclaimed by Hamlet as a desperate act of self-fashioning, but since it is precisely uttered in language and within a court setting, the inward self possessed ("I have that") may just simply be another version of the public show he is attempting to disparage.

Indeed, if we see how swiftly Hamlet-as-performer adopts a theatrical role after the encounter with the ghost of his father, Shakespeare does seem to be making the point that this something within which passeth show may be a crafty product of Hamlet's first role, as angry young man in mourning. In other words, the claim to a secret interiority is being improvised here, in Greenblatt's sense of the "ability to play a role, to transform oneself, if only for a brief period and with mental reservations, into another [...] the acceptance of a disguise, the ability to effect a divorce, in Ascham's phrase, between the tongue and the heart" (Greenblatt 228). Only in this case, it is the union between tongue and heart that is being improvised, and the role being played is the transformation of the other acted out by one's surfaces into the potentially more powerfully unsettling false figure of the secretly unified subject.

But I think we can read this speech contextually so that a more complicated idea of role performance emerges. What Hamlet discovers, in performing this speech to his mother, is precisely that secret selfhood (Goffman's

performer) can be performed as character. He speaks the speech so as to be overheard by Claudius, deliberately arching the accusation of hypocrisy against his uncle (who has opened the scene by saying it is time to stop mourning for Hamlet his brother.) The speech sets up a private loyal sincerity against the seeming of Claudius' court. But, as the rest of the play shows, Hamlet, on being given a character identity to play by the ghost, goes to immense pains to ensure that the secret is kept by Horatio and Marcellus. In other words, Hamlet-as-performer needs a secret (knowing about the murder and the injunction to revenge) and also a theatrical team who shares that secret with him: he needs both these things in order to have an interiority, that is, in order to perform interiority.

That this is true may be proven by the tight fit between Hamlet as a set of motivations that an audience might intuit and the kinds of decisions any actor must take in order to play Hamlet. Both audience and actor must speculate that Hamlet's performed interiority (defined both as a set of team-agreed motivations and as a role) is vulnerable to charges of improvisation, since it cannot be seen to know whether the ghost has reported the past truthfully. This uncertainty pushes Hamlet (again defined as a publically perceived actor onstage and as an actor offstage speculating about the role of Hamlet) paradoxically into excessive improvisation, as with the ungrounded accusations against Ophelia. It is by improvising madly that he theatricalizes his own mystery, displaying his own character self as an open secret, and thereby acting out the power of very simply having a secret interiority, a secret knowledge, secrecy as a mysteriously displayed performer identity.

[17] This at once condemns the corruption of the court by being a fool's mimickry of its theatre of historical lies and propaganda, and also outwits its network of power, by positing a performed selfhood seemingly entirely unconstructed by the opposite team's regime. Only with a secret, shared with his own team, can Hamlet fabricate an interiority that can hope to rival the secret political identities thought to be generated by the enemy team offstage prior to Claudius's public display. That the secret is ghostly and potentially insubstantial matters less than that the performed interiority of Hamlet is perceived to have relations to a theatre of suggestion, a performance that suggests that the performer knows something secret. By performing well and thereby hinting at what Goffman calls "secret mysteries and powers behind the performance," Hamlet seems to be at all times on the verge of revealing state secrets at a very vulnerable moment for the new regime.

What is terribly depressing to Hamlet's team is that the performed selfhood of the prince is sheer bluff in its positing of itself as unconstructed by the regime: for the only secret his father gave them to play with was the enemy team's dark secret. This means, in effect, that the performed interiority of Hamlet is fabricated around secret knowledge that has been generated by Claudius. Hamlet's performed core self, in other words, is Claudius's secret.

[18] Hamlet's whole project throughout the play is to act out this warning to Claudius--"I know your secret." This is depressing because Hamlet's openly secret performer self is condemned to be read by the enemy team as being entirely shaped by that team. Hamlet's monologues (as the space where the 'real' performer self is overheard speculating about the theatrical difficulties involved in staging the performer-character) demonstrate that the backstage performer is suffering from something like political nausea. Perhaps what takes Hamlet (in his preparatory and speculative form in Goffman's back region) so much time in the play is that a ritual of abasement needs to performed. He must act out, in the offstage preparation periods, what Goffman refers to as "deeply felt shame" which threatens "to maximize the chances he takes of exposure." That shame turns round the abandonment of all pride in his performed role in the front region, for the performer must take the rival team he despises so seriously that he must construct the whole performed interiority around Claudius's secret past.

