JOURNAL OF The Wooden O SYMPOSIUM

Volume 6

Published by the
Southern Utah University Press

in cooperation with the
Gerald R. Sherratt Library and the
Utah Shakespearean Festival

The Wooden O Symposium is a cross-disciplinary conference that explores Medieval and Renaissance studies through the text and performance of Shakespeare's plays. Scholars from many disciplines present papers that offer insights into the era of William Shakespeare.

The symposium is conducted the first week of August in Cedar City, Utah, and coincides with the Utah Shakespearean Festival's summer season. Three plays from Shakespeare's canon are performed each summer in the Adams Memorial Shakespearean Theatre, a unique performance space modeled after the Globe Theatre, Shakespeare's own "Wooden O."

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Bottom Gets a Life: Michael Hoffman's Contribution to the Shakespeare Film Canon

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To Dream the Possible Dream

For writer/director Michael Hoffman, filming a big-screen version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a dream come true: Hoffman himself played Lysander in the Idaho Shakespearean Festival's inaugural production; shortly thereafter, he studied renaissance drama as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, during which time he directed an acclaimed interpretation of the play there. Having subsequently directed such successful films as *One Fine Day* (1996), *Restoration* (1995), and *Soapdish* (1991), Hoffman's return to *Midsummer* was inevitable.

A modern *Midsummer* was also a dream for Twentieth Century Fox executives hoping to bank on Hoffman's experience and talent. By all accounts, their investment seemed a sure bet. For one thing, Hoffman had good timing: Shakespeare's plays have never been more cinematically popular than during the 1990s: nearly thirty English-language versions of twelve plays in the last seven years—a third of which have been romantic comedies.[1] In addition, there was a general perception that *Midsummer* had not been filmed with any great distinction for sixty-five years. Therefore, a fresh, technologically enhanced re-presentation was due.

Promising, too, was *Midsummer*'s perennial popularity as the crown jewel of Shakespeare's comedy canon. Leslie Urdang, director and co-founder of New York Stage and Film Company, notes that *Midsummer* is consistently a "favorite for school productions" and "the one Shakespeare play everyone seems to know."[2] And even if not everyone actually knows the play, many believe they ought to, just as they ought to know *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet*, for example. Hence, both the Shakespeare-sure and the Shakespeare-shy would stand to benefit from an updated adaptation.

Further ensuring his success was Hoffman's star-studded cast (his own "dream team," if you will), many of whom were experienced Shakespeareans: Kevin Kline (Bottom) played an acclaimed Hamlet at the 1990 New York Shakespeare Festival (which he then directed for television); Christian Bale (Demetrius) appeared in Branagh's 1989 *Henry V*; and Dominic West (Lysander) was Richmond in Loncraine's 1995 *Richard III*. Others had done pseudo-Shakespeare: Rupert Everett (Oberon) played Christopher Marlowe in the 1998 Oscar®-winning *Shakespeare in Love*, while Michelle Pfeiffer (Titania) starred in *A Thousand Acres* (1997)—*King Lear* set on an Iowa farm. Finally, Calista Flockhart brought to the screen what might be termed "Ally McBeal appeal": notoriety for her character in the Emmy®-winning comedy of the same name.

May the Farce Be with You

Still, Hoffman's project had risks. Analysts wondered whether the Shakespearean film market had hit a point of diminishing returns. Would audiences be fired up for yet another remake, or were they burned out on Branagh? Hoffman knew that even if the production itself were deemed successful by cast, crew, creditors, and critics, its fate was ultimately in viewers' hands: several promising Shakespeare ventures failed miserably at the box office. There were additional obstacles: purists would probably—if not predictably—object if Hoffman were too liberal in his interpretation, while George Lucas's much-anticipated *Star Wars* prequel—slated to open a mere five days after *Midsummer*—cast a menacing shadow over Hoffman's film's debut, threatening to eclipse whatever brilliance he might otherwise display. How would audiences recently exposed—and now accustomed—to Lucas's state-of-the-art special effects respond to Hoffman's comparatively modest magic? Could the farce resist "the Force"? *Herald-Times* reviewer Eric Pfeffinger saw Hoffman's challenge in terms of marketing: Hoffman had to convince a modern movie-going audience that "this film full of poetry and magic and forest nymphs is, in fact, a comedy."[3]

Anticipating such obstacles, Hoffman had to devise creative ways to keep his dream from dissipating; his *Midsummer* not only had to be worth watching: somehow it had to contribute uniquely and meaningfully to the play's long film tradition. His solutions were creative: a late Victorian setting; a "fairy bar," in which viewers glimpse sprite night life; bicycles which transport not just lovers, but Puck; a mud wrestling match between Helena and Hermia; and digitized "fairy-flies."

But arguably the film's most unique—and endearing—feature is its Bottom; Hoffman gave his film life by giving Bottom one. In the film's planning stages, as Hoffman considered his adaptation options, he became concerned that it "lacked a center." At various times, he thought of "book-ending" the play by making it Theseus's dream, or Hippolyta's, or even Helena's. But the character to whom he consistently returned was Bottom, prompting Hoffman to wonder, "What if Bottom, as the king of amateur dramatics, has delusions of grandeur about himself as an actor because he doesn't have any love in his life?"[4]

Bottom Bottoms Out

Once Lysander parts company with Helena, and Helena lets loose a few mild expletives, the film cuts to Monte Athena—a "walled village perched on the crown of a high Tuscan hill." The next scene captures the village piazza, during the "hour of the promenade."[5] Contentedly watching the citizenry, drinking campari, is Nick Bottom, looking natty in an immaculate white suit. Grabbing his silver-tipped walking stick, he stands and turns. A café window captures his reflection, which Bottom cannot help but study self-admiringly. The window also mirrors the presence of a beautiful young woman looking in Bottom's direction. In eager response, Bottom turns around to face her, his smile broadening. He tips his hat, eliciting an encouraging smile from her. Then, taking a step forward, Bottom spies another woman—an incensed woman—grabbing a blameless passerby by his lapels and ranting, "Where's my husband? Where's that worthless dreamer?" Avoiding detection, Bottom ducks into a shop entryway until his wife moves on. Winding his way through the piazza, he eventually joins his troupe. Though a motley lot, Bottom is relieved to have found them.

Upon receiving the part of Pyramus, Bottom, noticing a loosely formed crowd around his "stage," caters to their curiosity with a mini-monologue articulated in a rich, deep, crisp voice that carries easily through the hollow village square. He is applauded, prompting more listeners to approach, including the same pretty woman with whom he had flirted at the café. Demonstrating amazing range, Bottom interprets Thisby's role to a second, louder, round of applause. Finally, for an encore, he undertakes the lion's part, directing his growling at two little girls who giggle delightedly at every roar. Bottom has, with little effort and no rehearsal, won over his audience. Then, without warning, he is literally showered with red wine—two large bottles' worth—poured by two young teenagers atop the stage's roof. Stunned and stained, he looks to

his fans for sympathy, who by now are laughing uncontrollably, cruelly, at his misfortune. Even the young woman he had hoped to impress wears an expression of absolute pity. Still dripping, Bottom turns away in humiliation. Empathetically, Quince, using his own handkerchief, gently wipes Bottom's face. In a tender voice, Quince entreats his friend, "You can play no part but Pyramus." As the crowd disbands, he continues, "Pyramus is a sweet-faced man, a proper man as one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely gentlemanlike man: therefore you must needs play Pyramus" (1.2.68-70).[6] Humbled, Bottom concedes. Replacing his hat, he rises, and exits into the piazza, maintaining an admirable pretense of dignity.

Hoffman's film, rather than entering the forest to present a plucky Puck, follows Bottom home. Entering a poorly-lit, squalid, spartan apartment, Bottom softly ascends the stairs and slips into a bedroom, again hoping to avoid his wife's notice. Immediately sensing his return, however, his wife silently appears as Bottom stoops over a small washbasin to rinse the wine out of his suit. Surprisingly, and in contrast to her public tirade, she says absolutely nothing. Instead, she glares at him in disbelief and disgust. Bottom, himself speechless, can only gesture helplessness by displaying his suit's condition. Mustering the strength she will need to endure not only this episode and its aftermath, but this marriage as well, the wife inhales deeply, turns, and exits. Defeated once again, Bottom exhales, tosses his permanently discolored suit coat over a chair, sits on the edge of what appears to be a single bed, and stares longingly out the bedroom's single window. A sudden thunderclap heralds a heavy downpour.

What's Up with Bottom?

Greater than the sum of his parts, Bottom exhibits a depth in the film that is only hinted at in the play. These scenes combine to form much more than a day-in-the-life of Nick Bottom: collectively, they represent his *whole life*. To his wife, he is not Nick the weaver; he is Nick the weasel. Hoffman, notes *Shakespeare Magazine's* Josh Cabat, "gives Bottom a wife who, though silent, clearly disapproves of both her husband's pomposity and his delusions of theatrical grandeur."[7] To audiences, he is not just Bottom the "egoist, braggart, or buffoon" of many other *Midsummer* productions, nor is he just Bottom the "dreamer, actor, pretender."[8] Rather, this film explores the tragedy in Bottom's private life as much as it preserves the comedy in his public life. He is Bottom the unloved, the rejected—just like (at various times) Hermia, Helena, Lysander, Demetrius, and Oberon. And, as will

be shown, Bottom's deficiencies will imbue both his relationship with Titania and his performance as Pyramus with added meaning.

It is worth noting here that, according to Hoffman's original script, there was also a baby Bottom: Nick was a father of a child who was supposed to be crying in the background when Bottom came home. Though Hoffman offers no explanation, the idea may have been abandoned because his character is supposed to be searching for unconditional love and acceptance—something a child could both evoke and provide. It is telling that Bottom has no trouble charming the two young girls watching his performance, if one believes the notion that children are unusually adept at determining adult sincerity and authenticity. Bottom's motives are apparently pure.

Hoffman's Bottom lives in two worlds: a real one characterized by infamy, misery, and hardship; and an imagined one of fame, glamour, and respect. In his introductory scene, Bottom makes sure he is part of the action, situating himself at the right time in the right place. Like the actor he so desperately wants to become, he is dressed for the part and ready for action. Careful viewers will notice that as the camera closes in on Bottom, an actual donkey passes by; in effect, the audience has to get past the ass in order to see the man, the more interesting animal. According to online movie critic Melissa Morrison, unlike the play, Bottom is "not just a source of laughter as an ass unexpectedly enjoying a life of leisure. Here he is given a whole other dimension."[9] There's more to his character—more to him—than meets the eye. Incidentally, the donkey is also pulling a cart; it is a beast of burden, not unlike Bottom.

Unlike other productions which have Bottom angrily abandoning the project as Quince insists he play Pyramus, Hoffman's version offers a softer Bottom, one who gets neither angry nor frustrated. In both the 1935 Reinhardt and 1981 Moshinsky/BBC adaptations, Quince commands a stubborn, resentful Bottom to play the part. In Hall's 1968 RSC version, Bottom gets so upset, he clears a large table of its ware in a single motion and sends chickens scurrying as he storms out. He halts only when Quince gently grabs his shoulder. Noble's 1996 RSC interpretation also has Nick (sporting a black leather motorcycle jacket) abruptly leaving when Quince loses his patience. Hoffman's production is the only one in which Bottom rehearses outdoors before a live audience.

Hoffman's decision to have Bottom doused makes more sense when viewers recall that his film is set in the Victorian period—an

age when appearance and decorum really matter. Commenting on the significance of the locale (which may override any chronology constraints), Hoffman adds, "Italy is the only country in the world where a man is willing to go into debt to buy clothes."[10] In various places of his adapted playscript, Hoffman notes that Bottom's ruined suit was the only one he owned; however, in the film Bottom does wear another, though it is clearly inferior. Interestingly, Hoffman's script originally called for the puckish pranksters to bombard Bottom with donkey dung. The director never explains the change. Perhaps it was to allow Bottom some dignity; more likely, the idea of a dirty Bottom—with all its possible connotations—would have been in poor taste.

The Art of Becoming an Ass

Having entered the forest and persuaded Quince to add the prologue, Bottom distances himself from his fellow actors in order to practice his lines. In Hoffman's version, Bottom stumbles across a top hat and a walking stick capped, strangely, with a donkey's head. Of course, to such an aspiring actor, the props are irresistible. Behind Bottom—and invisible to him—perches Puck, who gently blows a kind of pixie dust in Bottom's direction, which he inhales. As rehearsing continues among the troupe, Bottom enters on cue, and removes his newfound hat to reveal a pair of newly sprung ass's ears.

As was true in Shakespeare's day, Bottom's transformation is great dramatic spectacle—the more exaggerated his appearance, the more comic the scene. In earlier productions, such as Reinhardt's and Hall's, Bottom's head metamorphosed completely into that of a donkey—that is, he touted a snout in addition to the long ears and fuzzy face; only his eyes were unchanged. One advantage to taking the "snout route" is that it offers better "ass smileage": watching Titania kiss Bottom's rubber donkey nose and lips *is* irresistibly funny. James Cagney's new look, for example, "frightens" the troupe's real donkey! There is, however, a distinct disadvantage to having an actor don the whole head, as Hoffman explains: "Bottom as the donkey presented a very specific problem in the film. In many productions the actor applies a mask that completely consumes him. Bottom, the man, goes away. Given the importance of his relationship with Titania, we could not afford to lose him."[11]

The solution for Hoffman (as well as Moshinsky and Noble) was not to let Bottom make a complete ass of himself: the snout was out. As Noble demonstrated, donkey ears alone are sufficient for comic effect (the Bottom in his film even sprouts ears which

break through his metal motorcycle helmet). And in act 4, when Bottom says, "I must to the barber's . . . methinks I am marvellous hairy about the face" (1.22-23), extra facial hair on a human face seems to make more sense. But the greatest benefit is the freedom of expression the head's absence allows the actor. *Midsummer* make-up artist Paul Engelen "enabled Kevin [Kline] to still be Kevin and very present," notes Hoffman.[12] A headless Bottom is a necessarily more exposed Bottom, and therefore may present the greater acting challenge.

In the productions by Reinhardt and Moshinsky, the transformed Bottom's initial reaction is to hurry over to a pond to check his reflection, the sight of which terrifies him (Cagney's character even weeps uncontrollably). Hoffman's Bottom never sees himself as others do and does not seem ever to realize his condition. For him, his situation really is a pleasant dream, not some horrible nightmare. Also, when Kline says he needs to see the barber, the fact that he does not know just how hairy he is accommodates the line better as naïve understatement than if he had already seen, or fully understood, his condition.

Love for the Ass-king

As Bottom declares his intention to leave, Titania commands a rope-vine to magically bind his ankles, pull his feet out from under him, and suspend him upside down, level with her hanging bower. An attending fairy then cuts the vine, and Bottom falls into the queen's bed, whereupon she straddles and pins him, effectively preventing his escape. What is delightful about this scene is just how quickly Bottom's urge to leave the forest disappears once Titania physically asserts herself. His fall into her bower is effectively a fall into love; Bottom is as instantly smitten with Titania as she is with him, as though he had been the victim of Puck's optical antics. Hoffman's stage directions have Bottom "look[ing] deeply into Titania's loving gaze" and "a tear com[ing] to his eye."[13] This is really Bottom the man, not the donkey or the "lustful animal," as *Chicago Sun-Times* critic Roger Ebert calls Bottoms from productions past.[14] This *Midsummer's* mortal is about to embark not on his first sexual experience, but on his first emotional one—and it overwhelms him. "Rather than being played for purely comic effect," Cabat writes, "his love scene with Michelle Pfeiffer's ravishing Titania has a quality of wistful longing to it that is absent in most productions."[15] Yet keeping the scene from getting too serious too soon, and perhaps permitting Bottom to postpone emotional gratification, Hoffman directs Kline—"the embodiment

of amiability"—to have his character "bashfully parr[y] the passionate advances of Titania."[16]

Continuing the comedy is Bottom's reaction as Titania grants him his own personal staff of attending fairies: Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed. Unlike some other productions in which these sprites are children (or even exclusively male, as in Peter Brook's 1970 RSC production), here they are beautiful young women in what mortals would consider "the prime of life." Comprising for Bottom a virtual harem, theirs is the assignment not to fulfill him sexually but to dote on him, to fulfill him emotionally and socially. The next scene finds him royally outfitted with robe and crown, escorted by his attendants—along a path lined with the rest of Titania's court—toward the waiting queen. Bottom has always wanted to be the center of attention, but this event—a dream within a dream—goes well beyond anything he could have imagined. He is "giddy at being with a dream woman in a dream . . . situation," observes *San Francisco Chronicle* reviewer Peter Stack.[17]

The scenes between Bottom and Titania constitute the film's "emotional core," says *Midsummer's* Anna Friel, who plays Hermia.[18] This "core" sets this film apart from other adaptations in which Bottom is merely a passive recipient of ear scratches and tummy rubs, emotionally unresponsive to Titania's cooing and wooing. The fact that Titania, like Bottom, is experiencing marital strife, makes her attraction to him—despite the supernatural spell—natural and realistic. Bottom's wife and Oberon both dominate their spouses to such a degree that the Bottom-Titania union is understandable, if not justified. Furthermore, Oberon and Titania, as king and queen, live by a different set of rules, observes Pfeiffer. "That's why [her] relationship with Bottom is very liberating in its simplicity."[19] Things are simpler, more liberating for Bottom, too. His relationship with Titania contrasts sharply with his relationship with his wife: with the former, Bottom exerts absolutely no effort whatsoever and gets instant, abundant, unconditional love; with the latter, his efforts—as weaver, as provider—are met with contempt, resentment, and impatience. One doubts that the pension he earns at play's end will placate his wife.

As is common in other versions, Bottom is spared the humiliation of witnessing Titania gasp at his hideousness when she returns to reality and finds him in her bed. It is a good thing, too, that she is long gone with Oberon before he awakens. In Reinhardt's film, when Cagney regains "consciousness," so to speak, he convulses as violently as he did when he was made an ass. It is

only when he checks his reflection in the pond again that he begins to relax. For him, his experience was more nightmare than dream, and despite the "Bottom's dream" speech—which he is obligated to recite—Bottom is clearly relieved that the ordeal is over.

Dream Analysis

In contrast, Hoffman's Bottom, though initially disoriented, cherishes the thought once he reconstructs what happened. Given the choice to regard the event as either real or imagined, he unhesitatingly picks the former. The tone of his "I have had a dream" speech conveys a sense of pride, as though he were chosen by the gods to experience it. Sitting in the tall grass at the forest's edge, he reaches down and picks up a small nest closely resembling Titania's bower. Inside, he finds a ring, which, upon closer inspection, is identical to the crown he wore as honorary king of the fairies. He then reclines, holding up the gold band, and smiles broadly—"moved by the memory, the glory of it all, the adulation, but mostly the love,"[20] directs Hoffman. It is interesting to note that, upon awakening, Bottom sighs heavily and repeatedly up to the point when he decides that his experience "shall be called 'Bottom's . . . [long pause] . . . Dream'" (4.1.208). Satisfied at having found a way to preserve the memory, Bottom now stops his exaggerated exhaling; instead, he inhales deeply, as though revived and reanimated. Quite literally, he has (been) inspired.

Bottom's memory of Titania—specifically, his memory of her love for him—is what boosts his confidence. He hurries back to the village, and is received by his troupe in what may be viewed as a second reception, parallel to Titania's in that he is again the generously-praised center of attention and is loved unconditionally. The "love bug" he caught in the forest is contagious, and Bottom's first order of business is to inspire his fellow actors to give the performance of their lives.

As he is escorted to the ducal residence by Philostrate, Bottom "is drawn irresistibly to the statue of [a] garlanded goddess. She holds in one hand an earthen jug, in the other a small bowl, very like the one from which he'd drunk Titania's wine. . . . He reaches out to touch the cool white marble."[21] A frustrated Philostrate, anxious to get on with the business of arranging the wedding's entertainment, impatiently suggests they move on, and a distracted Bottom reluctantly returns to his companions, looking back over his shoulder at the statue.

Playfulness within the Play (within the Play)

The next scene finds the Mechanicals sitting on a bench, "waiting, sweating," and wondering whether their rehearsal for

Philostrate will translate into acceptance or rejection. Having heard the verdict, Quince—"the color drained from his face"—enters the hopeful performers' backstage waiting area. "Our play is preferred," he announces to the stupefied troupe. Hoffman's descriptions read, "Fear passes through them like a cold wind. . . . Bottom grabs Snug by the collar as he tries to bolt."[22]

Other productions portray Quince and company as utterly petrified throughout their short performances, granting self-assurance and success only to Flute. In Hoffman's film, much of Quince's prologue is cut, placing the focus—and therefore burden—on the actors. Snout, as the wall, is nervous, but Starveling is as calm as the moon he represents. Appropriately, Snug's part as the lion is courageously undertaken. In fact, he gains enough confidence to remove his lion's head, effectively letting down his guard and voluntarily exposing himself to his audience—suggesting that Snug was heavily influenced by Bottom's transformation. Like Bottom, Snug is amply rewarded for taking the risk: he gets a front-row smile from Helena, a front-row wink from Hermia, the audience's first applause, and the troupe's first compliment via Demetrius's, "Well roared, Lion" (5.1.249).

Unlike his fellow actors, Bottom expects success from the start. He *is* successful, just not as the serious Pyramus he intended to play. To actor Dominic West (who plays Lysander), Quince's *Pyramus and Thisby* is "*Romeo and Juliet* with laughs."[23] For example, Pyramus picks up Thisby's discarded shawl only to discover that Starveling's dog has latched onto it. "Bottom struggles to stay in character as he fights to free it. . . . The dog is sailing around on the end of the scarf like an angry game fish. The fight intensifies. . . . [There is] a great whiplike action. The dog loses its grip and goes sailing into the audience"[24]—and into a repulsed Philostrate's arms! Obviously, this is the kind of slapstick which the troupe could not have rehearsed—and the audience, including the Duke and Duchess, loves it. Pyramus's unwieldy sword—approximately four feet long and several inches wide—is another source of unexpected comedy. Undoubtedly, Bottom fashioned the prop himself, the size of which (suitable only to a warrior of Goliath's stature) is meant to match Bottom's ego. Even partially penetrating a body the size of Pyramus's, such a blade would ensure instant death. Yet the film's audience is somehow not surprised when it takes two complete piercings—punctuated by a resurrection—for Pyramus's suicide to stick. To Kline's acting credit, Hoffman offers very little stage direction for this scene. As Cabat notes, Hoffman considered Kline a "superior actor": so dependable, so

versatile, that the director was able "to take some real risks with the character."[25]

For his part, Flute plays Thisby customarily straight, speaking "as convincingly as her text allows."[26] What Sam Rockwell brings to it, however, is a rare realism, abandoning the feigned female pitch and replacing it with convincing tears. Quince, who has been wincing throughout the production, now weeps, parentally proud of his prodigy. While the entire audience is silent, Hoffman's cameras remain fixed on the now-sober Lovers, who have been taught "just how thin the line between tragedy and comedy is, and how close [they] actually came to inflicting some serious harm upon one another."[27] Theseus could not foresee how right he would be when he declared to the discovered Lovers in 4.1: "We'll hold a feast in great solemnity" (182)—a statement which assumes new meaning here.

Backstage, as Bottom ponders the ducal dictum, "when the players are all dead, there need none to be blamed" (5.1.336-337), Philostrate enters reluctantly, bearing a note, which Quince takes and reads aloud, in disbelief: "Very notably discharged." Bottom grabs it and holds it up like a trophy for the vindicated troupe's view. "A wave of relief" washes over them, leaving in its wake, "a little bit of dignity."[28] The Mechanicals "succeed in actually accomplishing something, and . . . that's very moving," says their real-life director.[29]

Astrology: A Study of Heavenly Bodies

The film ends with a Bottom on top of the world. Originally, Hoffman envisioned a different ending than the one which now concludes the film:

> Bottom slowly puts away his white suit. His wife appears at the turn, grunts in contempt at his delusions of grandeur. He shrugs. She walks away. Alone now, he hangs his trousers, careful to keep the crease. He feels something in the pocket. It is the little fairy crown from the woods. He turns it over in his hand, a strange little trinket. He blows out his light and goes to his window. One last look at the moon. He sighs. All very strange. But before he turns away, something catches his eye; a light that flits and flies and dances outside his window. As he looks at it, it expands and takes on a form—of Titania, his fairy love, suspended in the air before him. They look at each other with great curiosity. She reaches out her hand and touches the windowpane. He opens it. Then reaching for his hand, she takes the crown and slips it onto his finger, like a wedding ring. She smiles a little sadly, fades, and is gone. Bottom is left smiling too. His eyes fill up with a strange kind of joy.[30]

In the film, after congratulating his friends for a job well done, Bottom returns to his quiet—perhaps now even vacant—apartment; there is no sign of his wife. He looks out his bedroom window—the same one he stared out of before his dream began—savoring his taste of success, and surveying the market square, the site where he will likely spend much of his new pension, and whose clientele will now have to acknowledge his achievement. Putting his hand in his pocket, Bottom pulls out the gold ring he found earlier in the forest and inspects it again. Interrupting his study, however, is a swirling cluster of fairies who, like fireflies, scintillate and hover near his window. Awestruck, Bottom watches as one approaches him and becomes more luminous. The longer the small creature lingers, the more her light intensifies, and it becomes evident that the two recognize each other. As though reluctant to leave, the fairy gradually flies upward, eventually blending with the stars. Without being able to clearly discern her form or features, Bottom knows intuitively—as viewers know—the visitor was Titania, returning to wish her former lover farewell.