Hamlet's core self, then, is not a void as Barker intimates, but a back region forced to fabricate an interiority based entirely on the dark secret of the enemy team. This is essentially what Greenblatt argues in Self-Fashioning, i.e. that the sense of self is constructed by the secret power relations of one's culture. Does the play present this, however, as good news? Hardly. One way we can understand the play's position on this is to reconsider the issue of slander raised by Much Ado. Hamlet in the front region is seen to define the displayed interiority in opposition to the hypocritical theatricality of the court by positing a sincere performer-interiority, which

must be seen to be hinting at his enemy's secret. This self-definition turns round an angry defiance of his mother's throwaway use of the word "seems." Another of Shakespeare's characters had already reacted strongly to the same word, Claudio in Much Ado:

CLAUDIO. I never tempted her with word too large,
But as a bashful brother to his sister showed
Bashful sincerity and comely love.

HERO. And seemed I ever otherwise to you?

CLAUDIO. Out on thy seeming! I will write against it.
You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown.
But you are more intemperate in your blood
Than Venus, or to those pampered animals
That rage in savage sensuality. (4.1.52-61)

Claudio is very like Hamlet here. Both are seen to differentiate themselves from their enemy's hypocrisy by positing their own sincere interiority. Both, in their back regions, are obsessed by secret lust as a figure for court corruption (as the revenge tragedies written after Hamlet understood.) What distinguishes them is that Hamlet presents his self as a political scourge of the corrupt court family, as faithful mourner of a murdered father, whereas Claudio is publically slandering the woman he loves. But even this distinction begins to fall away when we see how Hamlet-as-perfomer and performer-character feels he must slander both his mother and Ophelia.

Shakespeare is saying here that the self may have to be defined by the culture one moves in, even when one's stance is as enemy of the state. He is therefore entertaining the radical proposition that the performer identity (the only internal self) may be nothing more than the harried fabrication of a performed character entirely subject to one's enemy's dark secrets. The playtext defines this as a kind of social damnation, for Hamlet condemns his performances not only for being wholly shaped by Claudius's dark past, but also because the performance demands the role-playing of slander. Kenneth Gross makes a similar point: "[Hamlet] anxiously defends a hidden, strangely abstract 'something' inside himself from all questions, reports, or rumors by aggressively deforming his outward face into a mask of madness, preempting the slander of other by slandering himself first, even as he gives himself scope to mock and slander all others around him" (Gross "Slander and Scepticism," note 8, 847). For Gross, Hamlet is "the play's chief slanderer" (Gross "The Rumor of Hamlet," 55). The reason for this lies, Gross argues, in Hamlet's "complexly staged desire to seal away a self, or the rumor of a self, that is unavailable to public knowledge or public interrogation, a blank space of subjectivity unavailable to the world's slanders" ("The Rumor of Hamlet," 57). A further reason, I would argue, is that Hamlet has given his performer identity wholly up to Claudius's secret story, i.e. the slanderous murder of his father. His presented self must thereby be seen to be constructed by his enemy's slanderous secret whether he theatricalizes that self or not, since slander is the form taken by the dark theatre he is miming.

[19] Shakespeare staged his own culture's nightmare, which could be expressed by this question: what is to distinguish selves fabricated by social performance of interiority from the secret roles being performed by the vicious and slanderous forces in our culture? For if power ascribes roles to its citizens, and we act out those roles, even or especially by opposing them, then we are being shaped continually by what might turn out to be our deepest enemy. Goffman's canny and fly theory of the team-scripted self, as back region shamefully speculating about the presentation of role and set of perceived motivations, and as front region publically performing selves seen to have been produced by the scenes of culture, may perhaps help us to get as close as we are likely to get to Shakespeare's own theory of early modern subjectivity as slanderous performed interiority.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes under "Moi, je" (Barthes 168).

2. A useful account of Heidegger's critique of the Cartesian Cogito is in Paul Standish's Beyond the Self.

3. Cf. Black Sun, Leon Roudiez's translation of her 1987 Soleil noir: Depression et mélancolie.

4. Cf. McHoul and Grace.

5. For Foucault, cf. Robert Hurley's translation of the third section of Histoire de la sexualité. For Derrida, cf. "'Eating Well': An Interview." For Balibar, cf. "Citizen Subject."

6. It may be fruitless to go over this question of the anachronicity of unified subjectivity in Hamlet all over again, but the validity of cultural-materialist and new historicist arguments concerning interiority in early modern culture has been challenged recently by Katharine Eisaman Maus's Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance. Maus has, in Nora Johnson's words, "articulated a powerful critique of such theories, noting that the evidence of what she calls 'inwardness' is widespread, and arguing against historical difference as a privileged tool for dislodging the hold of the bourgeois subject" (Johnson, note 15, 701). This article seconds Maus's and Johnson's work in this matter, querying the necessity to empty early modern interiority of any content in the name of historical difference. As Hillman puts it: "On the current tendency to deny Renaissance human beings anything like inwardness in the modern sense, Maus is refreshingly sceptical, and her scepticism opens the door to textual analysis that often complements mine" (Hillman 16). My view is that Shakespeare anticipates scepticism as to the truth of private, interior experience at the same time as he dramatizes the self-slandering consequences of such scepticism.

7. This may be too commonplace to have to back up, but for an instance of this comparative thinking, see Traub, Kaplan and Callaghan's introduction to Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: "if the postmodern marks a crisis of modernity, the early modern marks the moment when we begin to see the issues of modernity developing. Without asserting that there was a full-blown Enlightenment subject in the sixteenth century or that there was nothing recognizably modern in the medieval subject, we can recognize that the early modern and the postmodern are similar in part because of their transitional status" (Traub, Kaplan & Callaghan 7).

8. Cf. Chapters 1 and 4 of Presentation. Freedman's argument is seconded by Karin Coddon, in her discussion of Twelfth Night. Coddon also sees theatricality in the plays as a means of evading the rival team's ascription of stereotyped roles: "Theatricality constitutes a site of evasion from subjectification (...) An actor does not speak a 'self'--he impersonates; his social identity is not metaphysical but infinitely manipulable" (Coddon 315).

9. Quotations from Much Ado follow Sheldon P. Zitner's Oxford World's Classics edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993).

10. The OED quotes Much Ado's "skirmish of wit" as one of the earliest uses of the word in this sense, which complicates the circle somewhat.

11. Kaplan gives evidence of the rise in slander legislation after the 1560s and offers several reasons for this, but the main reason seems to have been changes in the law consequent on the state's increased use of defamation as both the means of policing and justifying royal authority and as its chief false accusation, i.e. the easiest way to control potentially dangerous subjects was to arrest them on suspicion of being treacherous slanderers of the state (Kaplan 19-27). I would only add to her argument the suggestion that the state perceived its subjects to be potentially dangerous slanderers of its use of slander because of the emergence of the idea of subversive free-thinking individualism during the same period.

12. Kenneth Gross has made this point in "The Rumor of Hamlet" (60-61).

13. Hamlet's double role as victim and parodist could also be understood as a performance of the double nature of slander, as I argue later in the article. M. Lindsay Kaplan has shown how early modern theatre was under attack from the state for its defamatory impersonation of public figures, and that writers such as Spenser, Jonson and Shakespeare were anxious to defend themselves against this charge by turning the attack against the state itself, since official slander was one of the state's chief modes of social control and propaganda: "attempts to discredit the slanderous aspects of the theatre could rebound against the state by calling into question the ruler's own use of theatrical power to expose and punish" (Kaplan 108). I would suggest that Hamlet, by displaying overtly theatrical power to slander those around him, is indeed calling into question Claudius's abuse of theatrical (slanderous) power to consolidate the illegal new regime.

14. As Andrew Mousley has argued, "Hamlet's 'experimentalism,' his testing of received truths and accounts of events for himself, and the extension of this questioning to his own sense of self, informs this more complex, less heroic sense of agency" (Mousley 78).