Hoffman says nothing about the changes, so one can only speculate as to his reasons. To be sure, having a tiny flittering fairy transform itself into a Pfeiffer-sized Titania would have been exhilarating, but it could have produced a negative residual effect by being too dramatically climactic. In other words, Titania's magnificent manifestation might have detracted from Bottom's less spectacular, yet more poignant, performance. Audiences (particularly men) leaving the theater with only Michelle on their minds would certainly leave with the wrong impression, having been merely entertained, but not morally educated. After all, the story is about his transformations, not hers. Furthermore, it would have meant straying from the storyline beyond what critics, purists, and perhaps even the general public would have tolerated: for example, Titania's "marriage" to Bottom would have made him a bigamist. What would that really mean? Such an ending would not only prevent the expected return to the status quo; it would also create plot knots when it should be tying up loose ends. Put succinctly, "less is more" (a phrase attributed to Shakespeare). As it stands, the heavens which now conceal Titania will serve as an enduring reminder of Bottom's midsummer night's dream. It is thematically fitting that to "see" Titania in the stars, Bottom will have to hold his head up high.

The Bottom Line

By most accounts, Hoffman made the right decision, as critical reviews of the film were generally favorable. The *San Francisco*

Examiner's Wesley Morris described the latest presentation of Shakespeare's "love rhombus" as a "soap opera on a yo-yo,"[31] while Stack called it a "visual tour de force to brighten eyes."[32] Morrison was pleased that Hoffman "respected the play's language" and used special effects "only occasionally to juice up the fairies' world."[33] Complimenting the director on his choice of filming locations, Cabat claimed that "everyone stayed through the very end of the credits . . . to jot down the names of the towns . . . for immediate vacation planning." He concluded his review by calling Hoffman's work "probably the best attempt ever to put [the play] on film."[34]

That the Shakespeare film canon has just been expanded is a good thing. Flockhart, who plays Helena in Hoffman's adaptation, believes "as long as people are being born and falling in love and getting married and having children and dying, then Shakespeare is relevant."[35] If she is right, then *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—one of Shakespeare's finest commentaries on love—will remain a perennial favorite with both the reading and viewing public. What Shakespeare identifies and explores in the play, among other things, is not just love in general or in abstract, but specific types or facets of love, its "light" and "dark" sides. Egeus, for example, represents conditional love—and loses his daughter because of it. The four young lovers experience or exhibit capricious and irrational love—and almost lose each other because of it. Oberon temporarily loses Titania to Bottom. Any "love" (if it can be called such) accompanied by selfishness, domination, insincerity, or (emotional) infidelity leads to emotional loss or near loss. Conversely, "truer" forms of love—marked by selflessness, equilibrium, and trust—lead to various kinds of emotional gain: by "letting go" of Hermia, Demetrius rediscovers Helena; by ignoring an oppressive law, Theseus regains Hippolyta's heart; by trusting in themselves (and Bottom), the Mechanicals acquire a confidence previously unimaginable (and therefore unattainable). Even Bottom, in the words of Leslie Urdang (also *Midsummer's* co-producer), "reclaims his dignity from a deeper place in himself that he finds through love."[36] In fact, this motif became so prominent that, as his production took shape, Hoffman came to see the entire play in terms of dignity lost and regained.

Just as he knew laughter is medicinal, Shakespeare also understood love's power to heal. His Oberon and Puck are apothecaries whose herbs and powders ultimately cure Bottom of self-doubt by providing the means through which his dignity (a kind of self-love) is restored. Titania, as the eager provider of

unconditional love and happy recipient of Bottom's idealized love, is his personal nurse, whose function is to promote his emotional rehabilitation.

And, if "love makes fools of us all," as the film's tagline asserts, then *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a good dose of preventive medicine.

Notes

1. www.imdb.com.
2. "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*: About the Production," http://www.foxsearchlight.com/midfinal/html/piazzaproduction.html.
3. Eric Pfeffinger, "*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Makes the Bard Boring," http://php.indiana.edu/~epfeffin/dream.html.
4. "Production."
5. Michael Hoffman, *William Shakespeare's* A Midsummer Night's Dream (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1999), 9.
6. G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company: 1974); all line references are to this edition.
7. Josh Cabat, "Michael Hoffman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Shakespeare: A Magazine for Teachers and Enthusiasts*, http://www.shakespearemag.com/reviews/midsummer.asp.
8. Hoffman, viii.
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12. "Production."
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15. Cabat.
16. Ebert.
17. Peter Stack, "'Dream' Interpretation, Stellar Cast Adds Comic Madness to Lush, Over-the-Top *Midsummer*," *San Francisco Chronicle* May 14, 1999, http://www.sfgate.com/archive/1999/05/14/dd27854.dtl.
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23. "Production."
24. Hoffman, 106.
25. Cabat.
26. Hoffman, 101.
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28. Hoffman, 110.

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30. Hoffman, 113-114.
31. Wesley Morris, "Midsummer a Delight, at Bottom," *San Francisco Examiner* May 14, 1999, http://www.sfgate.com/archive/1999/05/14/weekend92.dtl.
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33. Morrison.
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35. Hoffman, 45.
36. "Production."

"Can We Know Them by the Songs They Sing?" Shakespeare's Use of Ballad and Psalm Allusions as a Characterization Tool in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

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Shakespeare's characters (especially those one suspects their creator most liked or admired) are routinely invested with the spirit of music; the poet/dramatist seems biased in favor of musical people—a conclusion supported by Lorenzo's converse claim in *The Merchant of Venice*, "The man that hath no music in himself, / Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, / Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils" (5.1.82-84).[1] The relation of any given Shakespearean character with music often provides clues to his or her essential nature or moral stature. Sometimes in moments of disarming relaxation or repose (as in the romantic Lorenzo/Jessica night reverie at Belmont just referenced), or even in what might be termed unlikely circumstances, at inopportune times of significant stress (as when Brutus requests of his sleepy servant boy Lucius on the eve of the battle of Philippi, "Canst thou hold up thy heavy eyes a while, / And touch thy instrument a strain or two?" [*Julius Caesar* 4.2.307-308]), the bard's characters appear distracted by (or preoccupied with) song. Often they are caught humming a tune or muttering part of a refrain from some now obscure/then popular ballad (as when Desdemona, awaiting Othello's fatal last visitation, remarks that Barbary's "song of willow. . . . / Will not go from [her] mind" [4.3.27, 30], and subsequently offers a fragmented rendition).

The quoted lyrics may seem, at first hearing, of slight relevance to the immediate situation or context. But, of course, we simply cannot assume that anything in a Shakespearean text is *actually* irrelevant, and I shall proceed from the opposite assumption, or hypothesis, here—that there is much to learn about the character from the catch or ditty he or she sings, that even a casual snatch of

song is likely to prove significant at some level.[2] Whether it be the formerly-demure-now-mad Ophelia, chanting strikingly out-of-character bawdy folk verses to the mortification of her brother and the formal royal company (in *Hamlet* 4.5) or Parson Hugh Evans amid un-cleric-like duel preparations (in *The Merry Wives* 3.1), nervously mumbling alternately the words of a pious psalm and Marlowe's intensely secular "Come Live with Me and Be My Love," Shakespeare frequently sets up fascinating and complex dynamics between his song references and the characters who make them. My specific goal in this paper will be to anatomize (and hopefully to shed light on) the author's use of psalm and ballad allusions, often subtly and indirectly, to reveal or develop character in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.[3]

What we, as modern or post-Modern readers and auditors, need to remind ourselves in contemplating the significance of vocal music references in Shakespeare is just how central popular songs were to the grass roots culture of the day. We have to imagine a time before electronic media when the only music, for the majority of the populace, was that which they produced for themselves in the home or tavern or church. There were no tapes or CDs whereby a person of middling status might experience the rarefied artistry of a Perlman or a Pavarotti; the common citizenry had little or no access to the palaces and private theaters where they might have heard what we would term today "high art"—the formal lute songs, the elaborate madrigals and masques of the court. Indeed, the public playhouse served (incidentally, certainly not by design) as a unique medium for the broader dissemination of aristocratic culture. In attending (and attending to) the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson, commoners might well sample and (to the extent that their ears and musical skills would allow) assimilate the high fashion of sonnets and art songs, but for the most part the underclasses had to entertain themselves, and they did so primarily by singing readily intelligible lyrics to simple, tuneful melodies.

This was the age of the ballad, rooted in oral folk tradition, but recently commoditized in the form of the printed broadside, sold voluminously in the London streets, peddled through the countryside to often ravenous consumers by roving ballad-sellers like Autolycus from *The Winter's Tale* (see 4.4.182-300). Broadside ballads served a rich range of roles for Elizabethan society, equivalent, it would seem, to the combined function of newspapers, tabloids, and the electronic media today. They were often current in so far as they reported recent, usually sensational, events—

notorious murders, grisly hangings, monstrous births, for example—but also nostalgic in that they revived old folk songs, retold biblical episodes, or recounted famous battles.[4] As in the case of popular music and verse from any age, love was the principal theme of all; hence, the disproportionately large number of wooing, seduction, or (often satirical) marriage ballads that flooded the market.

What all the broadsides had in common was that they were tailored to sell, produced for mass distribution and universal consumption. They sought to articulate the core values, ideals, and attitudes of society, and they quickly became an integral part of the cultural vocabulary—a source of catch phrases, familiar refrains, colloquial, proverbial, and platitudinous expressions that everyone knew and might easily incorporate into everyday discourse. The collective consciousness of early modern people was no doubt deeply informed and shaped by the simple rhymes, the accessible rhetoric, the narrative formulas, the conventional images, situations, and character types found in the ballads. And again, what we must remind ourselves in reconsidering the import of these texts is that they were not just passively read. They were actively, often communally, sung and habitually memorized. While most of Shakespeare's classical or biblical allusions remain comprehensible to humanistically-educated moderns, many of his references to single lines or phrases from popular songs must (without the aid of footnotes) strike us as trivial or nonsensical simply because we have lost the crucial knowledge base: we no longer know the songs—or certainly, we don't know them well, as presumably the playwright and his contemporaries did.

These same fragmentary references would have readily evoked for Shakespeare's original audience the full text and meaning of the song in question, together with its several manifestations (for in the case of the most popular songs there were usually several versions in circulation).[5] In fact, they probably would have triggered in the minds of Elizabethan theatergoers a wave of associations with other ballads closely related in subject, theme, or language, since—then, as now—for every hit there were countless imitations and sequels.[6] Finally, the associative process might well extend to strikingly diverse and heterogeneous texts based on commonality of music, for the balladeers routinely set new lyrics to the old familiar tunes.[7] Broadsides only rarely contained musical notation; they were typically single-sheet documents that included only a boldface title, a song text, a primitive woodcut illustration, and a simple directive such as *To the tune of Greensleeves*,[8] or *Walsingham*, or

others. Thus a bawdy drinking song might come to share its melody with a pious moral exemplum; and in fact, as Winifred Maynard has remarked, "the provision of sacred parodies, edifying words written to popular tunes 'for auoyding of sin and harlatrie', was a practice much favoured during and after the Reformation."[9] My main point here is that in order to understand Shakespeare's ballad references in something like the way his original audience did, and in order to appreciate fully their function and significance in relation to the characters who make them and the dramatic contexts in which they occur, we will need to revisit the song texts *in full*, and in some cases explore further intertextual connections within the intricate network of broadside culture.

That popular songs figure prominently in the communal rhetoric of provincial Windsor becomes evident early in *The Merry Wives*, when Mistress Ford employs a remarkable analogy to illustrate the discrepancy she finds between Falstaff's public knight-like courtesy and his inward degeneracy, as evidenced by the audacious written invitation to adultery she has just received: "He would not swear, praised women's modesty, and gave such orderly and well-behaved reproof to all uncomeliness, that I would have sworn his disposition would have gone to the truth of his words. But they do no more adhere and keep place together than the hundred psalms to the tune of 'Greensleeves'" (2.1.50-56).

The comment tells us something about the cleverness and intellectual vigor of Mistress Ford. She may allow herself a moment of amusement over the prospect of being "knighted," but she is too clearly a person of assertive mind and character to prove genuinely vulnerable to Falstaff's dubious charms. In fact, she and the equally shrewd and resilient Mistress Page repeatedly defy the expectations not only of the misogynous Falstaff, but also (assuming that the ballad references are fully comprehended) of an audience persistently teased through the course of the play with allusions to willing, assailable, or ultimately yielding women. As we shall see, this ballad imagery of successful male seduction is consistently evoked by Falstaff and serves both to reflect and to rally his wishful thinking.

Mistress Ford's choice of song reference here is likewise self-revelatory, not to mention prophetic. It should not surprise us that she thinks of "Greensleeves" first as the definitive example of lighthearted secular song, and as the polar opposite of, hence perfect comic foil to, the grave and godly psalms. It was, after all, the most famous and beloved English folk song of the day. But there was a reason why "Greensleeves" was so popular, especially

with respectable middle-class women like Mistress Ford. Setting the complaints and frustrations of the male speaker aside, the song text reads as a kind of fantasy list of fine and fashionable commodities that any woman of the period might desire, and that a newly rich woman might actually hope to obtain:

> I bought thee kerchiefs to thy head
> that were wrought fine and gallantly:
> I kept thee both at board and bed,
> which cost my purse well favoredly. / *Greensleeves was all my joy. . . .*
>
> Thy purse and eke thy gay gilt knives,
> thy pincase gallant to the eye:
> No better wore the burgess wives,
> and yet thou would'st not love me. / *Greensleeves. . . .*
>
> Thy crimson stockings all of silk,
> With gold all wrought above the knee,
> Thy pumps as white as was the milk,
> And yet thou would'st not love me. / *Greensleeves. . . .*
>
> Thy gown was of the grassy green,
> Thy sleeves of satin hanging by:
> Which made thee be our harvest Queen,
> And yet thou would'st not love me. / *Greensleeves. . . .*[10]

One can see how the song, with its frank materialism, with its copious and marvelously specific gift imagery, might appeal to an aspiring middle-class sensibility. Moreover, for all its pseudo-courtly language and emphasis on luxury goods, the imagery is not essentially aristocratic: Greensleeves, the woman with a coif (however finely wrought) to her head, armed with a knife (however fancily gilded) for cooking and a pincase for sewing and clothes-fastening purposes, who saw enough milk daily to appreciate it as a standard of whiteness, and whose greatest social triumph was to be named harvest Queen, was certainly no lady of the royal court, but a prospective domestic housewife—a Mistress Ford *in training.*

Still, the most important function of Mistress Ford's "Greensleeves" allusion may be one of narrative foreshadowing, for the song (unlike those Falstaff will reference later) chronicles through eighteen full stanzas the repeated, absolute failure of male solicitation.[11] From the man's perspective, which the ballad of course privileges, the lady is cruel, selfish, and unfeeling: he clearly sees himself as an innocent victim of her unjust denial. But one wonders whether Mistress Ford and other merry wives of the time, in their pride of feminine strength and dignity, may have taken some secret delight in the fact that Greensleeves could not

be bought. Surely there is potential here for a subversive reading of the ballad's main theme, not as the failure of honest male entreaty, but as a kind of triumph of female resistance—and a refreshing alternative to the misogynistic seduction tale that was so prevalent. In any case, in an admittedly remote and highly associative way, Greensleeve's unwavering rejection (and thorough humiliation) of her suitor anticipates Mistress Ford's later treatment of Falstaff.

In a more general sense, the "hundred psalms to the tune of Greensleeves" joke points up a striking dichotomy in the popular vocal music of the day. It was, after all, as much the golden age of the psalm as it was of the ballad: psalm singing remained throughout the period an enormously popular pastime both in and out of church.[12] The seemingly incongruous psalm/ballad conflation (not actually as far-fetched as it sounds, given the *sacred parody* phenomenon aforementioned) also subtly supports the play's central thesis—that wives can be both socially assertive and chaste, both merry and essentially pious. Provincial gossip though she is, Mistress Ford is no silly romantic country lass like Dorcas or Mopsa of *The Winter's Tale*, with little on her mind besides secular escapist love songs and longed-for fashionable trinkets. The casual, unselfconscious reference to ballad and psalm in the same breath suggests that Mistress Ford's undeniably worldly side, her materialist, class- and fashion-conscious external persona, is balanced by a morally scrupulous (perhaps even reasonably devout?) core sensibility. It reflects her maturity and broad-mindedness, as well as her wit, and contributes to our impression of her as a surprisingly dimensional, well-integrated personality.

The jarring, satiric conflation of sacred and profane song introduced in Mistress Ford's ingenious analogy for Falstaff's hypocrisy continues as a key comic motif in act 3, scene 1, where we find Hugh Evans anxiously awaiting his duel with Caius. That a Christian minister feels compelled to defend his masculine honor in armed combat and finds himself gripped with simultaneous emotions of terror for his life and murderous aggression against his challenger seems strange and inappropriate enough. That he should be caught in the midst of this singing a frankly sensual love song—with the opening line of a holy psalm interjected—only intensifies the incongruity, and spurs our closer consideration of the character of this unorthodox parson:

[folio] *EVANS* [*Sings.*] . . . . . .

> To shallow rivers, to whose falls
> Melodious birds sing madrigals—
> There will we make our peds of rose

And a thousand fragrant posies.
To shallow—

Mercy on me, I have a great dispositions to cry.
[*Sings.*] Melodious birds sing madrigals—
Whenas I sat in Pabylon—
And a thousand vagram posies.
To shallow, etc. (3.1.16-25)[13]

Of course, much of Hugh Evans's behavior in the scene can be explained by the fact that he is a Welshman and conforms to many of the sixteenth-century English stereotypes thereof. According to the period Anglo-centric view, the Welsh were a savage, warlike people (a perception founded on centuries of armed uprisings and sporadically successful Welsh resistance to English control); they were vain and boastful, prone to superstition: they practiced magic or even witchcraft; passion usually got the better of reason in them; they couldn't speak English worth a damn, but they were gifted poets and musicians.[14]

Such were the assumptions upon which Shakespeare had fashioned his first great Welsh portrait—that of Owen Glendower in *Henry IV, Part 1*, the rebel lord who insists to Hotspur, "The earth did shake when I was born" (3.1.19), and recalls how once he "framed to the harp / Many an English ditty lovely well" (3.1.120-121). In *The Merry Wives* (3.1), the fact that Evans sings at all, given the circumstances, suggests that he is uncommonly musical, but the impression is only strengthened by his subliminal choice of Psalm 137 to rehearse, with its several references to singing and to the harp (the definitive instrument of Wales),[15] and with its strong identification of a culture with its musical tradition:

Whenas we sat in Babylon,
the rivers round about,
And in remembrance of Sion,
the tears for grief burst out:

We hang'd our harps and instruments,
the willow trees upon:
For in that place men for their use,
had planted many one.

Then they to whom we prisoners were
said to us tauntingly:
Now let us hear your Hebrew songs,
and pleasant melody.

Alas, said we, who can once frame,
his sorrowful heart to sing
The praises of our loving God,
thus, under a strange king. . . .[16]

Unlike the ultra-macho, blustery force of nature that was Glendower, Evans is Shakespeare's portrait of a modern, ostensibly domesticated Welshman, but with latent aggressive tendencies that find occasional (and always comic) expression, as in this scene when he remarks, "How melancholies I am" (3.1.13) and "I have a great dispositions to cry" (3.1.21), but amid these doldrums abruptly explodes, "I will knog his urinals about his knave's costard when I have good opportunities for the 'ork. Pless my soul!" (3.1.13-15). The parson's choice of Psalm 137, then, with its final call for revenge against the Babylonian enemy, its blessing proffered to that man who "takes thy children young: / To dash their bones against hard stones / which lie the streets among," serves (at least obliquely) to confirm the at times startlingly violent side of his nature.

Psalm 137 is also the archetypal Psalm of lament in exile. Evans is a Welshman living in a kind of voluntary (perhaps economically driven) exile in England. He seems relatively happy, and he is clearly committed to fitting in, but his outsider's status (continually pointed up by his awkward English) remains evident, and he does get regularly frustrated with what he perceives as the ignorance of the provincial townsfolk. In short, he shows a tendency to think of himself as better than his surroundings and the native inhabitants, much as the ancient Hebrews did, living among the Babylonians.

Of course, there is nothing unusual or essentially incongruous in a country parson's singing of a psalm, even a particularly violent one. (In fact, Psalm 137 seems to have been a favorite of the time, as the numerous surviving part-song settings of it attest.) It is Marlowe's amorous lyric that seems a much odder, less appropriate choice of reference for Evans—but again, his Welsh background and upbringing may partly account for it. After the acts of 1536 and 1543 effectively united England and Wales politically and administratively, the Welsh gentry sought to prepare their children for integration into the English system—and specifically for careers in law, government, and the church.[17] Evans would have been trained in a rigorous Welsh grammar school system that emphasized Latin and (to a lesser extent) English as the international languages.[18] His classical humanist education (which becomes, of course, satirically highlighted in the Latin lesson scene [4.1]) might help to explain his unconscious fixation on Marlowe's carpe diem, Ovidian lyric.[19] Obviously, this is no common ballad, but an art song, which, though inappropriately matched with the psalm, Evans might otherwise justify on scholarly or aesthetic grounds. In its learned, high culture associations, it suits this man of clear intellectual pretension.

By comparison with Evans, the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives* is a far less musical type. He is, I suspect, too lazy to transcend speech,[20] or to persist beyond the occasional quoting of an opening line or closing refrain. Nevertheless, his casual song allusions help to define certain of his habitual attitudes—especially about women. Ross W. Duffin observes that Falstaff closes his first interview with Master Ford (alias Brook) with repeated charges to "Come to me soon at night."[21] The directive echoes the refrain of a popular ballad of the time, "The Shepherd's Wooing of Dulcina," and thus must have prompted Shakespeare's original audience to explore meaningful connections.

In the ballad, the stand-offish Dulcina repeatedly dismisses her impatient would-be lover with the command, "*Forego me now, come to me soon.*" The drawn-out pattern of male solicitation and female evasion—carried through fourteen stanzas—seems initially reminiscent of the "Greensleeves" example discussed early, but there are a number of significant differences.[22] The ambivalent or mixed message of the refrain—at once rejecting and inviting—marks Dulcina as the kind of perpetual tease that Falstaff presumes all women are. He is convinced that women essentially want sex—want *him*, and that the phenomenon of their *forego-me-now*, stand-offish posturing is not the result of any genuine internal resistance or intrinsic moral scruples, but simply a matter of their fearing public exposure or shame. It is not that Dulcina doesn't wish to surrender to her wooer, but that she would not do so *by day*. And so she sends him away while soliciting his return by night. The first part of the ballad ends (in stanza 6) on an ambiguous note:

> Did he relent, or she consent?
> Accepts he night, or grants she noon?
> Left he her a maid or no? She said,
> *forego me now, come to me soon.*[23]

But the affected suspense rings false, and the story proceeds to its foregone conclusion. The lady's yielding is simply a matter of time, and a matter of her learning to accept—and to accommodate (as a good wench should)—the inevitability of her own fall. "Yet, at the worst of my disgrace, / I am not first, nor shall be last" is finally the only consolation left to her. In short, "Dulcina" is founded on the misogynist myth of infinitely corruptible womanhood. It is a myth that I suspect this Falstaff—the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives*—wholeheartedly believes prior to his possible, though never confirmed, reform in the final chastening scene, for how else could one explain the seemingly nonsensical persistence of his seduction attempts?

At least two more of Falstaff's explicit song allusions in *The Merry Wives* are—predictably enough, like "Dulcina"—narratives of significantly challenged but essentially and/or ultimately successful male solicitation. At their first rendezvous, Falstaff greets Mistress Ford in the following pseudo-rhapsodic terms: "Have I caught thee, my heavenly jewel? Why, now let me die, for I have lived long enough: this is the period of my ambition. O this blessed hour!" (3.3.38-40) At this point it should come as no surprise that the over-stuffed knight's pickup line is neither sincere nor original. Its source, "Have I Caught My Heavenly Jewel," a song from Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, describes the stealing of a kiss from a sleeping woman who emphatically would not grant it if awake—so it carries subtle (or not so subtle) rape connotations.[24] Of course, Sidney was the most celebrated courtier and model of modern knighthood in Elizabethan England, and Falstaff cites the title line at a point in the play when he is trying especially hard to impress Mistress Ford with his aristocratic status.

The full text of the poem contains a good deal of aggressive posturing, and employs conventional Petrarchan metaphors of the armed assault and the fort siege to dramatize (mock-heroically) the central male assertion/female resistance tension. In other words, it indulges in the rhetoric of the Miles Gloriosus type upon which Falstaff is founded. Moreover, it emphasizes the comic/ironic theme of actual cowardice amid affected bravery that is particularly central to Shakespeare's braggart soldier formulation. "Now will I invade the fort. / Coward[']s love with loss rewardeth. . . . Love fears nothing else but anger," Sidney's macho speaker declaims, rallying himself to action. But the one acknowledged fear (of *woman*'s anger, no less) proves decisive finally when, having succeeded in the initial assault—imposed the unwelcome kiss upon his sleeping victim/adversary, he slinks away at the first sign of her waking:

> Oh, sweet kiss! But ah, she's waking!
> low'ring beauty chast'neth me.
> Now will I for fear hence flee,
> fool, more fool for no more taking.[25]

In short, the scenario that the song's pseudo-martial lover relates is not ethically irrelevant to the dramatic situation—i.e., to what Falstaff is doing in act 3, scene 3. The essential cowardice of stealing a kiss from a defenseless sleeping woman parallels well enough the cowardice of sneaking behind a husband's back to make love to his unguarded wife, and the final flight described in the poem

anticipates Falstaff's hasty retreat to the infamous "buck-basket" at the news of Master Ford's approach.

But again, the predatory male objective—to fulfill male desire, to master at some level the resistant female, to secure the prohibited kiss—is apparently achieved in Sidney's song. Naturally, this is a narrative pattern that fits in well with the perpetual sexual fantasy world Falstaff inhabits. Later in the same scene, another variation on the rape or successful seduction story is evoked when Falstaff, flattering Mistress Ford with prospects of what a fine court lady she might make (and presumably will make if she yields to him—forms alliance with his aristocracy), remarks, "I see what thou wert if *Fortune thy foe* were not" (3.3.58-59—my emphasis). Once again, Falstaff draws his catch phrase from a popular ballad. "The Lover's Complaint for the Loss of His Love," or "Fortune My Foe" as it was more commonly called (based on its first line), begins as a typical man's lament over his apparent abandonment by a lady; but a sequel, "The Lady's Comfortable and Pleasant Answer," follows—in which she reassures him of success in his suit to reclaim her as long as he remains true and *persistent.*[26] Again, the point that I wish to emphasize here is that most of the songs that Falstaff references indulge the male fantasy of successful entreaty, seduction, or conquest.

For the most part, the vocal music lyrics spoken or sung by Shakespearean characters simply reveal what we already know about them—confirm aspects of their natures or personalities formerly established through more organic and reliable means of character development. Still, I would contend that the full realization of a character as vital, as complex and multi-dimensional, as richly nuanced as Falstaff depends on more than just his direct speech and actions. Some will protest that I make too much of these ballad and psalm references. My critics will no doubt remind me that Shakepeare's vocal music allusions are essentially casual and incidental; they will perhaps justly insist that, in so far as popular song quotes represent a form of public, communal, usually anonymous discourse, their function as a tool of individual characterization must prove dubious at best, and that certainly they should not be treated as reflecting the original thought or expression of the mouthpiece characters. I would largely accept such objections as reasonable and constructively cautionary. Nevertheless, stage characters are defined not only by their most personal and autonomous utterances, and by their most dramatic actions, but also (as the products of so subtle and sophisticated an author as Shakespeare) by their smallest, most seemingly-spontaneous-and-

random choices. They are also peripherally, but still significantly, defined by external elements—by what other characters say about them (even by others' false conceptions, or preconceptions, or prejudices), by the clothes they wear, by the props they carry, and, for Shakespeare, at least, not the least by the songs they (consciously, or unconsciously, choose to) sing.

Notes

1. Citations from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are based on Giorgio Melchiori's (third series) Arden edition (Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, UK: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 2000); quotations from all other plays are keyed to the texts found in *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

2. For a discussion of the significance of Shakespeare's songs and music references emphasizing their dramatic function (as opposed to their revelation of character), see David Lindley's "Shakespeare's Provoking Music," in *The Well Enchanting Skill: Music, Poetry, and Drama in the Culture of the Renaissance*, ed. John Caldwell, Edward Olleson, and Susan Wollenberg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 79-90.

3. Before proceeding further, I should like to acknowledge my debt to Ross W. Duffin's *Shakespeare's Songbook* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004). The Case Western Reserve musicologist has performed a much-needed and long-overdue service by researching all of the (mostly anonymous and now arcane) song lyrics to which Shakespeare makes even casual reference and reprinting them in full text. In addition, he provides the period tunes to which the words were explicitly (or might be speculatively) linked in simple, accessible modern notation. I first conceived the idea for this paper through scrutiny of Professor Duffin's work, and I have built my interpretive argument more or less directly on the foundation of his objective scholarship.

As a source for commentary on Shakespeare's original and/or fully articulated songs, I have found Peter J. Seng's *The Vocal Songs in the Plays of Shakespeare: A Critical History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) particularly useful. Other works consulted for general background include John H. Long's *Shakespeare's Use of Music: The Final Comedies* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961); John Stevens's "Shakespeare and the Music of the Elizabethan Stage: An Introductory Essay," in *Shakespeare in Music*, ed. Phyllis Hartnoll (London: Macmillan/New York: St. Martin's, 1964), 3-48; F. W. Sternfeld's *Music in Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963; New York: Dover, 1967); E. D. Mackerness's *A Social History of English Music* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1964; repr. 1976); and Winifred Maynard's *Elizabethan Lyric Poetry and Its Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

4. Hyder E. Rollins's "The Black-Letter Broadside Ballad," *PMLA* 34, no.2 (1919): 258-339, remains an indispensable introductory source on the subject, and his selected broadside (reprint) collections still provide the most convenient means of sampling the wide range of ballad sub-genres. The two volumes most relevant to Shakespeare's time and context are *A*

Pepysian Garland: Black-letter Broadside Ballads of the years 1595-1639, chiefly from the collection of Samuel Pepys (Cambridge, England: The Cambridge University Press, 1922; repr. 1971) and *The Pack of Autolycus; or, strange and terrible news of ghosts, apparitions, monstrous births, showers of wheat, judgments of God, and other fearful happenings as told in broadside ballads of the years, 1624-1693* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1927; repr. 1969). Some 30,000 English ballads (in facsimile) can also be accessed online through the Bodleian Library at www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ballad/. For more recent in-depth commentary on English broadside culture, see Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Natascha Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad, 1550-1650*, trans. Gayna Walls (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Carol Rose Livingston, *British Broadside Ballads of the Sixteenth Century: A Catalogue of Extant Sheets and an Essay* (New York: Garland, 1991).

5. John M. Ward, "'And Who But Ladie Greensleeves?'" in *The Well Enchanting Skill: Music, Poetry, and Drama in the Culture of the Renaissance*, ed. John Caldwell, Edward Olleson, and Susan Wollenberg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, 181-211. Multiple variations were often true of both text *and melody*. In his exhaustive account of the history of "Greensleeves" and its multitudinous transmutations, Ward remarks that "describing . . . the tune . . . as written down during the decades around 1600 is not easy, for no two versions are note-for-note the same. Like almost all Elizabethan popular music, the tune was multiform, circulated without the constraints of print" (182).

6. Ward further observes that in the course of a single year after "A newe northern Dittye of ye Ladye Greene Sleves" was entered in the Stationers' Company register (in September 1580), "the young man's 'Courtly Sonet' had been answered by the lady, 'moralized to the Scripture' by an anonymous broadside poet, reprehended by another, and Green Sleeves described by a third ballad poet as 'worne awaie'" (181).

7. Bruce Pattison, *Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance* (London: Methuen, 1970), 160. Pattison observes that "a good deal of Renaissance verse was . . . directly controlled by music, for it was actually written to existing tunes."

8. Roy Lamson, Jr., "English Broadside Ballad Tunes of the 16th and 17th Centuries," *American Musicological Society: Congress Report New York, 1939*, ed. Arthur Mendel et al. (New York, 1944). Lamson counted no less than eighty broadside ballads set to the "Greensleeves" melody before 1700 (cited in Ward, 190 n.).

9. Winifred Maynard, *Elizabethan Lyric Poetry and Its Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 181. The interior quotation is drawn from a popular sixteenth-century pious ballad anthology entitled "*Ane Compendious buik of godlie Psalmes and spirituall Sangis collectit furthe of sindrie partis of the Scripture, with diueris utheris Ballattis changeit out of prophane Sangis in*[*to*] *godlie sangis, for the auoyding of sin and harlatrie*" (Maynard,181n).

10. "Greensleeves," stanzas 3, 7, 8, 9; Duffin, *Songbook*, 177-178.

11. Space limitations prevent my reprinting of the complete text here, but the following selected early and late stanzas (together with those middle stanzas cited earlier) should give readers a sense of the song's overall trajectory:

[stanza 1] Alas my love, you do me wrong
to cast me off discourteously:
And I have loved you so long,
delighting in your company.
Greensleeves was all my joy
Greensleeves was my delight:
Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
and who but my lady Greensleeves.

[stanza 2] I have been ready at your hand
to grant whatever you would crave.
I have both waged life and land
your love and good will for to have. / *Greensleeves.* . . .

[stanza 4] I bought thee petticoats of the best,
the cloth so fine as it might be:
I gave thee jewels for thy chest,
and all this cost I spent on thee. / *Greensleeves.* . . .

[stanza 6] Thy girdle of gold so red,
with pearls bedecked sumptuously:
The like no other lasses had,
and yet thou would'st not love me. / *Greensleeves.* . . .

[stanza 16] And who did pay for all this gear,
that thou did'st spend when pleased thee?
Even I that am rejected here,
and thou disdain'st to love me. / *Greensleeves.* . . .

[stanza 17] Well, I will pray to God on high
that thou my constancy may'st see:
And that yet once before I die,
thou will vouchsafe to love me. / *Greensleeves.* . . .

(Duffin, *Songbook*, 177-179)

12. In fact, the tradition of psalm singing seems to have developed at least partly as a means to offset the supposedly insidious influence of secular ballads. Rollins ("The Black-Letter Broadside Ballad," 259) notes that "in 1549, Sternhold . . . versified fifty-one of the Psalms, that they might be sung 'in private houses, for godly solace and comfort, and for the laying apart all ungodly songs and ballads'; and John Baldwin wished to God that his own *Canticles or Balades of Solomon* (1549) 'might once drive out of office . . . bawdy ballads of lecherous love.'"

13. The full text of the amorous lyric from which Evans quotes here, Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," reads thus:

Come live with me and be my love,
and we will all the pleasures prove,
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
woods, or steepie mountains yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses,
and a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle,
embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool,
which from our pretty lambs we pull,
Fair lined slippers for the cold:
with buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw, and ivy buds,
with coral clasps and amber studs.
And if these pleasures may thee move,
come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing,
for thy delight each May-morning,
If these delights thy mind may move;
then live with me, and be my love.

(Duffin *Songbook*, 103-104)

14. Of course, this last notion was far from an empty stereotype. For a detailed account of the rich late-medieval Welsh traditions of poetry and music, see Glanmor Williams's chapter on "Learning and the Arts," in *Recovery, Reorientation, and Reformation: Wales c. 1415-1642* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 143-164.

15. Williams, 147.

16. Psalm 137 (trans. Sternhold and Hopkins), Duffin, *Songbook*, 438-439. The remainder of text reads thus:

But yet if I Jerusalem,
out of my heart let slide,
Then let my fingers quite forget
the warbling harp to guide.

And let my tongue within my mouth
be tied forever fast,
If that I joy before I see
thy full deliverance past.

Therefore, O Lord, remember now
the cursed noise and cry
That Edom's sons against us made
when they razed our city.

Remember, Lord, their cruel words,
when as with one accord,
They cried on sack, and raze the walls,
in despite of their Lord.

Even so shalt thou, O Babylon,
at length to dust be brought:
And happy shall that man be call'd
that our revenge hath wrought.

Yea, blessed shall that man be call'd
that takes thy children young:
To dash their bones against hard stones
which lie the streets among.

17. For detailed accounts of the rise of formal education in sixteenth-century Wales, see G. Dyfnallt Owen, *Elizabethan Wales: The Social Scene* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), 198-215, and Williams, 429-450.

18. Owen reports that "the curriculum adopted in the [Welsh] grammar schools was based on the intensive, sometimes the exclusive, teaching of Latin, since familiarity with that language was considered indispensable to any professional career" (202). Likewise, in "Anglo-Welsh Relations in *Cymbeline*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 33-66, Ronald J. Boling claims that "to early modern Welshmen fluent Latin meant admission to the international humanist commonwealth and possession of an alternative discourse for resisting cultural anglicizing " (60); still, he adds, "implicit in the Act of 'Union' was the necessity for the creation of a Welsh ruling class fluent in English" (61); and Williams observes that "the closer contacts of every kind coming into existence between Welsh and English, the increased emphasis on the capacity to speak and read English, the relative ease with which it could be learnt, and the tendency of many Welshmen to go to England and into English-speaking towns in Wales to find advancement all contributed to the wider knowledge of the English tongue" (438).

19. In his exposition of late-medieval Welsh poetry, Williams remarks the culture's enthusiasm for "*Canu serch* [love-poetry]": "Even priests wrote love-poems," he observes, "and one of them, Siôn Leia, claimed that Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* took precedence over the mass book in his thoughts" (155-156).

20. John P. Cutts, however, entertains the notion of a singing Falstaff in "Falstaff's 'Heauenlie Iewel': Incidental Music for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 11 (1960): 89-92.

21. Duffin, *Songbook*, 130. The actual play passage reads thus [folio—my emphasis]: "*FALSTAFF* . . . . Master Brook, thou shalt know I will predominate over the peasant, and thou shalt lie with his wife. *Come to me soon at night.* Ford's a knave, and I will aggravate his style: thou, Master Brook shalt know him for a knave and a cuckold. *Come to me soon at night*" (2.2.267-271). The highlighted command appears four times in the quarto texts.

22. Again, space concerns preclude my printing the full text here, but I will excerpt some of the most relevant stanzas:

[stanza 1] As at noon Dulcina rested
in a sweet and shady bower,
Came a shepherd and requested,
in her lap to sleep an hour.
But from her look a wound he took,
so deep that for a farther boon,
The nymph he pray'd, whereto she said,
forego me now, come to me soon.

[stanza 4] He demands, what time or leisure
can there be more fit than now.

She says night gives love that pleasure
which the day cannot allow.
The sun's clear light shineth more bright,
quoth he, more fairer than the moon.
For her to praise, he loves; she says,
forego me now, come to me soon.

[stanza 6] How at last agreed those lovers,
she was fair and he was young.
Tongue can tell what eye discovers,
joys unseen are never sung.
Did he relent, or she consent?
Accepts he night, or grants she noon?
Left he her a maid, or no? She said,
forego me now, come to me soon.

[stanza 12] Sweet he said, as I did promise,
I am now return'd again.
Long delay you know breeds danger
and to lovers bringeth pain.
The nymph said then, above all men,
still welcome shepherd morn and noon.
The shepherd prays, Dulcina says,
Shepherd, I doubt y'are come too soon.

[stanza 13] Come you now to over throw me
out alas I am betray'd.
Dear, is this the love you shew me
to betray a silly maid?
Help, help, ay me, I dare not speak.
I dare not cry, my heart will break.
What, all alone? Nay then, I find
men are too strong for womenkind.

[stanza 14] Out upon the wench that put me
to this plunge to be alone.
Yet, she was no fool to shut me
where I might be seen of none.
Hark, hark, ay me; what noise is that?
O now I see it is my cat.
Come puss, I know, thou wilt not tell
if all be so, all shall be well.

[stanza 15] O silly fool, why doubt I telling
when I doubted not to trust.
If my belly fall a-swelling,
there's no help, but out it must.
Ay me, the grief. Ay me, the shame
when I shall bear the common name,
Yet, at the worst of my disgrace
I am not first, nor shall be last.

(Duffin, *Songbook*, 128-130)

23. Duffin, *Songbook*, 129.

24. The full text of Sidney's "Song" reads as follows:

Have I caught my heavenly jewel
teaching sleep most fair to be?
Now will I teach her that she,
while she wakes is too, too cruel.

Since sweet sleep her eyes have charmed,
the two only darts of Love,
Now will I with that boy prove
some play while he is disarmed.

Her tongue, waking, still refuseth,
giving frankly niggard No.
Now will I attempt to know
what No her tongue, sleeping, useth.

See the hand which waking guardeth,
sleeping grants a free resort.
Now will I invade the fort.
Cowards love with loss rewardeth.

But, O fool, think on the danger
of her just and high disdain.
How will I, alas, refrain?
Love fears nothing else but anger.

Yet those lips so sweetly swelling
do invite a stealing kiss.
How will I but venture this?
Who will read must first learn spelling.

Oh, sweet kiss! But ah, she's waking!
low'ring beauty chast'neth me.
Now will I for fear hence flee,
fool, more fool for no more taking.

(Duffin, *Shakespeare's Songbook*, 187)

25. Duffin, *Songbook*, 187.

26. An abridged version of "The Lover's Complaint for the Loss of His Love" and its sequel follows:

[stanza 1] Fortune, my foe, why dost thou frown on me?
And will thy favors never better be?
Wilt thou, I say, forever breed my pain?
And wilt thou not restore my joys again?

[stanza 2] Fortune hath wrought my grief and great annoy,
Fortune hath falsely stol'n my love away,
My love and joy, whose sight did make me glad;
Such great misfortunes never young man had.

[stanza 3] Had fortune took my treasure and my store,
Fortune had never griev'd me half so sore,
But taking her whereon my heart did stay,
Fortune thereby hath took my life away.

[stanza 5] In vain I sigh, in vain I wail and weep;
In vain mine eyes refrain from quiet sleep:
In vain I shed my tears both night and day,
In vain my love, my sorrows do bewray.

[stanza 6] My love doth not my piteous plaint espy,
Nor feels my love what griping grief I try
Full well may I false Fortune's deeds reprove,
Fortune, that so unkindly keeps my love.

"The Lady's Comfortable and Pleasant Answer"

[stanza 1] Ah, silly soul, art thou so afraid?
Mourn not, my dear, nor be not so dismay'd.
Fortune cannot, with all her power and skill,
Enforce my heart to think thee any ill.

[stanza 2] Blame not thy chance, nor envy at thy choice,
No cause hast thou to curse, but to rejoice,
Fortune shall not thy joy and love deprive,
If by my love it may remain alive.

(Duffin, *Songbook*, 152-153)

Ambiguous Alliances: Betrothal Confusion in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

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Arguably, nothing in the lives of early modern English citizens held more importance than marriage and all its connected issues. The ways in which men and women in England were supposed to behave and the ways in which they actually did behave were often not the same. Even before they were married, women were taught that their place was in the home. The authors of conduct books outlined every aspect of female life, from behavior in public to what to do when ill. For instance, in "The Instruction of a Christian Woman," under the heading, "How the Maid Shall Behave Herself Forth Abroad," Juan Luis Vives describes in detail the consequences of a woman behaving incorrectly:

> If thou talk little in company folks think thou canst but little good: if thou speak much, they reckon thee light: if thou speak uncunningly, they count thee dull-witted; if thou speak cunningly thou shalt be called a shrew; if thou answer not quickly thou shalt be called proud or ill brought up; if thou answer they shall say thou wilt be soon over comen; if thou sit with demure countenance, thou art called a dissembler; if thou make much moving, they will call thee foolish: if thou look on any side, then will they say thy mind is there; if thou laugh when any man laugheth, though thou do it not a purpose, straight they will say thou hast a fantasy unto the man and his saying, and that it were no great mastery to win thee.[1]

Vives writes of so many limitations that one wonders what actions a woman could take without negative consequences. Breaking these rules could bring disaster to the woman who did so; early modern English communities were relatively small and close-knit, and word of even a suspected wanton woman spread quickly.

Women did not want to be called "light," or loose. Chastity was of the utmost importance if a woman wished to marry, and since marriage brought with it a better chance of financial security and a higher social position, it was very desirable. Lisa Jardine writes, "There is something intrinsically indecorous about a woman who . . . transgresses the social code which requires her to observe a modest silence and passivity in public";[2] and breaking any of society's rules could make her appear unseemly not only to her neighbors, but also to any potential suitors, bringing her to permanent ruin. At the same time, men also had to watch themselves and other men closely in order to always have a firm grasp on their reputations. Men were greatly concerned with honor, and engaging in the wrong activities could damage their reputations beyond repair, resulting in being shunned by society. English citizens were expected to behave in the way the conduct literature guided them, but the problems they had within these guidelines caused them, sometimes, to speak out against the moral values they were supposed to follow.

These conflicts can be understood as "social drama," a term coined by Victor Turner. Writing about societal groups in opposition to one another and the tensions that erupt from this opposition, Turner defines social drama as "units of aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations."[3] He describes these dramas as having four main parts. First, comes the breach of a social norm—"an overt breach or deliberate nonfulfillment of some crucial norm regulating the intercourse of the parties."[4] People breaking these norms often believe they are acting on behalf of not only themselves, but a larger party as well.[5] For instance, a woman publicly slandering another woman—an action certainly not condoned by conduct books—normally did so alone, but claimed that the whole neighborhood felt the same way. Additionally, women standing up in court against such slander would fight not only for their own honor, but also for the honor of all other slandered women. The second stage of social drama is a mounting crisis. At this point, unless the problem can be dealt with immediately, it threatens to spread. Here, the problem can no longer be ignored.[6] For example, society must recognize an adulterous man and deal with him in some way or he will continue to break this rule, perhaps influencing others to do so as well.

The need to handle conflict leads into the third stage, that of redressive action. As Turner explains, "It is in the redressive phase that both pragmatic techniques and symbolic action reach their fullest expression."[7] In this phase, people attempt to fix the problem

with "pragmatic techniques," such as lawsuits, and "symbolic action," such as stories, ballads, and jests, that provide an outlet for the conflict. The fourth and final stage of social drama is one of either "reintegration of the disturbed social group or of the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between the contesting parties."[8] The outcome of this stage depends largely on the third stage. Perhaps the lawsuits, for example, have solved the problem and the involved people have returned to the social norm, or perhaps new laws have been enacted, changing the social norm and solving conflict in this way. Either way the conflict is stopped, but the latter effects the community more visibly.

Conflicts surrounding marriage in early modern England can be understood in terms of Turner's social drama schema, with many different texts arising from the third phase. Controversies surrounding sexual behavior appear in everything from court records to songs and are also dramatized in *The Merry Wives of Windsor.* Sexual misconduct is a particularly interesting subject in terms of social drama and conflict because it is so complex. For instance, betrothal laws were so unclear that no one seemed quite sure when a couple was legally married. Sometimes a couple believed they were married, but a third party would disagree and charge them with sexual misconduct if they were sexually active. However, the ambiguity of the laws allowed for personal dislike to enter the situation; as Lisa Jardine explains, "The first thing to notice about the canons concerning unlawful marriage is that the 'unlawfulness' is couched in terms of a complaint—a charge of unlawful marriage arises when someone is offended by the union."[9] Disapproval of a couple by a third party could result not only in charges of breach of promise, but also accusations of sexual misconduct. If the laws were clear, a person could not accuse a couple of an illegitimate marriage simply because of personal animosity, but the fuzziness of what actually constituted a binding marriage opened the door for personal attacks and resulted in many more cases than otherwise might have been.

Because sexual reputations were so important, men and women regularly went to court to complain about sexual misconduct or to clear their names if they had been slandered. Ecclesiastical court records give a unique insight into the reasons for conflict in the society. Thousands and thousands of records were made, but many are incomplete, difficult to read, or otherwise inaccessible. However, the mere fact of so many moral court cases is significant because it reflects the issues that were of the greatest concern in society. Of court records, Bernard Capp writes, "If they seldom

provide the full story, they show us the most popular strategies of attack and defence, offer insights into the complex issue of conflict resolution, and yield clues to the underlying cultural values of the age."[10] If we understand what people argued about, why the disputes arose, and how they were solved, we can gain a greater understanding of how society worked than we can from more general historical reports.

In the third phase of Turner's social drama, the redressive action stage, problems with betrothals, adultery, cuckoldry, and defamation resulted not only in court records, but also in the creation of many popular texts, such as ballads and jokes. Societies laugh at what they fear, and early modern England was no exception. Men and women lived in a patriarchal society, and while men enjoyed their control, they continually worried about losing it. "Satires, sermons, plays, ballads, and jokes reflected the fear that women did not genuinely accept male authority, dreamed of subverting it, and flouted it at every opportunity," Capp observes.[11] Indeed, many popular texts feature a woman outwitting a man and getting away with adultery, or men learning a painful or embarrassing lesson about trusting their wives too much.

However, as many texts that teach men the value of suspecting their wives, many also illustrate to women that they should remain at home and clean or feature a man fooling his wife and getting away with sexual sin. The events and lessons in these texts were probably more influential than court judgments, not only because the punishments were weightier, but also because more people could safely complain about or otherwise explore their situations through popular texts without the inconvenience of having to go to court or the danger of losing a court case. In the world of popular texts, to which people of every social strata had access, there seems to be almost a war of wits, with male-based jests fighting for patriarchal authority and female-based jests just as quickly teaching how to subvert it.

Plays were also immensely popular and their authors, aware of current events, problems, and other popular texts, often similarly reflected the concerns of society in their works. Shakespeare was no exception. As a playwright for one of the most popular acting troupes of the period, Shakespeare had the power to reach a vast audience. While his primary goal was undoubtedly to entertain people and make money doing it, his adaptations of well-known events or stories could also have functioned on a different level. Stephen Greenblatt explains that plays moved all types of "social energy" through society, such as "power, charisma, sexual

excitement, collective dreams, wonder, desire, anxiety, religious awe, free-floating intensities of experience . . . everything produced by the society can circulate."[12] Plays garnered material from society, adapted it, and gave it back to spectators with a new perspective. Suzanne Hull observes, "Successful humor or satire must have a base of truth or understanding for people to relate to it."[13] People viewing a comedy laugh precisely because they understand at least a small part of what they are seeing; perhaps they have experienced a similar situation, or they see characteristics of themselves or someone they know in one of the characters. Shakespeare's comedies played on aspects of society that the vast majority of audience members could relate to. If a person had not been accused of sexual misconduct or accused someone themselves, they may have known someone who had or even served in a court position for a while. Additionally, jests and ballads made their way through communities very quickly, and it is extremely likely that everyone in the audience had heard at least one such story. Referring to these well-known events and stories would have given audience members something to latch onto, laugh at, and understand.

The laws surrounding betrothals in early modern England were complex and unclear, and people often manipulated them for their own uses. For instance, society often looked the other way when a couple engaged in sexual activities if they were planning to marry. While a man might be prosecuted for promising marriage to a woman simply to seduce her,[14] he might claim he was planning to marry her and be excused from the sin. Also, though a pre-contract could become official only through the consent of the bride and groom,[15] parents sometimes still attempted to arrange contracts for their children. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Shakespeare draws on these situations and other confusing aspects of betrothal law to provide complications that drive the plot. While in the real world the courts often served as matchmakers, Shakespeare's play provides fantastical resolutions that suggest that love is more important than law in marriage.