15. Quotations from Hamlet follow G.R. Hibberd's Oxford World's Classics edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987).

16. Privileging these lines as anachronistic origin of modern subjectivity is, however, extremely dubious, as Maus has shown. A couple of lines from Tottel's Miscellany, quoted in the OED, seem to be feeding into Hamlet's speech here: "Oft craft can cause the man to make a semying show/Of hart with dolour all distreined, where grief did neuer grow" (2nd edition, Clarendon Press, 1989, sense 3 of "seeming"). This would push the inaugural moment back a few decades. Similarly, Barker's line on Hamlet's soliloquies cannot work as proof of Shakespeare as anachronistic originator of the modern subject, since Hamlet's soliloquies owe such a great deal to Chaucer's Troilus--the following speech from Book V of Troilus and Criseyde is a perfect instance of the gap between the subjects of utterance and enunciation, and are clearly sources for Hamlet's intense querying of his own interior hesitancy faced with the obligation to enact revenge, as indeed they are also sources for Hamlet' s split into observed and self-observing selves and "I"s:

For ire he quook, so gan his herte gnawe,
Whan Diomede on horse gan him dresse,
And seyde un-to him-self this ilke sawe,
"Allas," quod he, "thus foul a wrecchednesse
Why suffre ich it, why nil ich it redresse?
Were it not bet at ones for to dye
Than ever-more in langour thus to drye?
Why nil I make at ones riche and pore
To have y-nough to done, er that she go?
Why nil I bringe al Troye upon a rore?
Why nil I sleen this Diomede also?
Why nil I rather with a man or two
Stele hir a-way? Why wol I this endure?
Why nil I helpen to myn owene cure?" (V, ll. 36-49)

For fuller accounts of the long tradition of thinking about the inner and outer man, see Maus's introduction, and also Doran and Craun on slander and sins of speech.

17. William Empson is characteristically acute in understanding that the play is about Hamlet's display of secrecy, as were its sources: "the basic legend about Hamlet was that he [...] successfully kept a secret by displaying he had got one. [...] The basic legend is a dream glorification of both having your cake and eating it, keeping your secret for years, and yet perpetually enjoying boasts about it" (Empson 90-1). Empson's suggestion that this basic legend motivated Shakespeare's desire to reflect on theatricality has informed my argument throughout.

18. This is analogous to Othello's predicament, as expressed by Kenneth Gross. Gross argues that the "new and terrifying inwardness" that emerges when Iago fabricates his slander forces Othello into a sudden perception of the world as "full of secrets" but secrets which have the effect of robbing Othello of his privacy (Gross, "Slander and Scepticism," 825).

19. For slander in the early modern period, see Kaplan, Craun, Martin. With particular emphasis on Shakespeare, see Gross, Kehler, Nelson, Turner, Sexton, Jardine. The leap from political slander to misogyny is the most painful and difficult one Hamlet makes. It is difficult for us to understand the rationale for this move if we do not take it as seriously as the Jacobean revenge dramatists did. The middle term, I believe, is not only a mixture of sex nausea and straightforward sexism, but also must have something to do with the perceived relations between power and sexuality during the period. The perverse rhyme between secret sexual pleasures and abuse of political power is sustained by the fact that power resided in families, of course, with all the attendant misogynies that this entailed-- women may be exerting secret influence in court through their lustful action by exploiting their nightly access to men of power (as when Vindice calls his mother his father's "mid-night secretary" in The Revenger's Tragedy 1.2.142.) The classical record linking cruel dictatorship with debauchery obviously contributed to this sickened and sickening confusion between political and sexual corruption. Lisa Jardine, in Reading Shakespeare Historically, has an important

argument about public acts of defamation of women in Shakespeare. For two actual cases of defamation of women during the period, see Boose. M. Lindsay Kaplan's The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England is essential reading for the crucial issue of the struggle between state and theatre over the issue of slander in the early modern period. She argues that "Spenser, Jonson and Shakespeare present poet figures who employ accusations of defamation to deligitimate official criticism of their work and to advance a critique of state-sponsored slander" (Kaplan 33).

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