One way we can gain access to the inner workings of the conflict caused by betrothals is through court records, since during the period over 15,000 people were brought to court on sexual charges alone.[16] The ambiguous laws concerning betrothals caused many couples to be brought before the courts to settle the question of whether or not they were legally married or if any party was entitled to any material or monetary compensation. In one 1535 case from Northumberland, typical of many, a man named John

Adamson explains how a man named Anthony is caught by the law because of a pre-contract he had made:

> He saith that the same Anthonie being at the est end of Slalie churche, without the churche yard there, in the tyme of Lent last past, about a fortnight afore Ester, saied unto hym in this maner, "Sir John, ye knowe I have made a contract of matrymonye with Marion Martyne. I cannot denie but I have made a precontract with oone Jenat Armestronge, and I knowe well that the 2d contract is of no effect, wherfore I desire you to speke with the same Marion, to know her mynde." And this deponent saieth that after, he went to the same Marion, upon the mocion of the said Anthonie, and shewed to her as is afore rehersid. And she saied that she would not be contented with that mocion, but that she would take the lawe upon the said Anthonie for discharge of her sowle.[17]

In current society, men and women can break off engagements when they please, but in sixteenth-century England, contracts were law-binding statements, even though often nothing was written down. In his book about marriage and law, Martin Ingram explains, "An indissoluble union could be created solely by the consent of the two parties expressed in words of the present tense . . . Neither solemnisation in church, nor the use of specially prescribed phrases, nor even the presence of witnesses, was essential to an act of marriage."[18] However, though some moralists praised the pre-contract, others thought a church ceremony was more important, and informal verbal contracts raised the possibility of fraud;[19] for instance, one person might claim a contract to another where there was none for monetary benefit. In this case, Marion Martin was angry at Anthony because he had contracted to her even though he was pre-contracted to Jenat Armstrong. Anthony most likely hoped that Martin would not care much about the pre-contract, which is why he sent "to know her mynde" concerning the matter; but Martin seems to have known that betrothal law was messy and could potentially result in serious punishment. Lisa Jardine explains, "The offended party made depositions . . . which if substantiated in court led to the offender's doing public penance, paying a fine, or (in extreme cases) being excommunicated."[20] Here, Martin takes the offensive, taking Anthony to court before he can do the same should he decide to marry Armstrong instead, and also protecting herself against any action from Armstrong herself.

Pre-contract issues were familiar to Shakespeare, and the Anne Page subplot in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* centers around these confusions. When Anne's character is initially introduced, it is as a

woman marriageable because of her monetary value. While discussing the possibility of marriage, Slender's interest is piqued when the subject of her inheritance arises:

> *Slender:* Did her grandsire leave her seven hundred pound?
> *Evans:* Ay, and her father is make her a petter penny.
> *Slender:* I know the young gentlewoman, she has good gifts.
> *Evans:* Seven hundred pounds, and possibilities, is goot gifts. (1.1.60-63)[21]

Slender, we are told, is "well landed" (4.4.86) and so is not wholly dependent on Anne's money—in fact, it is quite clear that he does not love Anne. However, he recognizes a good alliance and makes an informal verbal contract with Anne's father. Page gives Slender his consent to marry Anne, then tells Anne to love Slender. When Fenton, the man Anne truly loves, attempts to woo Anne and get the good will of her parents, P age says, "I told you, sir, my daughter is dispos'd of" (3.4.70), implying that the contract negotiated between himself and Slender is solid.

According to law, official betrothal contracts could be made only by the intended couple themselves so that parents could not marry their children simply to amass property; but many citizens felt that this law did not allow parents to protect their own interests.[22] In spite of the law, arranged marriages did happen, however rarely, and conduct books urged children to obey their parents in such matters.[23] For example, Martin Ingram mentions several cases in which girls were led into marriages by their parents. While not forced marriages, "the evidence makes plain that parents or others had at least consulted them and secured their consent,"[24] which is what happens in *Merry Wives.* Page tells Anne to marry Slender, and Anne does not say no. A contract is made for her.

However, the informality of this verbal contract, so prevalent in early modern England, works against Page, as his wife has also made a verbal contract for Anne with Doctor Caius. She says, "I'll to the doctor, he hath my good will, / And none but he, to marry with Nan Page. . . . He, none but he, shall have her" (4.4.84-85, 89). Mistress Page knows that her husband has promised Anne to Slender, but because she disapproves of that match, she uses the confusing betrothal laws to her benefit. Using the fact that the validity of verbal agreements could often come into question, Mistress Page decides to try her luck at making her own contract. Additionally, Mistress Page likes Caius because "he is well money'd, and his friends / Potent at court" (4.4.88-89), which would be advantageous to her own social position. Again, although

parents were not supposed to use the marriages of their children to gain social status, it appears that this is one of Mistress Page's motives in securing a suitor for Anne.

A third problem arises when Fenton reveals that he has also unofficially betrothed himself to Anne. While both Caius and Slender have made informal arrangements with Anne's parents, Fenton's contract was made in secret with Anne herself. After eloping with Anne, Fenton explains their relationship to her parents: "The truth is, she and I (long since contracted) / Are now so sure that nothing can dissolve us" (5.5.223-24). Anne and Fenton's contract seems to be the most viable because it is made by the couple themselves instead of being arranged by a third party, but B. J. and Mary Sokol state that "Anne's parents could have sought legal redress against Fenton,[25] possibly because of his technically unlawful betrothal without their consent. In fact, parents who disliked their child's choice of partner could even refuse financial support.[26] Fenton, for example, would not gain any wealth by marrying Anne, because Page dislikes the match so much. Page says, "If he take her, let him take her simply. The wealth I have waits on my consent, and my consent goes not that way" (3.2.76-78). However, monetary gain is not an issue in Fenton's pre-contract, since Fenton wants to marry Anne not because of her wealth, but because of love.

Though Fenton admits that he first became interested in Anne because of her money, he claims that as he wooed her, he came to love her—an emotion lacking in both of the other arrangements. He says, "You would have married her most shamefully, / Where there was no proportion held in love" (5.5.221-22). He goes on to explain that Anne has not sinned in disobeying her parents, since by doing so "she doth evitate and shun / A thousand irreligious cursed hours / Which forced marriage would have brought upon her" (5.5.228-30). Marriage forced through use of threats was unlawful,[27] and Page effectively threatens to disinherit Anne should she marry Fenton. With his statement at the end of the play, Fenton comments on Page's abuse of authority concerning Anne's betrothal, claiming that a parental arrangement is not favorable in the eyes of the church—it is "irreligious"—and that their love-based marriage is a much better resolution.

Underlying the betrothal issues in this play is a gendered power struggle. As the head of the family, Page feels very secure in his power and thus feels justified in arranging a marriage contract for his daughter. In fact, even Anne knows that she owes this duty to her father, telling Fenton to "seek my father's love, still seek it, sir"

(3.4.19). However, Mistress Page makes her own arrangement, taking away Page's ability to govern both his wife's and his daughter's choices in marriage. Page makes an arrangement with Slender, but Mistress Page makes an arrangement with Caius and goes to great lengths to make sure Anne marries him. According to societal beliefs, a wife should obey her husband. The largely Protestant nation was taught that because Eve was created after Adam and caused his fall, women were subject to men. Churchgoers learned that a woman must "acknowledge her inferiority, [and] carry herself as inferior."[28] In the play, Mistress Page is clearly not inferior; Mistress Quickly describes her as one who can "do what she will, say what she will, take all, pay all, go to bed when she list, rise when she list, all is as she will; and truly she deserves it, for if there be a kind woman in Windsor, she is one" (2.2.117-21). Instead of conforming to the expected inferiority, Mistress Page takes power away from her husband. Her power becomes clear partly through the way she meddles with her daughter's betrothal, even after her husband, whom she should obey, has made a decision. In the real world, this behavior would most likely get her branded a shrew or an uncouth wife, but in Shakespeare's play, she is set up as an honorable, powerful woman.

Anne's actions take this power struggle even further. Arguably the least powerful of the group as an unmarried, female child, Anne owes obeisance to her mother and father. However, she fools both her parents and marries Fenton. Although she has apparently contracted herself to Slender and Caius, she seems to know these are not binding contracts. Anne uses betrothal loopholes to her advantage and gets out of potentially unlawful and unhappy marriages. Her contract with Fenton is informal and maybe not even lawful, but still a touch more formal than the arranged contracts of her parents, since those were more clearly thought of as illegal. Anne uses the intricacies of betrothal law to flout it, governing her marriage choice with love instead of legality.

Near the end of the play, Fenton explains all of Anne's pre-contracts:

> From time to time I have acquainted you
> With the dear love I bear to fair Anne Page,
> Who mutually hath answer'd my affection
> (So far forth as herself might be her chooser)
> Even to my wish. . . .
>
> Her father hath commanded her to slip
> Away with Slender, and with him at Eton
> Immediately to marry. She hath consented.

> Now, sir,
> Her mother (even strong against that match
> And firm for Doctor Caius) hath appointed
> That he shall likewise shuffle her away . . .
>
> To this her mother's plot
> She (seemingly obedient) likewise hath
> Made promise to the doctor. (4.6.8-12, 23-29, 32-34)

It is Anne's apparent consent to the contracts made by her parents that causes the most tension surrounding the betrothal issues in the play. As stated above, marriages arranged by parents were not standard, but could occur when the parents consulted their children about the match. Even though Anne seems to have always been planning to marry Fenton—she is only "seemingly obedient" to her parents' wishes—she still consents to their arrangements. Because she consents to each betrothal, including the one she makes herself, Anne informally contracts herself to three men, even though two of the bargains are not technically pre-contracts. Fenton emerges the victor, but the other two would have every reason to go to court over the issue, as so many people did in early modern English society; Elizabethan audiences would have understood this legal problem and thus felt the dramatic tension. However, seemingly inexplicably, all is forgiven at the end of the play. The Pages willingly accept Fenton as part of the family, claiming that "in love, the heavens themselves do guide the state; /Money buys lands, and wives are sold by fate. / . . . Fenton, heaven give thee joy!" (5.5.232-33, 235-36). This fantastical resolution deftly sidesteps the potentially sticky legal issues that could have played out in real life, suggesting that Anne may still receive her inheritance and allowing love to claim the position of most importance in making alliances.

While there are abundant court records about betrothal conflicts, it is much more difficult to find jests or ballads dealing with the subject. Perhaps this is because gender ideologies governed so much of the everyday life of early modern English people, and gender plays a smaller role in betrothals than it does in something like cuckoldry. In any case, ballads and jests on the topic of betrothals are few and far between, and even those seem to focus on real life incidents as opposed to fictionalized events. For example, in 1573, Walter Smith wrote a book called *XII Mery Jests of the Wyddow Edyth*, which subsequent editors have explained "is not strictly a *jest book*, but rather a relation of the tricks and deceptions practised by the heroine . . . on one Walter Smith, who

published them for the information of his contemporaries and posterity.[29]

One jest recounts how Edith promises to marry the servant of a count and consummates the promise, but runs away before the marriage takes place:

> The Wydow northward tooke her way,
> And came to Rochester the next day,
> And there, within a little space,
> To a yongman that seruant was
> Vnto the Byshop in the Towne,
> She promised him dale and downe,
> On that condition he wolde her wed,
> And keepe her company at boord & in bed. . . .
> Good cheare he made her in her Inne,
> And eke he would not neuer blinne,
> Tyl he had brought her to his Lorde,
> Before whom they were at accorde
> Upon a condition maryed to be . . .
> On the morrow my Lorde for her sent,
> To dyne with him, and to commen further.
> Then was she gone; but when and whether
> No wyght any worde of her could tell . . .[30]

Here, the woman makes a contract with the servant, promising to marry him in exchange for sexual favors. In a section not reprinted here, the servant agrees in part because he knows he can gain money and status from the match. Both parties, then, are at fault—the widow contracts for the sole purpose of seduction, and the man is blinded by greed.

This jest may be read with a tone of warning, in contrast to the court records which simply present the events without any commentary, yet it is called a jest, which implies that it should be laughed at. These two feelings may seem at odds with each other; however, what societies joke about often reveals their insecurities. Keith Thomas states, "When we laugh we betray our innermost assumptions. . . . Jokes are a pointer to joking situations, areas of structural ambiguity in society itself; and their subject-matter can be a revealing guide to past tensions and anxieties."[31] Betrothal laws were nothing if not ambiguous, and much social anxiety was caused by their application. Jests such as these allow people to view societal problems in action from a more detached position. Even though this jest invites people to laugh at a lusty widow, if the author, Walter Smith, is to be believed, another purpose of the piece is to inform and warn men—and, to a lesser extent, women—not to be deceived by such false promises. In this jest, men,

especially, are invited to laugh at the servant the widow deceives, but also learn from his error and be sure, in their own lives, that they are not similarly tricked by women. This text provides a way for men to vent their anxiety about women and betrothals without having to actually speak about it.

Though *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a comedy, the parts of the plot involving betrothal issues do not include any specific jokes about betrothals. Anne's dancing around three pre-contracts in *Merry Wives* is, in fact, dangerous; however, in the play all the trouble is resolved to everyone's satisfaction, though not without first hinting at or explaining the consequences. Just as the jest about the Widow Edith recounts a story and encourages men to learn from the mistakes of the involved parties, the play allows men and women to see familiar problems and their results. Individual conflicts, such as those in the play, affected communities as a whole because they were public.

Lisa Jardine states, "Some ostensibly verbal incidents between individuals . . . became recognised as events, which generate particular expectations . . . the event in question introduces competing versions of fault and blame, which must now be resolved in order that the individuals concerned may be reintegrated into the community."[32] This is the case in *Merry Wives*, where, in the final act of the play the entire community becomes involved in Falstaff's machinations. By the end of the play, all the issues are resolved—Falstaff is punished, and all competing groups are reintegrated into one community—but important questions have been raised regarding tricky females, unclear laws, and love. Though it is impossible to state conclusively what direct effect these sights may have had on audiences, their familiarity with such episodes most likely connected them more deeply to the characters and possibly helped them identify and work to change similar problems in their own society, bringing the social drama to a close.

Notes

1. Juan Luis Vives, "The Instruction of a Christian Woman," in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson (London: Routledge, 1995), 71-72.
2. Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London: Routledge, 1996), 50.
3. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974), 37.
4. Turner, 38.
5. Turner, 38.
6. Turner, 38-39.
7. Turner, 41.

8. Turner, 41.
9. Jardine, 39.
10. Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 186.
11. Capp, 21.
12. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 19.
13. Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent, and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1457-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), 135.
14. B. J. and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21.
15. Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 135.
16. F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Morals and the Church Courts* (Essex: Benham and Company Limited, 1973), 1.
17. Paul Hair, ed., *Before the Bawdy Court: Selections from Church Court and Other Records Relating to the Correction of Moral Offences in England, Scotland and New England, 1300-1800* (London: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1972), 35.
18. Ingram, 132.
19. Ingram, 133.
20. Jardine, 26.
21. William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed, ed. Herschel Baker, et al., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 324-360. All subsequent line references occur in the text and refer to this edition.
22. Ingram, 135.
23. Sokol and Sokol, 32.
24. Ingram, 201.
25. Sokol and Sokol, 36.
26. Ingram, 139.
27. Sokol and Sokol, 31.
28. William Whately, "A Bride Bush," in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson (London: Routledge, 1995), 31.
29. Walter Smith, "XII Mery Jests of the Wyddow Edyth," in *The Shakespeare Jest-Books; being reprints of the Early Jest-Books supposed to have been used by Shakespeare*, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (London: Willis and Sotheran, 1864), 3:28; emphasis in original.
30. Smith, 69-70.
31. Quoted in Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 10.
32. Jardine, 28.

Gertrude, Ophelia, Ghost: Hamlet's Revenge and the Abject

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T. S. Eliot intrigues me in the following passage from his famous essay entitled "Hamlet and His Problems." He does so because while pronouncing the play "an artistic failure" due to the dissonance between dramatic representations of Gertrude and the disgust she arouses in Hamlet, Eliot serendipitously opens up another critical entry that can take Hamlet's equally troubled relations with other characters into account: "*Hamlet*, like the sonnets, is full of *some stuff* that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art. And when we search for this feeling, we find it, as in the sonnets, very difficult to localize."[1] Later Eliot does localize this "some stuff" even more pregnantly as "the inexpressibly horrible" that Shakespeare wanted to reveal but could not.[2] Though his own term lacks "an 'objective correlative'" with which he admonishes Shakespeare in the above-noted essay for the Gertrude characterization,[3] Eliot's very act of noticing "some stuff"—this "inexpressibly horrible"—is salutary, giving a fresh center from which to reread *Hamlet*.

By asking why Hamlet is aroused to react in turn with fear, desire, contempt, and disgust—not only towards Gertrude, but also towards Ophelia and the Ghost—I hope to show that Hamlet's "problems" lie in his epistemological dilemma spurred by the material manifestations of "the inexpressibly horrible." It is also my hope that his sense of the horrible becomes intelligible with the assistance of Julia Kristeva, who explores the corporeal authority of abjection in her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*—a treatise built in part on Freud's maternal figure as a taboo, in part on Mary Douglas's anthropological insights about boundaries and the role of the body in society, and in part on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of outsiders.[4] It is fortuitous that the terms "horrible" and "horror" are etymologically cognate. Such linkages help in reconfiguring Hamlet's horrors of Gertrude, Ophelia, and the Ghost into those of his ever-shifting symbolically-prescribed threefold self—that

of the prince, the son, and the lover—because such self is founded upon his disquiet about feminine sexuality, "the maternal" body, and the general materiality of the human body.[5] In the end, Kristeva's theory clarifies Hamlet's "problems" as those of an outsider's epistemology.

Thick theoretical threads weave Kristeva's abjection, but the most guiding for my rereading of *Hamlet* are those concerned with the imaginary borderlines and "the speaking subject's"—i.e., symbolic self's—relationship to these borders.[6] Namely, what may exist on either side of the border is the key element to Kristeva's abjection. She writes that abjection is that which "disturbs identity, system, or order" and thus threatens stable subject positions.[7] Since abjection does not respect "borders, positions, rules," the full constitution of subject positions requires a clear demarcation line between the space of the subject and what is not the subject's, namely, the other's.[8] This redrawing of boundaries and spaces creates the subject's sense of security, of what's inside and what is outside the boundary of the self. This horror of abjection is caused as much by the physical repulsion at the other as by an additional knowledge that

> abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives. Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.[9]

Kristeva means that abjection does not exist outside the subject in the sense that it has emanated from the subject's acknowledged symbolic self and order, be it biological, social, or spiritual. Although the specific nature of the border changes from one experience to another, the work of abjection remains the same: to bring about an encounter between symbolic order and that which threatens its stability.

One of the primal abjective borders, as hinted at in the preceding passage, is the materiality of the feminine, especially "converging on the maternal" body as the sexualized other.[10] Kristeva explains this point in this way: In our psychosexual development, partly consumed by the desire to remain locked in a blissful oneness with the mother and partly terrified of separation, the child finds it easy to succumb to the comforting pleasure of "a

chora, a receptacle,"[11] that is, the ideal state of fusion in the womb between mother and child prior to the child's individuation. But, as the child separates from the "*maternal* entity" and enters "the symbolic realm" or law of the father, the child experiences its mother as an abject and begins to recognize a boundary between "me" and the "mother," between "I" and other.[12] When we as adults confront the abject, therefore, we simultaneously fear and identify with the mother as both repellent and fascinating, provoking us into recalling a state of being prior to the law of the father where we feel a sense of helplessness. However hard we try to exclude the abject mother, she still exists since the other is that which is outside the self and within the self at the same time. Abjection is truly an intolerable state of being because the maternal causes the recurring, threatening sensation of an instable self, signifying "a kind of *narcissistic crisis*" wherein "when I *seek* (myself), [I] *lose* (myself) . . . then 'I' is *heterogeneous*"; it is a state wherein "I" must question the integrity of my own self.[13]

Equally important in Kristeva's scheme is another border that materializes in what she calls "a 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing" since this "something" partakes of "the improper and unclean."[14] Kristeva remarks that we recognize one such border-drawing other at the sight of certain foods, vomit, body fluids, human wastes and, most of all, the corpse, toward which we feel revulsion and abhorrence. Such somatic reactions occur, moved by our psychological reactions of "repelling, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Ab-jecting." Through these, we redraw an imaginary "boundary of the self's clean and proper body . . . a border between two distinct entities or territories. . . between nature and culture, between the human and the non-human."[15] In our symbolic and spiritual experiences, we abstract such biological "repelling" into "a rite of defilement and pollution."[16] During the performance of the rite, we renew the original contact with the abject, then we repel it as an "*exclusion* or taboo," a "*transgression* (of the Law)," or as "a threatening otherness."[17] We feel urged to perform such a cathartic rite of repelling because the otherness exists "where meaning collapses," most typically in forms of bodily pollution or the breaching of taboo social practices. Otherness as abjection breaks down meanings and causes the generic loss of distinctions that nurture these foundational distinctions—whether a distinction is between culture and nature, subject and object, I and other, life and death.[18]

From the foregoing theoretical gleanings, the genesis of Hamlet's problematic relations with Gertrude, Ophelia, and the

Ghost may be re-imagined in his horrified new knowledge of them primarily as figures of abjection. In an illuminating association to Kristeva, Hamlet's first soliloquy plunges us into the play's subtext of abjection where a transgressive border-crossing by the abject maternal body—and its extension, the female body—is foregrounded. Since Ernest Jones read Hamlet as an Oedipal-complexed youth, Hamlet's relation to the maternal has often turned on a psychology complete with Freudian repressed infantile fantasies and adult son's fears and revulsion of what Janet Adelman named Gertrude's "maternal malevolence" and her "uncontrolled sexuality."[19] A Kristeva-leavened reading of *Hamlet* encourages not so much revising such views of Gertrude as augmenting Hamlet's complex filial stance towards the disorganizing materiality of her body, now authorized as both a repulsive and a desired place.

Thus it is with the revelation of Hamlet's horror of this repulsive mother-as-power that the first soliloquy begins. "Repellingly" lamented is Gertrude, who does not know the borders of the self, originating in her fertile and deadly generative body with which she has collapsed the whole meaning-making paradigm of "all the uses of this world" (1.2.138).[20] What sounds like Hamlet's death wish—"O, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew, / Or that the Everlasting had not fixed/ His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!" (1.2.133-36)—in fact articulates his unspeakable horror and revulsion of the "rank and gross" maternal power that would "disturb identity, system, order" of the symbolic (1.2.140). Immediately following, therefore, is Hamlet's more private horror of "Maternal authority," which, according to Kristeva's premise, "is distinguished from paternal laws within which . . . the destiny of man will take shape."[21] His symbolic identity, inscribed in his princely and filial status, is founded on and maintained in King Hamlet's transcendent paternal order and law.

Now that she has effaced that proper boundary by means of the shifting of her body from "my poor father's body" to "incestuous sheets" (1.2.152, 162), she has become a threat to "the totality of his living being."[22] In order to reclaim his "clean and proper" male body,[23] he redraws boundaries by performing a verbal ritual of repelling because pure speech is associated with the symbolic male body and "like culture, sets up a separation and, starting with discrete elements, concatenates an order."[24] His language, expectedly, is underpinned with the reassuringly foundational distinctions between the transgressive mutable maternal ("an unweeded garden," "nature," "earth," "this,"

"appetite," "most unrighteous tears," "satyr," "a beast," "incestuous sheets," "increase," "grown," "fed," "speed") and the transcendental ideal paternal ("Everlasting," "God," "His canon," "a king," "Hyperion," "heaven," "father," and "reason") (1.2.135-54).

In the process of so recapturing himself, Hamlet's horror of Gertrude's body escalates, I think, by an additional unwelcome knowledge that she in effect helps both to subvert and convert his father's paternal order by willingly subordinating herself to the new symbolic order through the seemingly acceptable, but in reality defiled, form of marriage ("this" [1.2.143]) to Claudius; she had put herself "outside . . . [and] beyond . . . the rules of the game,"[25] and blurred the line between what she should be as his mother and for his father and what she chooses to be with Claudius. Indeed, his double horror is engendered because she can maintain the integrity of the former symbolic status of a queen mother, whereas his own is now quite ungrounded, just as Claudius's deconstructing public address to him in the preceding scene—"But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son" (1.2.66)—has demonstrated.

While marriage in itself represents an ideal social practice, informed by the paternal rules of inheritance, economics, and considerations for order in society, for Hamlet, Gertrude's "marr[ying] with my uncle" with "most wicked speed" (155-56, 161) constitutes a prohibited marriage and thus a commission of a taboo, and points towards the delusive nature of the former "arrangements of knowledge" that would have allowed for his familiar, stable identity of prince and son to continue.[26] "Maternal authority" is to set up an archaic borderline between the "I" and the other, its mother, according to Kristeva. Her body is to signify a boundary of "that mapping of the self's clean and proper body; it is distinguished from paternal laws."[27] Yet, Gertrude seems intent on reincorporating herself into the body of Claudius ("With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" [1.2.162]), who, even if Hamlet does not yet know about Claudius's covert regicide, now represents not only the paternal and symbolic law, but also precisely the kind of law "around which a secure, a sacrally corroborated, masculine identity can be organized,"[28] a pervasive occurrence Hamlet acutely observes in the expeditiously achieved male identities of Polonius, Gildenstern, Rosencrantz, and Laertes, who are all bent on reorganizing their loyalties.

At the same time, Hamlet also registers a Kristevan resonance of the maternal in the form of his strangely lingering desire to retrieve the ideal mother, while still contending with his impulse to

expel her. His ferocious maternal repelling here, ironically then, can be thought to form the obverse of the high stakes of such desire which remembers his parents as ideal figures, particularly his father embodying the transcendent authority attending and nurturing the ideal mother: "so loving to my mother / That he might not beteem the winds of heaven / Visit her face too roughly" (1.2.144-46). Hamlet's longing remembrance in turn substitutes what Kristeva describes as the *chora,* that space where he grew fused with the mother and which he left in order to be under the father's law, because it anchors Gertrude in her enactment of ideal motherhood, like "Niobe, all tears" following "my poor father's body" (1.2.153, 152).

This desirous, ideal maternal image belies the destructive power behind tears, however. Excretions, such as her tears, are part of "these body fluids [of] . . . defilement [and] are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death"; they insist on body boundaries as fluid and subject to instability, according to Kristeva, who echoes Mary Douglas: excretions "by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body."[29] Applied to *Hamlet*, her tears shed for "so excellent a king" (1.2.143) turn out to be false and impure precisely because they are reminders of the permeability of borders: Gertrude's body not only rewrites King Hamlet's symbolic order and law; it also makes it impossible for Hamlet to reconstruct himself in the image of a time-unbound mythic male self ("but no more . . . / than I to Hercules" [1.2.158]) and prepares him to experience the onset of the feeling of abjection within himself later on.

When she was Hamlet's queen mother, she was safely preserved under his father's symbolic order ("Why, she would hang on him / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on" [1.2.147-49]). Remarried, Gertrude is now under Claudius's order, and her tears, leaking heavily from the quintessentially female body, horrify his reminiscences ("Must I remember?") as "most unrighteous tears" "in her galled eyes" (1.2.147, 159, 160). As Mary Douglas continues in the above note, all borderlines are dangerous and marginal areas, and eyes, like other orifices of the body, are where the paternal order is blown to extinction, just as Claudius has accomplished through Gertrude. What naturally follows is Hamlet's sweeping, expelling rite of maternal abjection with "Frailty, thy name is woman!" exposing Gertrude as the source of both moral and sexual weakness and the "active murderer" of his own corporeal body (1.2.150).[30]

It is no surprise, then, that Hamlet's succeeding efforts to confine and curb so as then to repel Gertrude and Ophelia are accompanied with the increasingly foreboding knowledge of his own frailty, eventuating in self-erasure. In act 2, scene 2, Gertrude's boundary-effacing maternal sensuality is now transferred onto the question of the fecund, yet lethal, female body of Ophelia. Hamlet warns Polonius that it would be dangerous for Ophelia to traffic in the sun. He is referring back to "I am too much in the sun" in the previous scene (1.2.69), the sun being Claudius and his symbolic law. The implied danger is that the specious sun-god (the male gender like Claudius) impregnates the "frailty" of Ophelia who, having turned dead-dog, breeds maggots "being a go[o]d kissing carrion" (2.2.197-98). This warning is shot under the guise of Hamlet's pretend-madness humour, of course, and beyond Polonius's ken: maggots devour the dead, and if the sun-kissed mortals like him are like maggots in their mortality, a potentially maggot-breeding female like Ophelia is mortality itself.

But such humour, whether aimed at Polonius or at Ophelia, only disguises the dawning knowledge of his own self-abnegation in a world in which a male identity is constituted by female abjection coded with male fear and desire. In act 3, scene 1, Hamlet continues to contend with this configuration of motherhood, fecund but lethal female body, and the delusive stability of his symbolic self. In the ritualistic expelling of the properties and potentialities of the female body—"Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1.99-162)—Hamlet extends his previous warning to Polonius ("Let her not walk i' th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but, as your daughter may conceive, friend, look to 't" [2.2.201-203]) and associates the maggot-breeding body specifically with feminine physicality and sexuality, icons of filth and decay. This point is especially apparent as he fuses Gertrude and Ophelia into "breeder[s] of sinners," these abject figures putting him, as Kristeva writes, "at the border of [his] condition as a living being."[31] Such a female body obliterates not just his former claim to be her lover; it also condemns his soul through physical corruption. With an incantatory "Get thee to a nunnery," Hamlet attempts to obscure and contain the feminine power at the same time, only to become acutely aware of the fragility of his masculine self:

> I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things, that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck that I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such

> fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us. (3.1.131-40)

His baiting of Ophelia before the production of *The Mousetrap* (3.2) and his brief soliloquy following it extend this awareness of the temporality of his body as he battles the collapse of the symbolic through his duty to revenge. Female bodies like Ophelia's readily bleed, leak, and secrete, making deadly male entrance posible; as Kristeva remarks, they "can wreck the infinite."[32] His verbal play on "nothing" alludes not just to Ophelia's sexual integrity alone; also detectable is the sense that the power of women bestows him life but without transcendent infinity. Therefore, even his attention to female sexuality wrecks him, he claims waggishly, literally reducing him to physical "nothing" unless he expels his thoughts to "lie between maids' legs" (3.2.125-26). Shortly after, answering his mother's summons, he professes to be "cruel" though "not unnatural" to her, to "speak daggers to her but use none," and not to "let . . . The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom" (3.2.428-29). These are all verbal acts of expelling female abjection if only to reassure his essential "nature" (3.2.426).

The Closet scene (3.4) climaxes Hamlet and Gertrude at their parting thresholds of abjection precisely because Gertrude seems to continue defeating Hamlet's tenuous custody of the symbolic self. Established differences and all the customary categories are invoked in his first soliloquy and elsewhere: for instance, "Hyperion" vs. "satyr" (1.2.144), "celestial bed" vs. "garbage" (1.5.63-64), "moor" vs. "fair mountain" (3.4.76-77), "devil" vs. "angel" (3.4.183). But, here, they are incomprehensible to her and thus abolished by her:

> *Queen:* Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.
> *Hamlet:* Mother, you have my father much offended (3.4.12-13).

> *Queen:* Have you forgot me?
> *Hamlet:* No, by the rood, not so.
> You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife,
> And (would it were not so) you are my mother.
> *Queen:* Nay, then I'll set those to you that can speak. (3.4.18-22)

Indeed, the heart of what appears "a rash and bloody deed" (3.4.33) in the scene lies not so much in the "accidental" killing of Polonius,[33] as in Hamlet's almost self-forgetting, savage reminder to her of the importance of the clear boundaries of meaning that can guarantee the stability and totality of their symbolic selves—the Queen, a king, his brother, good mother, and Hamlet the prince and son:

> Such an act
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
> Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love
> And sets s blister there, makes marriage vows
> As false as dicers' oaths – O, such a deed
> As from the body of contraction plucks
> The very soul, and sweet religion makes
> A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face does glow
> O'er this solidity and compound mass
> With heated visage, as against the doom,
> Is thought-sick at the act. (3.4.49-60)

So here, in her room within the closed, curtained walls (which is an ironic objectification of Kristeva's *chora*, signifying both the mother's womb and the son's grave), Hamlet points to the two pictures of the two brothers and "bring[s] [her] to the test" on what her "heyday in the blood" (3.4.79) has wrought. In this way, he frees himself of the abjection in the maternal and readies her to become his ideal mother and his father's legitimate queen once more, in a world which will no longer be dominated by "a king of shreds and patches" (3.4.117)—and where, as Joel Fineman, evoking the Kristevan notion of boundaries, says, binary systems are nullified by "her sensuality which has abolished Difference in Denmark. By sleeping first with one brother and then with the second . . . Gertrude makes it finally apparent that there is in Denmark No Difference at all."[34] Bringing her to the savage degree of the dangers inherent in erasing the physical differences between King Hamlet and Claudius, Hamlet gives voice to the growing, painful knowledge that accompanies the loss of his symbolic self that would "draw attention to the fragility of the [paternal] law."[35] I see that the Claudius-mandated dispatching of Hamlet to England fleshes out Hamlet's final loss of and the separation from the *chora*, while his grudging obeisance to Claudius again throws into relief the fragility of the idealization of Old Hamlet's law.

What I gain from tracing these contestations between the maternal and feminine and the paternal and masculine is a paradox that Hamlet can signify a force of the symbolic only if he can confine, control, and expel female abjection. As Hamlet increasingly comes to realize, Gertrude and Ophelia, possessed of corporeal authority, point towards the impossibility of an ideal realm to which his material body aspires.

This paradox, accentuating a progressive volatility of Hamlet's symbolic self, also enables another condition of paradox to arise, further problematizing his being since he must concentrate on his

hidden, yet more urgent, subjective self as a revenger. Namely, when his father's Ghost as a "spectral other"[36] commands, "So art thou to revenge," the Ghost pushes to its limits the crisis in Hamlet's paternally inscribed self (1.5.12), and transforms his ontological status.

It is this new orientation toward Hamlet's being that intriguingly approximates the several threads of Renaissance discourse on the morality and politics of revenge to the Kristevan horror and attraction of the Ghost in *Hamlet*. Lily Bess Campbell and later Eleanor Prosser have shown that commentary against revenge varies, leaving the situation unavoidably ambivalent.[37] On one hand is the widespread official disapproval of revenge based on Biblical (especially Genesis 4.9-15 and Romans 12.19) and positive laws. For instance, William Dickinson, stressing the function of positive law as deriving from the Word of God, prohibits private revenge and counsels the victims of severe, malicious, and unjustified injuries to adhere to prescribed legal procedures so as to maintain order and justice throughout the realm.[38] Thomas Beard, for another, believes in providential punishments accorded in this world to Christians if they leave vengeance to God, even under corrupt and tyrannical kings.[39]

Opposite to their thinking is Francis Bacon, who concedes that revenge might be justified, having several potentially affirmative functions. Characterizing revenge as "a kind of Wilde Justice," he provocatively argues that the offender deserves to suffer a revenger's punishment for the harm he has committed.[40] The revenger operates in what Catherine Belsey calls border territories "between justice and crime," where the revenger is himself freed from exposing himself to punishment of the law and where the revenger participates "in the installation of the sovereign subject, entitled to take action in accordance with conscience and on behalf of the law."[41]

At its very base, then, what is common to Bacon's qualified idea of a revenger and Kristeva's probing of abjection is a cross-epochal insight, leading to the irony of King Hamlet's Ghost as a being that resides the space that is "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[42] In the Ghost's own admission, he is

> Doomed for a certain term to walk the night
> And for the day confined to fast in fires
> Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
> Are burnt and purged away. (1.5.15-18)

Hamlet's subsequent revenge act therefore substantiates Kristeva's observation: "Any crime, because it draws attention to

the fragility of the law, is abject but . . . hypocritical revenge [is] even more so because [it heightens] the display of fragility."[43] With his "dread command," the Ghost renders Hamlet an abject while radicalizing him into becoming a transgressive outsider existing in abjection, because as a revenger, he is forced not to "respect borders, positions, rules" of King Hamlet's own symbolic law as well as Claudius's.

Hamlet's emergent new self-purchase as a figure of abjection is equally confirmed in his own words in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, long accepted as Hamlet's contemplation of suicide. There, Hamlet enumerates the world's iniquities, one of which is found in the often neglected phrase, "the law's delay." Rather than Hamlet contemplating suicide, I submit that his primary interest here resides in foregrounding the law's centrality in his life as an avenger and crystallizes his momentous awareness of social displacement as an outsider. Placed in the choice between passively accepting an injustice and resisting it by committing an act of "wild justice," Hamlet is wrenched from an established identity ("Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son," according to Claudius [1.2.121], "Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state," according to Ophelia [3.1.166]) and forced to inhabit a new one as a legally marginalized being; in fact, he is in danger of falling outside the legal system completely. To put up with "law's delay" means to leave crime unpunished and disorder triumphant.

Unlike Fortinbras and Laertes, for Hamlet to shrink from revenge in a world that looks upon it as a sacred obeisance to paternal law is to exclude himself from that society. As head of state, even if illicit to the Ghost and Hamlet's view, Claudius wields supreme judicial power. The delay of Claudius's law indeed consigns Hamlet to inhabit the extra-legal space of collision between patriarchal law which prohibits revenge, and the illicit act to avenge "his [father's] foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.31) as a privately appointed avenging self.

Such a fundamental shift in his ontological status helps, I think, in understanding the ambivalent responses of horror and desire of the Ghost in *Hamlet* as another paradox because the Ghost's appearance forces Hamlet's attention to the paternal figure as a destabilizing abjection, its commandment further confirming both his transgressive role and the fragility of the symbolic. Erupting in an already destabilized state of Denmark, the Ghost confronts Hamlet with questionable materiality: the corpse encased in the armor as Hamlet's cry, "What may this mean / That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel," confirms (1.4.56-57). And its fall

from symbolic grace is clear, when Kristeva, describing the corpse as abjection, uses the infinitive "to fall," *cadere* in French, hence cadaver, the corpse:

> My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—cadere, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. . . Deprived of world, therefore, I *fall in faint.*[44]

Even the Ghost's own syphilis-like, diseased body description vivifies its abject fall,[45] though Hamlet attempts to reestablish its transcendent ideal images by calling out, "thee," "Hamlet," "King," "Father," "Royal Dane" (1.4.49-50). Claudius's "cursed hebona" courses through Old Hamlet's "natural gates and alleys of the body," causing "the leprous distilment" to suddenly "posset" his "thin and wholesome blood," his "smooth body" erupting into "tetter barked about, / Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust" (1.5.69, 71, 74, 75, 78-79). As Kristeva points out, the corpse of "such a questionable shape" (1.5.4) is part of that impurity and disgust and poses the ultimate ontological threat to Hamlet. King Hamlet's corpse literalizes the breakdown of familiar rational and moral "arrangements of knowledge" within Hamlet's world and confronts the symbolic King Hamlet where he, "fluctuating between inside and outside, pleasure and pain, would find death, along with nirvana."[46] It is meaningful, I think, that King Hamlet is rendered a corpse, as Lucianus reenacts in *The Mousetrap*, through one of the vulnerable orifices of the body, his ears (3.2.280-87), destabilizing the corporeal boundary. As Kristeva puts it, "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject."[47]

In examining revenge, Bacon also says that "the most tolerable sort of revenge is for those wrongs which there is no law to remedy; but then let a man take heed the revenge be such as there is no law to punish."[48] The tragic irony in Bacon's warning, applied to Hamlet the avenger, is this: More unnaturally than the maternal threat, it is the Ghost—once paternal law and order, but now another manifestation of the abject as a decaying corpse—that punishes Hamlet by impelling the eventual annihilation of Hamlet's body and his symbolically prescribed identity.

In the last scene, after consigning Hamlet to "rest" and "felicity" (5.2.362, 347), Horatio shifts Hamlet's "my story" from being a revenge play (a tale of "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts / . . . Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters, / Of deaths put on by the cunning and forc'd cause" [5.2.382-85]) to an ontological mystery of "things standing thus unknown" (5.2.361-62). Dying, Hamlet, too, offers himself up not only to the court, but also to our interpretation. And this, finally, seemingly is the purpose of his revenge task—to create a meaning of his self, as if in response to Kristeva's implicit questions embedded in the powers of horror: what is the nature of this world and what is the meaning of his outsider's place in this world?

In one of his essays, Mikhail Bakhtin clarifies that the outsider exercises a special mental sight through which he, she, or they can see what the insider cannot:

> In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*. In the realm of culture, outsidedness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of *another* culture that foreign culture reveals itself more fully and profoundly.[49]

Bakhtin explores what it means for us to be outsiders ("located outside"). When we are "located outside," Bakhtin suggests that we encounter and juxtapose with other autonomous cultural entities—whether words, sentences, discourses, or subjects—as deeply as possible. But having done this without merging with other cultures, we need to return to the understanding provided to us by our native selves or our native culture. Because we conserve our identities as well as theirs in a mutually enriching bond, we "engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures," and, therefore, we acquire an enriched understanding of "others" and ourselves. Bakhtin reverses the customarily negative status of the outsider into one of significant creative potentialities. He suggests that the outsider obtains an "epistemological privilege"[50] wherein one's consciousness of outsidedness privileges one, epistemologically, to move toward a moment of enlightenment and causes one to gain an enriched knowledge and understanding of the self, the others, and the world. In this sense, the borders

can be unexpected sites of discovery, empathy, knowledge, interpretation, and creative energy. On this point, Kristeva would have agreed wholeheartedly with Bakhtin whose works she brought to the attention of the Francophone world and beyond.[51]

In Bakhtin's terms, liminal figures like the avenger Hamlet are initiated into the realm of epistemological privilege. To the dominant society, outsiders have sacrificed their own positions within the system. And yet, Hamlet's quest for the knowledge of the self, through "pluck[ing] out the heart of . . . mystery" of his father's murder, leads him to an intratext that insists not only on the solution to a crime, but also on a larger mystery (3.2.364-45): he cannot always solve the mysteries of the self, and confident rationalism is woefully inadequate to explain much of what goes on in his world—an ironic, untested intuition Hamlet displayed as he lectured to Horatio early in the play: "And therefore as a stranger gives it welcome, / There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (1.5.174-76).

As his revenge quest for the solution of the murder mystery turns into the tragic quest of the mystery of the world and himself, the limits of the management of revenge and honor or of any other absolutist moral conduct are left ambiguous. In this sense, it cannot be without purpose that the Old Hamlet, the murdered king, was a murderer himself (1.1.91-103). However a "smiling, damned villain" Claudius may be (1.5.109), he cannot be villainous enough if King Hamlet appears in a context of revenge by Fortinbras as well. Further, placed amid the imprisoning Denmark (the diseased and ever changing ways human relations are formed and the traitorous plots are hatched), Hamlet, the individual self, cannot always solve the nature of the self. It is in this intrinsically tragic realization that Hamlet's lament "the time is out of joint" (1.5.215) sympathetically relates to Kristeva's notion of abjection as an exile who acquires a heightened understanding of the self and will thus be saved.

In the end, Hamlet's liberation derives from his symbolic reading of the hidden knowledge he discovers, and it is both epistemologically and existentially privileged: the former revealing the self and the world as a tenuous and contingent mystery, an ontological rupture within the self; and the latter affirming such insights as conferrable only on those who freely choose the status of avenger/outsider. And his arrival at this truth about himself restores him to what he primarily is: Horatio's scholarly narrator's soul, responding to Kristeva's scholarship, might just point to the play's title, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, and say that, in

its subtitle, his friend's final redemption is already prophesied, vindicating Shakespeare's art that Eliot has censured. Though Horatio must tell a story of "the horror within,"[52] caused by breakdowns in Hamlet's corporeal and epistemological self, Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark, none other. Perennially situated in the in-between boundary of the epistemological privilege, Hamlet, in Horatio's telling, remains a "sweet prince," as his friend's valedictory orison movingly affirms, "Good night, sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!" (5.2.361-62).

Notes

1. T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," in *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998), 57, 58. Italics added.

2. Eliot, 59.

3. Eliot, 58.

4. Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Vol. 17, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1925), 217-52; Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. with notes and commentary by Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1966); Mikhail Bakhtin, "Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff," *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 1-7.

5. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 64. Hereafter, all page references to Kristeva are to this publication. Etymologically, according to the *OED,* words "abject" and "abjection" begin to appear in usage early in the 1400s to describe the person, the action, or the condition of being "brought low in position, condition, or estate," resulting in becoming an outcast, excluded, rejected, humiliated, or despicable. It quotes a line from Shakespeare's *Henry VI* ("These paltry servile, abject Drudges" [4.1]) to mean those "down in spirit or hope, low in regard or estimation." In Kristeva's interpretation, abject and abjection are used interchangeably throughout her book.

6. Kristeva, 67.

7. Kristeva, 4.

8. Kristeva, 4.

9. Kristeva, 9-10.

10. Kristeva, 64.

11. Kristeva, 14.

12. Kristeva, 6, 10, 13.

13. Kristeva, 14, 10.

14. Kristeva, 2.

15. Kristeva, 13, 75.

16. Kristeva, 17.

17. Kristeva, 17.

18. Kristeva, 2, 1-2.

19. Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (New York: Norton, 1976); Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, "Hamlet" to "The Tempest"* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16, 15.

20. Text references are to act, scene, and line of the Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992). Subsequent citations appear in the text.

21. Kristeva, 72.

22. Kristeva, 64.

23. Kristeva, 3, 72.

24. Kelly Oliver, "Kristeva's Imaginary Father and the Crisis in the Paternal Function," *diacritics* 9 (summer-fall 1991): 49; Kristeva, 72.

25. Kristeva, 2.

26. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 14.

27. Kristeva, 72.

28. Joel Fineman, "Fratricide and Cuckoldry: Shakespeare's Doubles," *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed. Coppelia Kahn and Murray M. Schwarz (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1980), 90.

29. Kristeva, 25; Douglas, 121.

30. Adelman, 25.

31. Kristeva, 3.

32. Kristeva. 157.

33. Eric Sterling argues that Hamlet purposefully murders Polonius, in his "Shakespeare's HAMLET," in *The Explicator* 60 (Fall 2001): 2-5. I agree with him in that this is one of a series of revenges Hamlet commits before finally getting at Claudius directly.

34. Fineman, 89-90.

35. Kristeva, 4.

36. Paul D. Streufel, "Spectral Others: Theatrical Ghosts as the Negotiation of Alterity in Aeschylus and Shakespeare," *Intertexts* 8.1 (Spring 2004): 77-94.

37. Lily B. Campbell, "Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England," *Modern Philology* 28 (1931): 281-96; Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), especially chapters 1-2.

38. William Dickinson, *The King's Right* (London, 1619), sigs. B4 verso, C verso, C2, D2. For the bibliographical information, I am indebted to *A Longman Cultural Edition Hamlet,* ed. Constance Jordan (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 175-6.

39. Thomas Beard, *The Theater of God's Judgments* (London, 1597), 225, 229. For the bibliographical information, I am indebted to *A Longman Cultural Edition Hamlet,* ed. Constance Jordan (New York, Boston, San Francisco: Pearson Longman, 2004), 177-78.

40. Francis Bacon, "Of Revenge," *The Essayes or Counsell, Civill and Morall,* ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 16; Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), 115, 116.

41. Belsey, 115.

42. Kristeva, 4.

43. Kristeva, 3-4.

44. Kristeva, 4.

45. Claudius's poison causes in King Hamlet the symptoms of venereal disease with the lazar-like tetter, which was one of the diagnostic signs of syphilis. See James Cleugh, *Secret Enemy: The Story of a Disease* (London: Thames, 1954), 46-50.

46. Kristeva, 63-64.

47. Kristeva, 4.

48. Bacon, 17.

49. Bakhtin, 6-7.

50. This is a term coined by Tzvetan Todorov whose explication of Bakhtin's idea of outsiders provides the basis for my arguments here. Todorov uses this particular expression to explain the status of the exile, a mode of being the other. See his *Nous et les autres: La reflexion francaise sur la diversite humanine* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989), 390.

51. Bakhtin's influence on Kristeva can be seen, for instance, in chapters 2 and 3 of *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 34-61, 62-73.

52. Kristeva, 53.

The Merry Wives of Windsor and Elizabeth I: The Welsh Connection

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We all understand how scholarship is a building process. As critics and scholars in later days analyze and critique, they usually borrow from earlier critics and scholars. Ideas previously proposed are expanded and extrapolated and qualified; however, this process can be as debilitating as it can be rewarding. Take the case of Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and, in particular, the character of Sir Hugh Evans. Because of the general harsh critical treatment this play has received, what may be a vital link between the English court and the play has been overlooked, its characters dismissed as shallow (pun intended).[1] I believe that two gentlemen, John Dennys and William Hazlitt, are largely responsible for the overall lack of scholarship and analysis of *The Merry Wives of Windsor.* Through both men's works, the process of criticism and discussion about this play has been delimited even to the present day.

John Dennys' famous "Epistle Dedicatory" in his reworking of the *Merry Wives*, *The Comic Gallant* (1702), contains his account of the catalyst of the play's original composition: "This Comedy was written at [Elizabeth's] Command, and by her direction, and she was so eager to see it Acted, that she commanded it to be finished in fourteen days; and was so afterwards, as Tradition tells us, very well pleas'd at the Representation."[2] For centuries, this particular passage colored any consideration of the play.

The origin of Dennys' story is not known with any amount of certainty—no documentary evidence exists which supports the now-canonical origin of the play—but modern day scholars have recently qualified Dennys' version with an argument first posed by Leslie Hotson in 1931. Hotson, in *Shakespeare Versus Shallow*, cites evidence that *Merry Wives* may have been first performed and indeed written specifically for the Garter Feast of 1597.[3] Later critics, such as William Green in his Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives*

of Windsor, have expanded this argument to the point of saying that "to the Elizabethan, the *Merry Wives* was Shakespeare's Garter play."[4] As recently as 1997, Giorgio Melchiori, in his *Shakespeare's Garter Plays*, treats *Merry Wives* as an expansion of said 1597 Garter entertainment, still linking the play with that precise date and occasion.[5]

An earlier critic, William Hazlitt, played no small role in minimizing Hamlet-like scholarship via his discussion of the *Merry Wives* in 1817. His work, *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, dealt with every known play in the Shakespearean canon at the time, including *Merry Wives*. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *Merry Wives* had enjoyed remarkable success on the English stage; however, after the early 1800s, the play nearly disappeared from the theaters. I believe Hazlitt's damning of Falstaff as "a designing, bare faced knave, and an unsuccessful one"[6] drastically altered people's perceptions of the play. "We should have liked [the play] much better, if any one else had been the hero of it . . . Sir John himself, by no means, comes off with flying colors . . . Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is not the man he was in the two parts of *Henry IV*. His wit and his eloquence have left him."[7] And Hazlitt does not reserve his comparative criticism for Falstaff alone: "Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol, are but the shadows of what they were."[8] These passages make the comparison between the characters of the history plays and the characters of this comedy, a comparison that continues to plague and discourage modern-day scholars. Hazlitt also characterizes the play and its main character, Falstaff, as "faint sparks of those flashes of merriment,"[9] a perception still widely held today.

But to analyze this play, one must rise above Hazlitt's perception and return to the play's composition. Green argues that the Garter Feast of 1597 was the occasion for the writing and first performance of *The Merry Wives* because Lord Hundson, patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, was being inducted into the Order of the Garter that year; hence, the play was commissioned by him as a sort of tribute to Queen Elizabeth. Melchiori reinterprets this origin story by arguing that the Garter entertainment remains merely as an echo in the fuller (and later) *Merry Wives*, but even he is unwilling to relinquish the connection altogether. Thus, the Garter feast story and Dennys' fable have a certain amount of charm, but I wish to discuss something besides charm, something far more striking about these two stories of *primeras causa* which should affect any interpretation of the play: the presence of royalty. Both stories of origination are linked **directly** with Elizabeth herself,

both stating that the play was written with the intention of performing in the immediate presence of the Queen. But what is her connection with the characters or action of the play?

I suggest that the strongest evidence for this association may be found in "Sir Hugh Evans, a Welsh parson." For centuries, Evans has been labeled as foolish, a caricature. Based only on his regional accent, Evans has been determined a fool not only in speech, but in heraldry, something that would have seemed odd to Evans's "contemporaries." Critics cite Evans's accent as reason for dismissing his character as nothing more than a comic bit part: "Got" for "God," "petter" for "better," and "fery" for "very"; "Evans . . . is a man who 'makes fritters of English,'" according to Anne Barton, echoing Falstaff's own characterization of the parson.[10] Also, Evans's actions in the play have been considered mere buffoonery. For example, the opening scene of the play shows Shallow, a country justice, and Slender, his cousin, raging about an offense given to Shallow by Falstaff. As Shallow exclaims his family honor, Shakespeare introduces the play's earliest humor by having Evans pun on the Shallow family coat: [11]

Slender. All his successors (gone before him) hath done't;
and all his ancestors (gone after him) may. They may
give the dozen white luces in their coat.
Shallow: It is an old coat.
Evans. The dozen white louses do become an old coat well; it
agrees well, passant. It is a familiar beast to man, and
signifies love.
Shallow: The luce is the fresh fish, the salt fish is an old coat.
Slender. I may quarter, coz.
Shallow: You may, by marrying.
Evans. It is marring indeed, if he quarter it.
Shallow: Not a whit.
Evans. Yes, py'r lady. If he has a quarter of your coat,
there is but three skirts for yourself, in my simple
conjectures.
But that is all one. (1.1.14-30)

The Riverside edition takes a standard approach to this passage: "Evans misunderstands *coat* (as a garment) and *luces* (as *louses*)"; and, referring to the word *passant*, "perhaps Evans means *passing*, i.e., exceedingly; if so, he unintentionally enriches his picture of the old coat and the lice by using the heraldic term for 'walking.'"[12] However, taking into account the theories of the play's composition, all of which revolve around the personage of Elizabeth, Evans's words and actions might take on an altogether different significance.

Even if neither Dennys' nor Hotson/Green's theory of composition is completely true and even if Melchiori is correct, the theories indicate that, for **whatever** reason the play was written, it seems to have been written with the Queen in mind. The text itself provides evidence for this assertion, mentioning "the radiant Queen" (5.5.46), impossible if the Falstaff and other characters are the same ones living and cavorting with Prince Hal in the Henry IV plays. In addition, the 1602 Quarto's title page states, "As it hath been divers times acted by the right Honorable my Lord Chamberlain's servants both before her Majesty and elsewhere."[13] And perhaps most strongly in support of this theory, there is the famous "Garter speech" in Act 5 by Mistress Quickly, a paean to the Garter, which inevitably calls to mind the elaborate ceremonies of the Most Noble Order:

> The several chairs of order look you scour
> With juice of balm and every precious flow'r;
> Each fair installment, coat, and sev'ral crest,
> With loyal blazon, evermore be blest!
> And nightly, meadow-fairies, look you sing,
> Like to the Garter's compass, in a ring.
> Th' expressure that it bears, green let it be,
> More fertile-fresh than all the field to see;
> And *'Honi soit qui mal y pensé'* write
> In em'rald tuffs, flow'rs purple, blue, and white,
> Like sapphire, pearl and rich embroidery,
> Buckled below fair knighthood's bending knee. (5.61-72)

Even if the Welsh connection to Elizabeth was made later than the 1597 entertainment, both her ancestry and Welsh honor cannot be so easily dismissed. No matter when Evans is incorporated into this obvious Garter Entertainment, how unlikely that Shakespeare would have included in a play written with such obvious royal consideration a character that might have offended the Queen. If Evans was written to be portrayed as a foolish buffoon, how might a Queen who is herself Welsh react? Although Elizabeth rarely overtly displayed her Welsh heritage, she also never completely removed herself from it. After all, the Dragon of Wales, which Elizabeth took from her father and changed from red to gold, remained as a supporter of her royal coat of arms; Wales, with England, comprised the term "Great Britanny"; and, at the Garter Feast of 1597, the very one at which this play may have been presented, a Welsh noble received the Order. Would a playwright compose a play to be performed before the Queen and include a Welsh character in it without taking into consideration Elizabeth's Welsh bloodline? Unlikely.

Additional and directly applicable evidence for my argument can be found in *The Overburian Characters, to Which is Added a Wife.* Sir Thomas Overbury and "other learned Gentlemen" composed this book of *character*s in the very early 1600s, including "A Welshman . . . Above all men he loves a herald and speaks of pedigree naturally."[14] How odd that Evans, a Welshman, would so diverge from this contemporary description. I believe that Evans does not deviate from the Overburian description, but, in fact, fully supports it. Nor is this the only example of the Welsh propensity for heraldry. In John Earle's later (1628) character "A Herald," "Hee is an Art in England, but in Wales Nature, where they are borne with Heraldry in their mouthes, and each Name is a Pedegree."[15]

To demonstrate and defend this interpretation, one merely need return to the opening scene of the play. Shallow and Slender have shown **themselves** to be buffoons—Shallow with his pompous praise of both himself and his family; Slender with his equally pompous praise of Shallow and equally fatuous speech. A great deal of the humor in this scene comes from Evans's ability to insult Shallow and Slender without them realizing it. (Perhaps his ability is too subtle for our less heraldically-sensitive age, a reason that many seem never to have seen it.) If we return to the words of *The Overburian Characters*, Evans is in his element when discussing heraldry. His "misunderstanding"—indicated by the Riverside, the Oxford edition of the *Merry Wives*,[16] and critics for nearly two centuries—can be seen as complete understanding, not only of the heraldry involved, but of the ignorance of the nobles to whom he speaks. His "unintentional" puns should instead be seen as intentional if subtle jibes at persons with little to no knowledge of heraldry. And putting Evans's knowledge in the context of the play's occasion, the Garter induction ceremony, merely elevates his knowledge above all of those around him.

To demonstrate, let me focus on the perplexing line delivered by Shallow in this opening passage: "The luce is the fresh fish, the salt fish is an old coat." The Riverside edition glosses this line with "Shallow's meaning has not been satisfactorily explained."[17] In light of my differing interpretation of Evans's place in this scene, I believe the fact that Shallow's line is difficult, if not impossible, to explain is support for an alternative interpretation of Evans's character. His "mistakes," when seen as intentional, contrast with Shallow's incompetence when speaking of heraldry. In fact, Shallow's understanding is **so** poor that his one declaration about coats of arms is indecipherable. Even now, hundreds of years

later, his statement has not been "satisfactorily explained."[18] Perhaps it was never meant to be explainable at all, but it is also likely that a knowledge of heraldry at least as good as a Welsh Parson's might help.[19]

The joke that Shallow makes is on himself. The "lousy" old coat is better than a "fresh water" coat, a point that escapes Shallow but not Evans, who makes the play on "luces" and "louses" so that this old coat of some 300 years becomes infested with lice *passant*, an heraldry term for "walking"—that is, crawling through the coat and perhaps caught in a compromising situation of human beasts and "love." Thus Evans is making a fool of the ignorance of his companions, who seem not to know the difference between "old" coats and "new" ones. How timely was this joke? In the two decades before the 1590, the number of new grants of arms reached nearly 1,500 in the 1570s and '80s, according to Edward Elmhirst.[20]

Thus, it seems most likely that Evans is amused by the lack of heraldry displayed by Slender and Shallow, not only because they are flummoxed by "old" and "new" coats, but also because "quartering" is not possible merely to Slender; any male entitled to bear arms who then marries an heraldic heiress (a woman whose father is an armiger without male heirs) may "quarter" the coat for his own heirs. As Evans notes, Slender would "mar" any coat by marrying with it, and he makes the clever point by literalizing the "quartering" a "coat" which he discusses as if it were an actual article of clothing. Thus, is it Evans who is the fool, or is he the one who demonstrates the incompetence of a couple of idiots proud of their "old" coats but who have no true conception of what a coat of arms actually means?

Still, it might be difficult to support this new interpretation of Evans if the first scene were an isolated instance of intelligence. It seems unlikely that the sum total of Evans's humor could be attributed to his pronunciation of English, but most critics have done just that; however, Evans's accent is not nearly so pronounced as that of Fluellen, the Welsh character in *Henry V*. And, in the 1602 Quarto of the *Merry Wives*—the one closest to its composition and performance—Evans's accent is almost nonexistent. But perhaps his greatest defense is his foreign counterpart in the play, Dr. Caius. The French doctor's speech is nearly incomprehensible at times and never easily understood. If left on its own, Evans's speech might indeed have been notable and laughable, but in contrast to the good doctor's French/English garble, Evans could serve as a speech therapist.

A more striking demonstration of Welshman's fundamental intelligence, however, occurs later in act 1, scene 1. Slender says to Shallow, "But if you say, 'Marry [Anne Page],' I will marry her; that I am freely dissovl'd, and dissolutely," to which Evans responds, "It is a fery discretion answer, save the fall is in the word 'dissolutely.' The word is (according to our meaning) 'resolutely.' His meaning is good" (1.1.250-256). Here, Evans actually corrects **Slender's** usage of his native tongue but does so in quite a tactful way, demonstrating that, although Evans' mastery of the English language is by no means complete, it also cannot be considered nonexistent.

Similarly, Evans's scene with young William Page in act 4, scene 1 (not appearing in the 2006 Utah Shakespearean Festival production) also has a juxtaposition of good speech and poor. Both Evans and William struggle through their discussion of Latin, but both appear as Latin scholars compared to Mistress Quickly, with her uneducated yet unabated interpositions. For example, Evans asks William, "What is 'fair,' William?" William replies, "*Pulcher.*" "Polecats?" interjects Quickly, "There are fairer things than polecats sure" (4.1.25-29). Another example:

> *Evans:* Remember, William, focative is *caret.*
> *Quickly:* And that's a good root. (4.1.53-54)

Lastly, although William does not perform as admirably in the lesson as might be hoped, Evans leaves Mrs. Page with, "He is a good sprag memory" (4.1.82), far kinder than he might have said, lending a certain depth to his character that many seem to have ignored merely because of his speech patterns.

In the following scene, Mistresses Ford and Page attempt to smuggle Falstaff out of their house past the angry eyes of their husbands. When Falstaff emerges *disguised like an old woman*, Evans comments, "By yea or no, I think the 'oman is a witch indeed. I like not when a 'oman has a great peard. I spy a great peard under his muffler" (4.2.192-194). The other gentlemen fail to notice anything strange, and it seems striking that only he notices something awry, showing that he is by no means the dullest of wits in the play. Though Falstaff's disguise is neither adequate nor professional, it functions well enough to thwart the jealous Ford and his reluctant band. Evans, however, the one Welsh character, is the first to see through Falstaff's masquerade, albeit obliquely. He may not discover Falstaff, but at least he knows when a woman is not a woman.

Finally, in the last act, after the exposing and humiliation of Falstaff, all of Evans's righteous anger comes flooding out in a

torrent directed at the fat knight, who is, according to Evans, "given to fornications, and to taverns, and sack, and wine, and metheglins, and to drinkings and swearings and starings, pribbles and prabbles" (5.5.158-160). And, despite the fact Evans is still no match in wits with even a humiliated Falstaff, Shakespeare makes it clear that Evans has no need to be a wit in this case. Falstaff accepts his defeat with, "I am not able to answer the Welsh flannel" (5.5.162)—a line also cut in the 2006 USF production.

At this point, let me be clear: I am not arguing that Evans, normally relegated to buffoon, is actually portrayed by Shakespeare as the model of high comedy or wit; but I do believe that Evans plays a more significant role in the play than that of a simple stereotype. And I believe this is so, in part, in deference to the Tudor Queen for whom the play may have been written and performed.

Even William Hazlitt, who thoroughly dismissed the character of Falstaff, comments favorably on Evans: "Sir Hugh Evans . . . is an excellent character in all respects . . . He has 'very good discretions, and very odd humors' . . . [he] shows his 'cholers and his tremblings of mind,' his valour and his melancholy, in an irresistible manner."[21] And perhaps the inordinate amount of emphasis that the play places on Queen Elizabeth, including, I feel, its Welsh parson, is, in fact, what spurred John Dennys to write his now infamous anecdote about the composition of the play. Perhaps for Dennys, as for us, it was difficult to ignore the enormous presence of the Queen within the play, and he must have felt, as I do, that this emphasis could not have been unintentional. Perhaps Shakespeare **did** compose this play at the direction of the Queen; perhaps not. In any case, she and all she stands for, including her Welsh ancestry, cannot be dismissed from the content of the play. And though Evans is by no means the focal character of the play—for if he were it would be titled something along the line of, *A Most Pleasant and excellent conceited comedy of Sir Hugh the Welsh Knight, with notable appearances by Sir John Falstaff and the various and sundry Merry Wives of Windsor*"—neither should Evans be dismissed from the content and context of the play. The Welsh connection, both inside and outside the play, gives reason for a reexamination of his role and his place in *The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

Notes

1. From the outset, I must acknowledge the invaluable guidance and assistance given by Dr. James F. R. Day of Troy University, whose work in heraldry informed a number of passages in this paper.

2. John Dennys, *The Comical Gallant, 1702* (London: Cornmarket, 1969).

3. Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare Versus Shallow* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1931).

4. William Green, ed., *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (New York: New American Library, 1979), 5.

5. Giorgio Melchiori, *Shakespeare's Garter Plays: Edward III to Merry Wives of Windsor* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994).

6. William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespear's Plays, in the Appreciation of Shakespeare: A Collection of Criticism, Philosophic, Literary, and Esthetic*, ed. Bernard M. Wagner (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1949), 68.

7. Hazlitt, 68.

8. Hazlitt, 68.

9. Hazlitt, 68.

10. Anne Barton, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962).

11. All quotes from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are from G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

12. See *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 290 n.

13. W. W. Greg, ed., *The Merry Wives of Windsor, 1602* Shakespeare Quarto Facsimiles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

14. Thomas Overbury, *The Overburian Characters, to Which Is Added, a Wife* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936).

15. John Earle, *Micro-Cosmographie; or, a Piece of the World Discovered; in Essays and Characters* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

16. T. W. Craik, ed., *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

17. See *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 290n.

18. In 2005, David Chandler—in "The 'Salt-Fish' Crux in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *English Language Notes* (March 2005: 1-14—writes his entire article on this one line alone, working his way through centuries of unclear criticism to arrive, ultimately, at a bawdy joke. While arguably comprehensive and somewhat pedantic, Chandler's conclusion is not necessarily persuasive.

19. Shakespeare, himself the beneficiary of a recent grant to his father, would have known that his own "new" coat was a touch suspect in the pantheon of older arms; indeed, in 1602, his own coat is cited by Ralph Brooke, York Herald, as an example of an improper grant. This case is mentioned in *The Riverside Shakespeare's* appendix on Shakespeare's arms, where the Folger copy of Brooke's manuscript lists the arms as that of Shakespeare, "ye player."

20. Edward Elmhirst, *Merchant's Marks* (London: Harleian Society, 1959).

21. Hazlitt, 68.

Unearthing *Hamlet's* Fool: A Metatheatrical Excavation of Yorick

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One would expect to see the Clown role in *Hamlet* go to a court jester; but in Elsinore, the king's jester, Yorick, is dead. Shakespeare's chosen Clown, the gravedigger, unearths his bones. *Hamlet* interprets humor and its relation to clowning, foolishness and madness. Lacking a formal Jester, the role passes figuratively through other characters, at different times and for different reasons. What those reasons are, who the new assumed fools are, and what it means to the play historically and creatively, I will explore later.

But back to our Gravedigger. The resident actor hired to play clown roles would have played the role. At the time of the production of *Hamlet* in 1604, that actor was Robert Armin. Armin had just joined the Chamberlain's men in their new home at the Globe Playhouse. In 1600, the company had lost their resident clown and partial future shareholder in the Globe, Will Kemp. The reasons for his leaving the company at such a profitable and auspicious time are particularly unknown. In a pamphlet Kemp published at the time, he offers juicy hints as to why he "danced his way out of the world" of the Globe, but does not offer specifics.[1] What is obvious and important is that Kemp's departure was not for positive reasons. Leaving the new Globe was a bad business decision. The reason for his going must have been great and serious to give up such a lucrative investment.

The change in actors which occurred led to a change in the types of Clowns Shaksepeare created. There is an obvious difference between Kemp's Clowns and Armin's Fools. The men were two different types of actors, with different comedic styles and strengths, and Shakespeare shaped their roles accordingly.

Shakespeare was a writer of sources and metatheatre in his plays. He made references to contemporary events and personages, as well as his theatre and actors. Overwhelming evidence throughout the plays demonstrates that Shakespeare was very aware

of metatheatrical devices and deliberately created dizzying labyrinths in his layered plays within layered plays.

This brings us back to the Gravedigger. His scene is highly unusual: a clown unearths the bones of a jester. The dead Yorick symbolizes the loss of humor, gaiety, and merriment in Elsinore. Could he represent something else? Robert Armin plays the living Gravedigger. Through an analysis of the history and lives of Armin and Kemp, as well as through deconstructing several of Shakespeare's plays, I will argue that Yorick is Kemp; if Yorick were alive in the play, it would be a role crafted for Kemp's talents. With Yorick, Shakespeare is making statements to his former clown. *Hamlet* as a whole is a battleground between Shakespeare and Kemp as the playwright explores humor in new ways, celebrates Robert Armin, attacks Kemp, and exercises power as a writer in obvious, metatheatrical ways.

Will Kemp

Before approaching the text of *Hamlet*, it is important to explore the history of Armin and Kemp. David Wiles's *Shakespeare's Clowns* is a definitive historical exploration of Kemp and Armin; it is from this work that I primarily take my historical information.

Kemp, more than anything, was a physical comedian. His specialty was the Morris dance, involving much leaping and athletic prowess.[2] Kemp's act also included music and playing instruments; the essence of his talent was in "nonverbal performance skill."[3] His reported physical unattractiveness relegated Kemp to the role of clown. Kemp had a "fund of humor, plenty of egotism, and an unfortunate temper…[;] his contemporary fame was great."[4] He and Burbage were widely considered the epitome of comedy and tragedy, respectively, of the day.[5]

Kemp was very much a part of the culture of the common man; he was not a gentleman, nor had he aspirations to be, having rejected all pretension and embraced what he referred to as "honesty."[6] Being in a culture where title and heritage were power, Kemp embraced the opposite, which became essential to his comedy and the characters Shakespeare later constructed for him.

When Kemp joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594, his performance history up to then had been only as a solo performer. He had traveled with the Leicester's Players, but wasn't integrated into their troupe. Working with Shakespeare and his fellow actors began Kemp's theatrical career and was the only time in his life when he had to share spotlight, work submerged in a group, and enjoy economic stability.[7] Kemp's presence in the company during

the years 1594-1599 landed him roles in *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, among others. Through examination of *Titus* and *Romeo and Juliet*, I will construct typical Kemp character.[8]

Titus Andronicus was Shakespeare's first attempt at tragedy. For that we applaud Shakespeare's intrepid attempt, though while watching the play we shake our heads in artistic horror. Most horrifying is the play's clown that, Wiles most rightly assumes, was a part inserted specifically to provide Kemp a role.[9] The clown scenes can be extracted without harming or interfering with the plot.

The clown in *Titus* shows an important characteristic indicative of Kemp's characters in Shakespeare's plays: how easily his roles can be removed or how unintegrated they are into the main action of the play. In later plays, though, such as *Much Ado* and *Midsummer*, we see Kemp's characters (Dogberry and Bottom, respectively) as more important and valuable to the action of the play. Yet the characters are always on the periphery and enter the main action only when absolutely necessary. This is also characteristic of Kemp himself: a man who spent most of his life as a solo artist, a comedian who worked best, and by the pattern of his behavior, preferred to work alone.

The short clown scenes in *Titus* involve the clown carrying a basket containing two pigeons (4.3.77; 4.4.43); reading these scenes makes it difficult to understand their purpose, let alone their humor. Also a key characteristic of Kemp's characters, the humor in the play does not necessarily read to a modern audience, or does not exist. In his old but still relevant study, *Memoirs of the Principle Actors*, Collier recognizes the absence of humor in Kemp's characters: "Kemp. . . was in the habit of extemporizing, and introducing matter of his own, which he apprehended would improve his part and be acceptable to his hearers."[10] This extemporizing technique was taught to Kemp by his teacher and former comic master, Tarleton. Richard Brome, a playwright contemporary to Shakespeare, alludes to this practice of Kemp's in his comedy *Antipodes*: "in the days of Tarleton and Kemp/Before the stage was purged of this barbarism."[11] The technique was, in fact, the old school comedy of Elizabethan theatre. The method is very similar to today's improv, which Kemp had mastered. We can assume that Shakespeare's early works were written in an attempt to allow Kemp opportunity to make the most of his talent. The clown in *Titus* is open to interpretation; in fact, it requires interpretation if it is going to be at all funny. Later in Shakespeare's

works, we find movement away from this form of open writing; as Shakespeare developed as a writer and took more control of the clown characters in his plays, the fewer the roles he wrote for Kemp's type, leading to the conflict believed to have caused Kemp's eventual abandonment of the Globe.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, stage directions for act 4, scene 5 in the second quarto say, "Enter Will Kemp," Kemp enacting the role of Peter. It is interesting metatheatrically that the text of the script has Will Kemp by name rather than his character, which implies that Kemp as an actor superimposes himself onto the role, the role less important than Kemp himself. Kemp's entrance will be important to the audience because of expectations of a certain kind of comedy that will supercede the text.

Peter has a slightly more important role in regard to the plot in his first scene, though his importance lessens in his second and third scenes. His illiteracy functions as a plot device that serves to inform Romeo and Mercutio about the Capulet ball. Illiteracy, or an inability to use language effectively, such as the use of malapropisms, is a major feature of Kemp's characters. As a performer, Kemp himself did not rely on language as a component of his humor. Though he eventually became a published author of pamphlets about his jigs and travels, he was at heart a physical/musical comedian. Language was not his specialty.

Kemp was not a stupid man, but Skakespeare must have recognized that Kemp did not match his own specialty with language. The humor in the roles that follow *Romeo and Juliet* become increasingly based in ignorance or stupidity. Kemp's characters are funny without meaning to be funny, as their more educated audience recognizes their ignorance and finds them absurd. After several plays this mode reads increasingly more humiliating and insulting.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, we also see the faint beginnings of a style of character for Kemp that worked well for Shakespeare and his development: leader of a band of Rude Mechanicals. In Peter's interaction with the nurse, we see him winning laughs at her expense. Though she is a much more interesting character than Peter, we see the beginnings of this split class group; the group is related to, but not fully integrated into the main action of the play. We see how these servants can interact with one another or main plot characters and be a continual humorous respite from the more serious plot. But, essentially, Kemp as leader is still a figure of isolation from the main action: a rogue independent who leads, but does not belong to, a group. The group becomes a symbol of Kemp himself: the different clowns acting as independent petals

to the same central flower. The humor is more based in dialogue, the pacing more modern in its fast speed; laughs come through the language rather than leaving moments completely open to the skilled, physical clown. Though Kemp's characters routinely have more physical comedic moments, Shakespeare stages the moments himself. During this era, Shakespeare enlarges his skills and tightens his grip on his clown, restricting his artistic freedom.

Some disagreement surrounds Robert Armin's point of entrance into the Chamberlain's Men, replacing Kemp. By 1600 the company was in the new Globe, and it is believed their first play to open the theatre was *Julius Caesar*. No clown is listed among the characters, nor, as the text continues, does a clown personality similar to Kemp or Armin reveal himself. Yet this does not mean that either of the men performed in the play; it simply means a role was not written for either of their particular talents. If Kemp never acted upon the Globe stage, it is probable that Shakespeare did not include a clown in *Caesar*, knowing he wouldn't have a clown or be able to find a replacement.

In 1599, Kemp withdrew from the Chamberlain's Men and most likely never performed on the new Globe stage. After leaving the company, Kemp went on an epic Morris Dance from London to Norwich, and then continued his dancing in Europe over the Alps. After this, Kemp returned to London and worked with Worcester's Men, whose brand of comedy was more in tune with Kemp's style.[12] He published a pamphlet about his dancing adventures to Norwich, called "Kemp's Nine Days Wonder." In it, he complains of slanders written against him; his prime slanderer is "a jig-maker," the leading suspect an actor working at a playhouse on the Bankside, and Kemp refers to his enemies as "Shakerags."[13] There is little debate that the culprits attacking Kemp were Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men, housed in the Globe on the Bankside.

Hamlet is Shakespeare's written response to "Kemp's Nine Days Wonder." At times, *Hamlet* becomes a noisy war between Clown and Poet, Shakespeare using the play as a sometimes-pulpit both to attack Kemp and to defend himself. But before launching into *Hamlet* and excavating the gravedigger scene, it is necessary to look at Kemp's successor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men: Robert Armin.

Robert Armin

Armin was "small in stature, ugly, highly intelligent, combining the physique of a 'natural' fool or clown with the mental agility of a professional wit."[14] He was a contradiction: the mind of Burbage

(or close to Shakespeare himself) in the body of Kemp. His physical appearance could not allow him to play a tragedian or a serious lead, such as Burbage enjoyed; yet he had a mind able to comprehend the complexities of a character such as Hamlet.

Armin could be considered more of an intellectual peer to Shakespeare than Kemp. Educated in Latin and Italian, Armin began life apprenticing a goldsmith, during which time he wrote ballads.[15] Armin went on to become a more published writer than Kemp, as well as a playwright. Wiles says Armin's skills as a performer lay in singing (not dancing), "mime and mimicry," skills which could easily be adapted to a theatre based in satire and the mimesis of manners. Because he set himself up as a writer, Armin did not perceive any necessary tension between the purposes of the dramatist and the purposes of the actor/clown. As a mimic and an intellectual, Armin never projected the clown persona "of the common Englishman."[16]

Armin was completely opposite Kemp in personality and type. In most of his roles, as we shall see, he embodied a "singing or court fool" in contrast to the "knockabout clown in Kemp's tradition."[17] His characters were men whose foolishness was ambiguous: "the congenital moron" versus "the artful jester."[18] Is an Armin character really an idiot, or someone so much more intelligent that he can pretend lunacy, thereby making us, the audience, the true fool for believing him? This type of Fool we see not only in Shakespeare's works, but Armin's own; in his own play *Two Maids of More-Clacke*, written presumably as a vehicle for his talents, Armin played an idiot clown named Tutch, featuring Tutch disguised as Blue John and Tutch disguised as a Welshman.[19] This is direct evidence of the actor understanding and capitalizing, even defining, his own type. Armin understood his skills and created this wondrous metamorphical tribute. These transformative, metatheatrical skills we don't see in Kemp; Kemp never played anything so complex. But we do see Shakespeare writing very similar roles for Armin himself.

The first logical, yet still debated, role written specifically for Armin is Touchstone in *As You Like It*. Touchstone "puzzles commentators because his occasional shrewdness and his professional skills, which contrast largely in putting up a dazzling façade of pseudo-intellectual scholarship, seem to contradict his simplicity.[20] Unlike Dogberry's unintentional humor, Touchstone "intends to be [comical]."[21] The roughness of the role and the sometimes blending of traits between a Kemp character and Armin's characters read as indications of a playwright struggling

to understand and fit a role to a new actor's type.[22] Prior to Armin's joining the company, Shakespeare must have seen him perform. Possibly Shakespeare had read his published writings. Most likely he discovered within Armin the provocative contradictions of his intelligence and physicality. Touchstone blends old school clowning of ignorance as comedy with the new intellectual humor of Armin, perhaps also as a test to see how an audience would react.

The role of Touchstone is enormous; no other clown role previously, save Dogberry or Bottom, is so large, plot enveloped, and memorable. The humor is funny because it is language based; Touchstone is clever, wise, and charming. A contemporary audience would find him humorous. Touchstone is not cuttable. Touchstone is an embodiment of contradiction; characters constantly regard him in awe of his wisdom that is seemingly opposite his nature and appearance. This contradiction becomes the embodiment of Shakespeare's increasingly complex characters, a theme or idea that Armin himself embodies.

Touchstone continually one-ups other characters with his wit; he can match puns with Rosalind and Celia. For the first time we have clowns that not only interact more with main characters, but challenge main characters. This is an Armin characteristic that continues to emerge; his clowns butt heads with the leads and match or surpass their wit. The lack of intellectual understanding of language and society in Dogberry or Bottom distances him from others, as well as adding a degree of arrogance and obsession with power. Touchstone's ability to match wits joins him with characters. His intelligence does not isolate him; it creates successful communication and comradery.

In *Twelfth Night*, Shaksepeare has discovered Armin. And the discovery is unabashedly and quite self-consciously an orgiastic celebration of his new Fool. We see a number of themes begin in *Twelfth Night* that recur throughout Armin's roles. With the previous breadth of Touchstone, now in Feste, the Fool is fully integrated into the plot, frequently interacting with main characters. He is an intimate of Olivia, and a major player in the practical joke practiced on Malvolio. Feste is everywhere. He is licensed in his ability and willingness to go everywhere, talk to everyone—Olivia, Viola, the Duke; he has interaction with everyone. At times, the interaction becomes a bit self-indulgent, as if the scenes exist primarily to give Feste stage time. This omnipresence of foolishness we will see thematically throughout *Hamlet*.

Olivia points out to Feste, "Now you see, Sir, how your fooling grows old and people dislike it?"[23] This theme of irritation and

endearment recurs in Armin's characters; Feste is both obnoxious and touching, funny and cruel. His nature is a contradiction. We'll see these same qualities in Lear's Fool. The things Feste says are biting, unpleasant, truthful, and serious; and he is a necessary member of the intimate circle of main characters. He may not always be likeable, but he is gentle. He may be cruel, but he can be sympathetic. As he works to crush one character (Malvolio), he nurtures another (Olivia). With his dry wit and intelligence, he shows up the absurdity in others. The joke on Malvolio is like a joke on a Kemp-like character: Malvolio, who does not realize he is funny, is tormented by others more intelligent and socially sophisticated than he, who recognize his absurdity and make him seem more absurd. The practical joke on Malvolio is a metatheatrical precursor to the Kemp reference in *Hamlet*'s gravedigger scene.

Feste's first scene in act 1, scene 5 deftly surpasses any comedy in *As You Like It.* It is a definite evolution of the witty, language-based Fool. The dialogue crackles with new, inventive humor, and Shakespeare the playwright seems more comfortable with this wit. It is a profitable avenue for the writer, as his specialty is language and intelligence. A startling and exciting difference separates Touchstone and Feste from all the clown roles preceding them. Feste truly begins a Golden Age of Fools, with roles that offer much more complex characters and more modern psychological constructions, as well as melding seamlessly into the upcoming Golden Age of Tragedy for Burbage.

Feste's proof of Olivia as a fool in this first scene is not only a work of comic genius; it is the genesis scene for *Hamlet.* In this scene we see major elements of *Hamlet*: a major character in mourning, another character attempting to encourage this character out of mourning. Feste becomes the proto-gravedigger: a clown who outwits the lead wit. Yet Feste does it gently, softly, in a way that does not hurt the already pained Olivia, but lightens her black mood.

The largest joy of *Twelfth Night* is Feste's role in the joke on Malvolio, when Feste pretends to be the Curate in act 4, scene 2—this is the climax of Armin's abilities. Frankly, the appearance of this scene in the canon of Shakespeare's works thus far is stunning. Armin must carry this scene alone, speaking to Malvolio locked in his closet, playing both Feste and Sir Topas; it is not only a fabulous comic moment and hilarious to read, but Armin has the opportunity to sing, revolving between characters and using his voice to create them. This scene could not have been written for anyone except

Armin and his specific talents. Though we don't know the exact reason for Armin's eventual retirement from the company, we do know he left the same year Shakespeare did: we can conjecture the actor saw remaining pointless, having lost a writer who truly celebrated and exploited his talents.

Hamlet

Hamlet as a text comes in context with Kemp's published attack of Shakespeare and the Chamberlain's Men. It is also in the personal context of the company that has lost a major member and former shareholder, resulting in the integration of someone new—which can be as startling and shocking to a theatre company as suffering the loss of a known member. Regardless of whether or not the parting of ways was to everyone's benefit, it was still difficult. Dust of such an upset will have begun to settle by the time *Hamlet* is produced. Armin's success in the company will have restored lost faith, alleviated fears, and soothed feelings. I think it is safe to say that with the creation of Feste, Shakespeare has found his new clown to be a true celebration. But, despite all this, resentment will still exist—on Kemp's side, we are sure—as well as personal confusion.

Hamlet is set in Elsinore. During the early part of his career, Kemp toured Elsinore as a solo performer.[24] If there is influence here, it is more unconscious; *Hamlet* was a common story at the time and multiple Hamlet's were being done throughout the Elizabethan era. But on some level, there must have been some association between Elsinore and Kemp. And where there is Kemp, there are feelings of betrayal, distrust, loss, and pain—all vivid themes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

Hamlet's speech to the players in act 3, scene 2 is one of the most autobiographically inspired speeches in all of Shakespeare's works. Harold Jenkins, editor of the Arden edition of *Hamlet*, credits it as reflecting "Shakespeare's own concern" with playacting.[25] With two interruptions by the First Player, the lecture runs forty-five prose lines at the beginning of 3.2. Yet a serious question demands answering: Why do we have this speech? Why is it present at all in the scene? The scene can play quite well without it; in fact the pacing moves more swiftly without it. Yes, it gains an opportunity to develop Hamlet's "uncompromising" standards, as Jenkins puts it, but is it really necessary?[26] If we can assume that the speech is a revelation of Shakespeare's own true feelings of acting, staging, and actors, it opens the door to metatheatrical speculation as to the motives of its presence: why does Shakespeare the playwright need to discuss these things?

The speech seems to come from anger, frustration; Hamlet instructs according to his negative observations of players' acting habits. Most interestingly, Hamlet—who we know has constructed the text of "The Mousetrap"—ends his diatribe with instructions for clowns, yet there are no clown scenes in "The Mousetrap":

> And let those that play your clowns speak no more than it set down for them—for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to considered. That's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. (3.2.38-45)

Yet these lines seem the peak of Hamlet's anger. Critics abound with the opinion that these are directed at Kemp himself and reflect Shakespeare's artistic causes of disagreement with the actor. If so, Shakespeare is deliberately and blatantly attacking Kemp. To do so requires incredible anger in the dramatist. The seeds of this anger bloom into flowers that grow all over *Hamlet* like weeds; the comedy grows twisted and black, forming a new comedy unseen in his prior work. Most important, the writer is asserting his power over all his actors and company.

Much clowning or Foolishness occurs in *Hamlet*, but it is a Foolishness linked closely with the ambiguity Armin himself embodied: the intellect behind the clownish appearance; the brilliant actor who possibly could have been a tragedian like Burbage, if not for his physical nature. It is easy to resolve Kemp as a clown because of his lack of intellect and education. Armin wasn't so easy to resolve. Armin's birth displaces him: he is a person thrust into an idiot role by circumstances he has no control over. Allowing Armin to influence himself thematically is more of the same kind of celebration of Armin we witnessed in *Twelfth Night*. As Shakespeare is intellectually titillated by Armin, he simultaneously affronts and devalues Kemp.

Twisted and complex comedy vividly flowers in *Hamlet* and appears in many scenes and characters. It begins with Hamlet's opening line: "A little more than kin and less than kind"—both a funny line and a tragic line, the line of a clown and the line of a hero. It is the line of a brilliant mind and the line of a smart-ass, a pun that deserves at least a smile and a lament that deserves at least a frown. It leaves the audience in a position of ambiguity and confusion, thinking and feeling contradictory thoughts and emotions. In this way, it thematically mirrors the opening line of the play, Barnardo's "Who's there?" The audience doesn't know what is going on.

Hamlet's response to Claudius's question, "How is it the clouds still hang on you?" is comic: "Not so, my lord, I am too much i'th' sun" (1.2.66-67). The punning continues, and even in Franco Zefferelli's film, the line elicits a laugh from Gertrude.

The conversation loses its comic tone, but these two lines are excessively important. The comedy is at heart ambiguity; it is both humorous and serious. The bitterness and anger behind the puns, the source of the jokes, is the heart of the tragedy. The punning is the soul of Hamlet's character: a prince displaced by events emotionally, socially, and psychically. The prince who should be king, who, in this opening scene, should be on the throne instead of Claudius, has been reduced and is introduced to us as the Court of Denmark's Fool.

Hamlet's madness is nothing if not funny. His scene with Polonius in act 2, scene 2 is hilarious as he continually renders the official adviser to the king and queen absurd. During "The Mousetrap," however, Hamlet's Fool role is at its strongest. Wiles recognizes the great significance in theatre history and the history of playwriting, when "Burbage united within Hamlet the figures of Clown and tragic hero."[27] As much as I personally credit Burbage with aiding Shakespeare with the psychological construction of Hamlet by providing himself as the actor Type for whom the role is written, Armin must be given credit as an influence as well, due to the humor's extremely contradictory, dark nature.

In Hamlet, we see an intelligent, language-based, brilliant Foolishness that is extremely akin to Armin's type. Hamlet's punning and jokes are too advanced for Kemp humor. Burbage, we must grant, was an actor of a caliber who could master these moments and complexities of character; Shakespeare created the role for Burbage knowing full well Burbage could handle it. During "The Mousetrap," Hamlet becomes an insulting, groundling-like, bawdy clown with his crude sexual jokes to Ophelia, interrupting the players with comments and singing like a court jester. Throughout, the ambiguity of the character compels us: Is Hamlet mad or is he pretending? Has he lost his wits while pretending to have lost his wits, or has he more wits than all of us combined?

Most startlingly and poignantly, we see Foolishness bleed into Ophelia. Hamlet is the first character in the play to sing; Ophelia is the second. Ophelia's mad scene is one of Shakespeare's most brilliant and inventive integrations of song into dramatic action, as well as a tragedy. Though this scene evokes great pity and horror,

it involves an undeniable and necessary element of comedy. Ophelia sings two bawdy songs. The first is the "St. Valentine's Day Song," which tells the story of a girl who is abandoned by her lover after surrendering to him sexually. Moments of this scene can be, and are intended to be, funny.[28] When Ophelia sings bawdy lyrics, it is meant to provoke laughter from the audience. In fact, it is best to give such comic moments to the audience to relieve tension and provide contrast to the horror. She becomes, therefore, another example of an oddly created Fool—humor resides in a character where it should not; Ophelia, a girl who should not be made into a Fool, who should not lose her wits, who should be the Queen of Denmark, suddenly is singing before the Court of Denmark: Gertrude and Claudius.

Her other song, I argue, is a direct reference to Robert Armin. Only one line from the song is heard in the scene: "For Bonny Sweet Robin is all my joy" (4.5.184). The line comes from a very popular song of Shakespeare's time, a song the audience would have known; it appears in some referential form in more than thirty manuscripts of the time.[29] We do not know what reference this line would have created for the original Elizabethan audience, as the song as a whole does not exist. But we can speculate. In the sixteenth century, the name "Robin" was a common term for a penis.[30] It is provocative that of all the lines Shakespeare could have selected for this moment, of all the bawdy songs, he chose one mentioning the name Robin.

Armin's first name was Robert, but he is repeatedly referred to by others in texts of the time as Robin Armin. Wiles cites *Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, a 1606 play in the King's Men's repertoire, that Armin's character being named Robin is a direct reference to Armin himself.[31] John Davies, in his "Scourge of Folly," wrote a long epigram to "Robin Armin" praising his wit.[32] Armin also refers to another nickname of his, "Pink," in a 1604 tract he authored; the name "Pink" could be a referential name to Robin—in the same way that a contemporary of his, author Robert Toffe, had the nickname "Robin Redbreast."[33] Robert Armin could have been nicknamed "Robin Pink" or "Pink Robin."

Ophelia singing "Bonny Sweet Robin" is a comic moment due to its bawdiness, but also carries with it the added metatheatrical reference, which, coupled with Ophelia being in a Foolish moment of singing before the Court, would have been additionally funny. The line becomes one of praise to Armin, for Armin, at that point, was Shakespeare's joy.

The Gravedigger Scene

Now for the grave scene. The scene (5.1) opens with dialogue between two diggers: the gravedigger and another man. The stage directions refer to both as clowns. Armin would have been the Gravedigger—the Other most likely a protégé or budding actor, a boy who formerly played women, now graduating into male roles with the potential for being a clown. The Other is the straightman; the Gravedigger has all the jokes. Their conversation is the macabre subject of whether or not Ophelia deserves a Christian burial. The Gravedigger has a Kemp attribute: a few malapropisms. But in comparison to, say, Dogberry, the Gravedigger is an intelligent, though uneducated, man. He is deliberately funny and reasons wittily; his mistaken words are funnier when compared to his clever thinking. This scene also establishes a contrast for Hamlet; the Gravedigger does not have Hamlet's Wittenburg education, but he is very intelligent.

This initial scene between the two diggers is cuttable; once Hamlet enters, it is not. The second clown exits and the Gravedigger continues digging Ophelia's grave and singing. On the Globe stage, the physical grave would have been the trap downstage. For Armin to be digging the grave and able to toss out bones, he must be in the trap. The depth of the trap is not known, but it doesn't matter too much: Armin was short, and being short and in the trap, no matter what its depth, there wasn't much of Armin for the audience to see. Those audience members in the balconies could have seen Armin well, but the groundlings and anyone sitting on the ground would have seen, most likely, only his head. Armin holds the stage alone for a few moments, singing as he digs, before Hamlet and Horatio enter. Without much of his body visible, Armin must maintain the audience's attention with just his voice on a primarily empty stage. To allow Armin this moment is a testament to his singing abilities.

The beginning of the song is worthy of fully reprinting here in order to see exactly what Shakespeare is doing:

> In youth when I did love, did love,
> Me thought it was very sweet
> To contract—O—the time for—a—my behove,
> O, methought there—a—was nothing—a—meet. (5.1.61-64)

The song in its last two lines is purposely broken, with O's and A's added to account for the physical actions of the Gravedigger digging, taking breaths, and attempting to remember his song. Shakespeare does not allow for extemporaneous comedy; in fact,

this entire scene is written in such a way that Kemp-like extemporaneous comedy is not only inappropriate, it is not allowed. Shakespeare has this moment under complete control. This cannot be stressed too much: rather than allowing his clown to make his own decisions with the song, Shakespeare did it for him. This is the work of a playwright keeping tight control over his singing clown. These are embedded stage directions for the actor. Taken in the context of Hamlet's speech to the players, these lines read as the work of a paranoid artist, or a playwright who has learned how to exercise power in a way he hadn't before—and is now enjoying.

The Gravedigger is Hamlet's intellectual match. The exchange between the Gravedigger and Hamlet is uncuttable banter and one of the most provocative pieces of dark comedy ever written. Representative of death, the Gravedigger will always play the higher wit to Hamlet, as death triumphs over all, intellectually, comedically, physically. But it is metatheatrically something more: it is a moment when Armin shines over Burbage, when the laughs go to the clown over the Tragedian, when Armin takes the focus. Burbage may be the lead, but Armin can take the attention through his wits. Armin is as powerful as Burbage is. This headbutting of Armin and Burbage, the exchange of Fool and Tragedian, appears again in *King Lear*, where Armin's Fool is more powerful, intelligent, and present than the Gravedigger ever could be. Shakespeare is letting Armin have the upper hand, just as he let Feste rule *Twelfth Night*. This is a moment Shakespeare would never have given Kemp, but which Kemp would have attempted to seize.

It is through the gravedigger that we first meet Yorick. The Gravedigger makes the dead Fool a guessing game for Hamlet: Guess whose skull this is? A face and identity anyone would know, but who is now unrecognizable and therefore erased? The clues Hamlet receives are that it was "a whoreson mad fellow," whom the Gravedigger then curses: "A pestilence on him for a mad rogue." The relationship he shared with Yorick was not positive, but contained animosity. The Gravedigger was the butt of Yorick's physical jokes: "A poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once" (.1.174-175), physical comedy indicative of Kemp.

We see more of Kemp in Yorick through Hamlet's description of him: "A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy" (5.1.178-179). This is flattering and gives due credit. "He hath borne me on his back a thousand times" (5.1.179-180) describes not only a gesture of childish play, but also Yorick as an object of support, a

figure present through Hamlet's youth. Like a dream symbol, Yorick carries Shakespeare through his early childhood works.

The next lines are provocative considering Kemp's absence and career path: "Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chop fallen?" (183-186). The gibes and gambols are Kempian humor; "merriment" is a quality frequently associated with Kemp. Kemp is now dead to Shakespeare. The humor is what is emphasized as the loss. Hamlet mocks the skull with puns of its own decay. The horror is great and so overwhelming that it becomes funny. It is a moment flowered with everyone: Shakespeare, Burbage, Kemp, Armin, the Globe, all of London.

Wiles grants this moment a metatheatrical bow to Tarleton—the great comic teacher of both Kemp and Armin—and sees it as a symbolic breaking away from the older style of comedy.[34] But he forgets a very important point: this would be true if Armin had written *Hamlet*. Shakespeare did, and Shakespeare has no motive to bid farewell to Tarleton; but he does have much to say to the recently decamped Kemp. The identity of the skull isn't Tarleton, but Kemp.

What follows this scene is Hamlet's acceptance of his fate and eventual death. Little comedy follows. There is no more anger, only resolution. It is time for the play to end.

Conclusion

Actors, in professional skills and personality, are inspirational; they are source material as important and creditworthy as Holinshed and Ovid and can still be as rich a source today for any playwright. It is my hope that in this small way, I've not acted as a sixteenth century gossip, but demonstrated the power of Kemp and Armin. For better or worse, the Bard found them interesting enough to hold the attention of hundreds of paying customers.

Notes

1. Agnes Latham, ed., introduction to *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare (London: Thomas Learning, 2005), lii.

2. David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 24.

3. Wiles, 33.

4. Helen Ormsbee, *Backstage with Actors: From the Time of Shakespeare to the Present Day* (New York: Benjamin Blom: 1969), 40.

5. Wiles, 34.

6. Wiles, 24.

7. Wiles, 33-34.

8. Though I establish character "types" in Shakespeare's plays for both Kemp and Armin, these are by no means rigid rules. Occasionally, there is a "regression" of sorts and Shakespeare falls back on old Clown patterns. For example, the Clown in *Othello* is structurally more Kempian than Arminian.

9. Wiles, 34.

10. J. Payne Collier, *Memoirs of the Principal Actors in the Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Shakespeare Society, 1846), 97.

11. Collier, 99.

12. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 182-83.

13. Wiles, 25.

14. R. A. Foakes, ed., *King Lear* by William Shakespeare (London: Thomas Learning, 2000), xxi.

15. Wiles, 19.

16. Wiles, 136.

17. Gurr, 185.

18. Wiles, 140.

19. Latham, liv.

20. Latham, li.

21. Latham, lii.

22. Latham, liv.

23. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. David Bevington (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), (1.5.107-108). In-text citations to this play are from this text.

24. Kate Emery Pogue, *Shakespeare's Friends* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), 117.

25. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Harold Jenkins (London: Thomas Learning, 1982) 498. In-text citations to this play are from this text.

26. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 498.

27. Wiles, 59.

28. Peter J. Seng, *The Vocal Songs in the Plays of Shakespeare: A Critical History* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1967), 144.

29. Seng, 154.

30. Seng, 151.

31. Wiles, 151.

32. Collier, 199.

33. Collier, *Memoirs*, 195.

34. Wiles, 151.

Gertrude as a Character of Intersection in *Hamlet*

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Dympna Callaghan in her introduction to *Shakespeare Without Women* notes that in *Hamlet*,

> Hamlet positions his mother as the origin and cause of a complex chain of absence and substitution with which he is incestuously obsessed. Claudius is his absent father's substitute not only on the throne but also in his mother's bed. These circumstances fuel Hamlet's misogyny and articulate a crucial alignment between representation and femininity in which the woman's own body, the female orifice—what Hamlet terms the woman's "nothing" (as opposed to the phallic "thing")—contains the site of her absence.[1]

Callaghan notices Hamlet's May games hobby-horse ("For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot" [3.2.123])[2] as a signifier "of wanton femininity, the genital woman, woman as the site of her own absence."[3] She describes this apparatus of a man riding a wooden horse, suppressed by the Puritans, as a prosthetic phallus. She concludes, "The hobby-horse, then, reveals representation, at least in the context of seventeenth-century popular culture and religious discourse, as inherently phallic and dependent upon a construction of the feminine absence."[4]

In an apparent response to this chain of absence, Hamlet attempts to impose, through language and role-playing, a stereotypic wanton sexuality on Ophelia and Gertrude, the conventions of female characters found in two popular Elizabethan, male-produced genres, the lover's complaint and the female criminal confession. Both genres deplore women's waywardness, foolishness, lust, or murderousness. Both often end in the woman's deserved death.

Hamlet's self-dedication to the conventions of Senecan revenge tragedy leads him to attempt to provoke in Gertrude and Ophelia

the aspect of the feminine that Ted Hughes, in his groundbreaking study *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, terms the "sexually insatiable, whorish, devouring, destructive" consort-killing or "horse" aspect of the feminine,[5] exemplified in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* by Tamora, the Queen of the Goths. However, in her only monologue, her narrative of Ophelia's death (4.7.137-154), Gertrude asserts a broader culturally complex ambiguity Hamlet attempts to suppress as he narrowly pursues a revenge model. In it, she uses visual, tactile and aesthetic details reminiscent of the agricultural rites of symbolic sacrifice and rebirth to preclude by verbal fiat the reductive explanation of Ophelia's death as the typical self-slaughter of the "ruined" maid. For the Elizabethan audience, Gertrude might have represented an intersection between "new" cultural rhetoric and suppressed folkloric traditions.

The ruined maid was a cliché of the lover's complaint genre, the agitated maid (in Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* with loosened hair and "pale and pined cheek" [5, 30-33]). Hamlet frightens Ophelia with a dumb show of distraction—a piteous sigh and fixed gaze.

> *Ophelia*: As I was sewing in my chamber,
> Lord Hamlet, . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . with a look so piteous in purport
> As if he had been loosed out of hell
> To speak of horrors, he comes before me.
> *Polonius*: Mad for thy love?
> *Ophelia*: My lord, I do not know,
> But truly I do fear it. (2.1.78-88)

Polonius conventionally reads Ophelia's narration as "the very ecstasy of love" in Hamlet (2.1.103).

Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* begins with the destruction of love tokens.

> A thousand favors from a maund she drew,
> Of amber, crystal, and of beaded jet,
> Which, one by one, she in a river threw,
> Upon whose weeping margent she was set. (36-39)

Similarly, Ophelia returns Hamlet's love tokens under the gaze of her father and Claudius as hidden spectators.

> *Ophelia*: My lord, I have remembrances of yours
> That I have longed long to redeliver.
> I pray you now receive them.
> *Hamlet*: No, no, I never gave you aught. (3.1.95-98)

Hamlet gives Ophelia the cues of a dejected lover, but when Ophelia responds in the same conventional vein, he rejects her with misogynistic cruelty, not "into the safe keeping of a nunnery" as Hughes has it,[6] but to the perdition of a "nunnery," slang for brothel.[7]

Hamlet: I did love you once.
Ophelia: Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.
Hamlet: You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.
Ophelia: I was the more deceived.
Hamlet: Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? (3.1.116-22)

Nevertheless, Ophelia's ribald exchanges with Hamlet at the playing of *The Mousetrap* (3.2.101-109, 130-32, 225-30) do not demonstrate the languishing state of the spurned maiden. Instead, she has the same appearance of liberality, of sexual openness, we see in Perdita as the May Queen in *A Winter's Tale* (4.4.70-134). Not until she is distracted by the killing of her father, a shock emphasized in a recent production of *Hamlet* by having her find the body,[8] does she sing the clichéd song,

Quoth she 'Before you tumbled me
You promised me to wed.'
So would I 'a done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed. (4.5.61-64)

Hamlet's conventional allusion to female perfidy in his bawdy exchange with Ophelia anticipates his exchange with Gertrude with in the closet scene:

Hamlet: I could interpret between you and your love if I could see the puppets dallying.
Ophelia: You are keen, my lord, you are keen.
Hamlet: It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge.
Ophelia: Still better, and worse.
Hamlet: So you mis-take your husbands. (3.2.225-30)

His "keenness" is linked to the excitement of demonstrating royal guilt through the drama. He fishes for the Queen's reaction to *The Mousetrap:*

Hamlet: [To Gertrude] Madam, how like you this play?
Queen Gertrude: The lady protests too much, methinks. (3.2.209-10)

Gertrude's response might be a cool critique of the stilted piece. Ophelia's announcement of the King's reaction to the play's murder brings all badinage to an end.

Ophelia: The King rises.
Hamlet: What, frighted with false fire? (3.2.243-44).

The male lover's deceptions are termed "false fire" in Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* (324), but here the false fire is the miming of murderous lust for another man's estate.

Ophelia's conflicted position between her kinsmen and Hamlet, her compliance with spying, her return of love tokens to Hamlet, even her iteration of "my lord" conspire to appear to reduce Ophelia in the course of the play from the court lady Gertrude hoped "shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife" (5.1.228) to a seduced complaint-genre victim abandoned by her social better. However, her father's murder by Hamlet, her madness and death, and Gertrude's elegy about her reclaim Ophelia's "special pathos"[9] and rescue her from the insipid genre Hamlet mirrored for her in her chamber. Gertrude reconfigures the "dew-bedabbled wretch" (as Hughes calls Venus's prophetic image of herself)[10] through mythic narrative with cyclical overtones. Without disavowing the lover's complaint theme insisted upon by Hamlet, Gertrude evokes both Renaissance neo-paganism and the popular festivals of rural Britain. Gertrude's laminated and generous monologue is at odds with the severity and rigor Hamlet unleashes at times upon both women.

Hughes intelligently finds a similar severity and rigor in the religious struggles during Shakespeare's time—"civil war by other means"—to connect with his mythic Adonis-Venus struggle: "Two savage competitors for the English soul, which were the new Puritan spirit and the old Catholic spirit, each intending to exterminate the other, both uncertain of the outcome, were deadlocked, and in a sense spellbound, by [Elizabeth's] deliberate policy throughout her very long reign."[11] The Puritans denounced the Maypole, a type of phallic symbol like the hobby-horse. Hughes sees the Adonis legend as a Classical prototype of this strenuous religious temperament: "In the abhorrence of what he imagines to be the Goddess's whorishness, or at least her treachery in love . . . is a 'madness' of the Puritan fear of female sexuality—where female sexuality has become identified with the infernal."[12]

Hamlet's closet examination of his mother's conscience—"you go not till I set you up a glass / Where you may see the inmost part of you" (3.4.19-20)—is interrupted by his Senecan gutting of Polonius. Even so, Hamlet in the confrontation with his mother elicits a confession Katharine Craik connects to a "women's" genre of admission of murderous guilt: "a new subset of complaint, seemingly written or uttered by female criminals on the verge of death, [that] emerged from . . . 'gallows confessions.'"[13] As Craik says,

> Complaint is often discussed as a paradigmatically "female" genre, perhaps by virtue of its guilty and repentant voice, but it is striking how few women actually authored complaints and, moreover, how forcefully women sometimes resisted confessing. Reported confessions nevertheless proved culturally important in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, since they were understood to renegotiate patterns of female behavior which imperiled fidelity and intimacy.[14]

Hamlet compares portraits of her two husbands and accuses Gertrude of leaving a "fair mountain" to "batten on this moor" (3.4.65-66), Claudius. Improbably, Hamlet accuses Gertrude of "compulsive ardour" (3.4.76), although he claims she cannot possibly call it "love, for at your age / The heyday of the blood is tame" (3.4.67-68). Despite the confusion in the accusations, especially of putative love with "Rebellious hell, / . . . mutin[ying] in a matron's bones" (3.4.72-73), Gertrude still sees her "inmost part" in Hamlet's glass:

> O Hamlet, speak no more!
> Thou turns't mine eyes into my very soul,
> And there I see such black and grained spots
> As will not leave their tinct. (3.4.78-81)

Diverse commentators, such as Noel Blincoe and Dorothea Kehler, are prepared to quibble about the theological implications of Gertrude's second marriage; but in fact Hamlet has accused his mother of *descent* from one man to another. The deadly words, "As kill a king and marry with his brother" (3.4.28), have a jingly echo of *The Mousetrap* dialogue. Gertrude now appears to be submerged in male-created sexual representation framed by an excess of Hamlet's sexual revulsion. Hamlet hopes further to sunder Gertrude from her husband's body:

> Good night—but go not to my uncle's bed.
> Assume a virtue if you have it not.
> . . . . . .
> Refrain tonight,
> And that shall lend a kind of easiness
> To the next abstinence. (3.4.150-54)

Hamlet's sexual jab parallels his dismissal of Ophelia to the stews; it denigrates Gertrude by attempting to reduce her to a fleshy figure of vice.

> Female sexual culpability—as it was understood in both law and imaginative literature—became intractably linked at this particular moment in the history of reading and writing

> with a phobically imagined female vocality. Placed by men into the mouths of culpable women, complaint emerges as the expression of an aspiration to control threatening or disruptive behavior and contributes to the well-documented early modern literary phenomenon of allowing female speech primarily as a means of silencing it.[15]

At first, Gertrude responds to Hamlet in a tone of offense: "What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue / In noise so rude against me?" (3.4.38-9). According to the female confession genre, with its presumption of female guilt, such protests proved the impenitence of the accused, and if the woman persisted, were monstrous. Instead, Gertrude does not protest too much; she shows a tender remorse in reply to Hamlet's apotheosis of his father. Although she names no specific sin, her penitence looks—especially to an Elizabethan audience—like a female criminal confession. But the female confession was followed by the silence of execution. Instead, Gertrude's speech becomes reticent but potent. After the closet scene, she quickly allays Claudius's fear and anger by her narrative of Polonius's demise, stressing its "accidental" nature. For Hamlet's brusque, "For this same lord, / I do repent" (3.4.156-7) she substitutes tears, although Hamlet departed with the cruel gibe, "I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room" (3.4186).

> *King Claudius*: ... Where is he gone?
> *Queen Gertrude*: To draw apart the body he hath killed,
> O'er whom—his very madness, like some ore
> Among a mineral of metals base,
> Shows itself pure—a weeps for what is done
> (4.1.22-26).

This is not exactly untrue, but it is skillfully weighed in Hamlet's favor. Like her eulogy of Ophelia, it is intended to protect her son from Laertes and from Claudius. It is clear from her verbal interventions that she is not preoccupied with her own guilt, but rather that she perceives her son's peril and acts to assuage it.

She also constructs meaning for Ophelia's death. When we look at Gertrude's eulogy of Ophelia, we find the ritual of the May Queen ceremonies asserted against the didactic and simplistic materialism of death represented by the "absolute" clown (5.1.126).

> In the willow speech . . . the Queen suggests that Ophelia's drowning was an accident connected with her irrational, mad behavior. . . . But the graveyard scene that follows close behind seems to establish that the drowning was the result of suicide and that but for royal intervention, the deceased

> would not have been granted Christian burial. . . . The willow speech is so breathtaking that it tends to lull to sleep our critical awareness. But when we listen carefully to the Queen's report and then to what the gravediggers say in the graveyard, the contradiction between the two accounts must strike us.[16]

Gertrude's narration of Ophelia's death not only refutes the charge of suicide ("an envious sliver") it also arrests the "linear development of the plot" between Claudius and Laertes to murder Hamlet.[17] The account binds "together the older and younger women, the only two women in the play":[18] "The gendered space created in Gertrude's speech is a sad landscape of willow and brook traditionally reserved for deserted young women into which Gertrude, as a woman, can enter imaginatively. Dominated by her father and brother, frustrated by her lover, and abandoned by all three, Ophelia has escaped into madness, then into death."[19]

For the well-educated playgoer, Gertrude's monologue metamorphoses "a simple-minded nymph (*nympha campi felicis*)" into a sumptuous and erotically charged water goddess—Ovid's nymph Chloris transformed into the goddess Flora. Elizabethans unfamiliar with the then-popular poet Ovid would have immediately recognized Gertrude's allusions to the popular festival of the May Queen, the fete of the prettiest girl in the village: "The May Queen was crowned and held one day's sway over her court, consisting of morris-dancers, of Robin Hood and his band, and generally of the villagers or townspeople. A pasteboard hobby-horse ridden by a man was sent around among the spectators to collect contributions in a ladle stuck in its mouth."[20]

Gertrude verbally decks Ophelia with the May Queen's garlands associated, as the Greenblatt *Norton* note says,[21] with fertility:

> Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
> Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
> That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,

But she also appears to reinstate Ophelia's chastity—

> But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.

A hint of assassination broods in the "envious sliver":

> There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds
> Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
> When down the weedy trophies and herself
> Fell in the weeping brook (5.1.139-46)

However, for the Elizabethan audience, Ophelia's drowning death is an image of the May-doll. Even in 1890, James Frazer still knew

of these festivals in Great Britain. In *The Golden Bough* he says of the May-doll, "Both male and female vegetation effigies could be thrown in the water. The death of the vegetable spirit was supposed to renew vegetation and bring Spring."[22]

Ophelia's floating clothes evoke the May-doll made of wood or straw:

> Her clothes spread wide,
> And mermaid-like a while they bore her up;
> Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
> As one incapable of her own distress,
> Or like a creature native and endued
> Unto that element. But long it could not be
> Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
> Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
> To muddy death. (4.7.146-54)

William Walsh remarks on the overlaying of the pagan festival by later Roman Catholicism:

> The May-dolls which, once common throughout England, are still [in 1897] paraded on May-Day in Devonshire, and may even be found in Cornwall and other parts of Wales. The May-doll is remotely a survival from the images of Flora which graced the Floralia, but more immediately from the figures of the Virgin and her Son of Catholic times.[23]

When Hamlet mentions the hobby-horse just before the players' dumb show, he swears by the Virgin, underlining the association these rituals had with popular Catholic ceremonies:

> O heavens, die two months ago and not forgotten yet! Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year. But, by'r Lady, a must build churches then, or else shall a suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is 'For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot' (3.2.118-22).

As would be appropriate to the notion of "wanton femininity," the hobby-horse elsewhere in Shakespeare is a whore. In *The Winter's Tale,* Leonetes says invidiously,

> My wife's a hobby horse, deserves a name
> As rank as any flax-wench that puts to
> Before her troth-plight (1.2.278-80).

The "wanton femininity, the genital woman, woman as the site of her own absence" in *Hamlet* as Callaghan has it,[24] can be taken to refer not just to Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, but to the full meaning of these old rituals, with their overt sexuality.

The May-doll was a human representation of the Roman (and Greek) *phallos.*

> The human representative of the tree-spirit [May tree/May pole] is sometimes a doll or puppet, sometimes a living person; but whether a puppet or a person, it is placed beside a tree or bough; so that together the person or puppet, and the tree or bough, form a sort of bilingual inscription, the one being, so to speak, a translation of the other.[25]

We can see in Gertrude's speech, then, the additional resonance for the Elizabethan audience of old customs called into disrepute. We may conclude, as Hughes suggests, that Hamlet, perforce, summons the nature of the feminine potently associated with death and rebirth. Despite Hamlet's intentness on Senecan conventions of revenge and his typifying of the two women through then-"modern" literary genres that tended to suppress and stereotype the female, he seems to formulate Gertrude as a primary agent of the decline from King Hamlet to Claudius. Hamlet presumes Gertrude to be the power behind the withering of the kingdom.

Gertrude in her monologue on Ophelia's death does in fact infuse Ophelia with the high seriousness of pagan and Christian sacrifice. Gertrude's construction of Ophelia's death also tells us how she might construct her own death if that were possible. Since she once before attempted to save her son through her narration of the deaths of Polonius and Ophelia, it is logical to direct an actress who plays Gertrude as if she intends to drink the cup of poison meant for Hamlet (5.2.232-35). In an echo of the Vessel-Cup,[26] the old Wassail cup, a "pledge drunk between friends" of "be whole" or "be well,"[27] Gertrude quaffs her son: "The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet" (5.2.232). Whether by accident, suicide or sacrifice, Gertrude drinks and dies on behalf of her son.

The Anglo-Saxon Wassail cup became associated not with the Communion cup, but, curiously, with "the Virgin and the infant Christ": The vessel-cup is made of holly and evergreens, like a bower, inside of which are placed either one or two dolls ... wrapped in a veil and borne ... by children ... from house to house."[28] Gertrude's last drink, then, evokes for the Elizabethan audience, a neo-Pagan ceremony of communion and the nativity—Virgin and child—of Britain's submerged Catholicism.

Notes

1. Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women* (London: Routledge, 2000), 10.

2. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* 2nd ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997). Line references to Shakespeare's plays and poems correspond to this edition.

3. Callaghan, 10.

4. Callaghan, 10-11.

5. Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992), 71.

6. Hughes, 234.

7. Dympna Callaghan, "Shakespeare: Poet or Playwright," (personal communication, Hall of Languages, Syracuse University, 2006).

8. Michael Flachmann, moderator, *Hamlet* Actors' Panel, annual meeting of the Wooden O Symposium, Utah Shakespearean Festival, Southern Utah University, Cedar City, UT, August 9, 2006.

9. Hughes, 239.

10. Hughes, 73.

11. Hughes, 75.

12. Hughes, 15.

13. Katharine A. Craik, "Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* and Early Modern Criminal Confession," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2002): 10.

14. Craik, 2.

15. Craik, 2-3.

16. Hanna Scolnicov, "Gertrude's Willow Speech: Word and Film Image," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 28 no. 2 (2000): 1.

17. Scolnicov, 2.

18. Scolnicov, 4.

19. Scolnicov, 6.

20. William S. Walsh, *Curiosities of Popular Customs and of Rites, Ceremonies, Observances, and Miscellaneous Antiquities* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1897), 683-85.

21. Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed., *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1997, 1739n.

22. James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1981), 82.

23. Walsh, 683.

24. See Note 3.

25. Frazer, 20.

26. Walsh, 959.

27. Walsh, 980-81.

28. Walsh, 959.

ACTORS' ROUNDTABLE

Acting Shakespeare: A Roundtable Discussion with Artists from the Utah Shakespearean Festival's 2006 Production of *Hamlet*

Michael Flachmann
Utah Shakespearean Festival Dramaturg

Featuring: J. R. Sullivan (Director), Brian Vaughn (Hamlet), Ashley Smith (Laertes), Emily Trask (Ophelia), Michael Connolly (Polonius), Leslie Brott (Gertrude), and Bill Christ (Claudius)

Flachmann: I'd like to welcome everyone to the culminating event for our Wooden O Symposium. We're delighted to have all of you here. I'm Michael Flachmann, the Festival Dramaturg, and I'm honored to introduce today's panelists from our brilliant production of *Hamlet*, which include J. R. Sullivan (director), Brian Vaughn (Hamlet), Ashley Smith (Laertes), Emily Trask (Ophelia), Michael Connolly (Polonius), Leslie Brott (Gertrude), and Bill Christ (Claudius) [applause].

As everyone knows, *Hamlet* is performed frequently all over the world, has a great deal of scholarship written on it, and has generated a massive performance history. We've also just spent three wonderful days at the "Wooden O Symposium" listening to a wide variety of papers, many of which investigated different aspects of the play. Within such an extensive scholarly and theatrical context, how do you make a production like this your own in this special space for this unique audience? In other words, what clues did you find in the script, in the rehearsal process, or in your own life experience that helped you make these characters yours? And in the case of Mr. Sullivan, how do you "own" this play as a director. Could we start with you, Jim?

Sullivan: Sure, thank you. And thanks to everyone for coming this morning and joining us at our festival. It's easy to think of *Hamlet* as Mt. Everest. That's the problem if you're going to work on it. I used that phrase in the initial notes when we began talking about it last fall, and when I shared that sentiment with Brian

[Vaughn], he said to me, "That's exactly how I see it." So we agreed that it could be a difficult mountain to climb, given all its brilliance, its extraordinary depth, and its ability to engender conversations on such a wide range of philosophic, political, and social topics, both Elizabethan and contemporary. Finally and ultimately, as I was saying last night [at the Wooden O Symposium Keynote Speech], it's all about working in the moment of its performance, and for me that meant making sure we demystified the script right away. We tried to keep all conversation in rehearsal away from everything that *Hamlet* is or has been to people throughout the ages, focusing instead on what the story says to us right now. We were content to leave the ultimate "meaning" of the play to our audiences.

One comment I did make at the first rehearsal was that I was really sick of all the deception in the world. I'm convinced that the rampant deceit that's running through Hamlet's world, his political and social construct, is a very contemporary issue. If we wanted the play to speak meaningfully to modern audiences, we needed to make certain that it resonated in every way possible within its Tudor staging. So in the opening scene, we purposely mixed in contemporary costuming with Shakespeare's Renaissance context. The guys at the top of the show are in black jeans, for instance. I'm not sure that's entirely evident, and perhaps it shouldn't be. But we wanted to do something that literally put one leg in our time and one leg in Shakespeare's. And I don't know why we would perform these plays if they didn't have one leg firmly in the time of the audience that is watching it. So that was my approach. Our extraordinary company was very amenable and even enthusiastic about that as we set to work on the play.

Staging *Hamlet* is a huge undertaking! The difficulty at this festival, at any repertory theatre, is getting enough rehearsal time, getting the people you need at the hours you need them. This play allowed for that, so we were able to spend significant time on the many scenes involving two or three people, such as the nunnery scene, for instance. And Brian and I spent many rich hours on the soliloquies. I felt that we really had the time, and I know he does too, to work moment to moment on them. And that made a lot of difference in the process. That was my basic approach to directing the play.

Flachmann: Thanks, Jim. We're off to a great start. So, Ashley, how do you own the role of Laertes? How did you make it yours when it's been done so many times before at so many different theatres?

Smith: I really connected with the idea of family and the sense of loss—with those two concepts combined. From one certain perspective, this is a story about two families, each with its own tragedy. Although the play is seen from the point of view of Hamlet, the parallels between what Hamlet is going through and what Laertes is experiencing are very interesting. Both these young men are trying to avenge the deaths of their fathers. And the play ends up being a meeting of sorts between the two of them. We also talked a lot in rehearsal about the fact that since there's something rotten in the state of Denmark, it seems as if the young people are all trying to get out of the country. Although Laertes gets to leave, Hamlet doesn't. This idea of young adults needing to get away from home and strike out on their own and become their own persons is crucial in the play. That's something I could certainly identify with, and I think most people these days tend to have lives like that. It's more common to leave home and end up living somewhere quite far away from your family, although a lot of guilt can go along with that. There's this bond between Laertes and Ophelia. And when the oldest child strikes out on his own, there's always some guilt about leaving the other one behind, that person for whom they feel such deep love. So those are some of the ideas I connected with in the role.

Flachmann: Thanks, Ashley. Emily, how about Ophelia?

Trask: It was really important to me that Ophelia be a real person. Unfortunately, because her role is not actually that large, her character is often just sketched in on the surface. For me, it was crucial that she be an intelligent woman. Otherwise, why would Hamlet love her? Other than she's the only girl in Denmark [laughter]. So we needed to delve into the heart of her and found immediately that she really did have some soul and some intelligence and some bite, so we worked through and found moments where she was strongly standing her ground. In that time period, she needed to do what her father said, but all the same she also needed to be enough of her own person for that to come through and for the audience to like her. If she's just whining and crying all the time, then when she dies, its like "Oh well, thank goodness she's dead . . . ." So, I really approached the meat of the character. I think its all about *love* for Ophelia: She loves her father so deeply, and loves her brother so deeply, and Hamlet so deeply. So you can define her through her relationships to other people, which tell you a great deal about her character.

Flachmann: Lovely job, Emily. Brian, how about the "melancholy Dane"?

Vaughn: Well, the first place I started was with a great amount of fear about playing the role [laughter], because I think the role is much larger than I am. In fact, the role is bigger than all of us. And I think that's one of the most amazing elements about the play. So I did a great deal of research, certainly, and luckily I found out I was going to be playing the part fairly early, in October of last year, I believe. So the first thing I did was read the play again, and then went and read a gazillion commentaries—everything from T. S. Eliot to Harold Bloom. I talked to other actors who had played the part, which was very helpful to me concerning what they had noticed in playing it over long periods of time.

But then it basically became about myself, and I think ultimately that's what the play is about: the recognition of purpose within your own life and Hamlet's journey from the beginning of the play to the end of it. In the midst of this mourning for his father, there is a reexamination of self and those around him, and in that comes this seeking for truth, for immediacy, for the "now" of all things. That was really what I latched onto, and I think Jim was absolutely fantastic in his design and his ideas about the play's focus on "being" versus "seeming" and "truth" versus "fiction." And in the midst of all of this is, how do we step out of that fictional world, how do we take action against it, how do we ruminate about it, where do we find our true purpose within this plague of pretense?

So, that was the real key to me. Also, technically, we spent a lot of time on the soliloquies: when they happen, why they happen, and where they are in the play. I believe that the soliloquies are reaching out to the audience, seeking an answer. It's the moment for the character to ask for help. Then in the second half of the play, there are no more soliloquies. After he comes back from England, he's a changed man; there is a sense of balance and grace and calm about him. And I think he reaches this state of knowing his own self and his purpose. There are so many different facets in playing the role; certain moments resonate at certain times. As one of the other actors said to me, "You'll never get it 100%." It's a monster part because it's so rich with ideas about life and humanity and self. It's "outside" of us, but it also forms to the individual. I think that's one of the most exciting elements about reading the play: Everyone becomes Hamlet. Steven Berkoff has written that "we are all Hamlet." So the thing you have to do in playing the role is to just play it and just be in the immediate moment to moment, the now of it. I think Shakespeare is saying that we have to live in that place of right here, right in this second,

and to do that night after night is such a comment on acting and on life. So that's where I started and where I ended, too, I guess.

Flachmann: Wonderful! Leslie, tell us about Gertrude.

Brott: Thank you all for being here today. Thank you for coming and supporting the festival. Gertrude doesn't have a lot of text, but what is there about Gertrude and what Gertrude says about herself and what other people say about her is pretty straightforward. And the big change for me actually came with some help from my director, which was to extract Gertrude from the overall atmosphere that I felt surrounded the play: *Hamlet*, tragedy, heavy. Gertrude is living in a really happy place in the first half of the play, and once I realized that, the play started to open up for me. I am so myopically self-involved with my own life that many times I don't realize what's going on around me, and that's pretty much where Gertrude is living. My friends who know me well can attest to the fact that I'm pretty clueless. Usually people are dating for three or four months before I notice! [laughter] That's actually the case with Gertrude: There are some unpleasantries that she doesn't want to see, and it takes awhile for those to filter into her consciousness. But it's also because she would like to fix the problems around her. Maybe Hamlet's crazy, but perhaps I can adjust that truth. I'm in a happy place, and I don't want to give up that happiness for the corruption and the deceit that's around me. So, that's where I started.

Flachmann: Thank you, Leslie. Michael, how do you see Polonius?

Connolly: I can attest to the fact that people have to make out passionately in Leslie's living room before she's aware of their involvement [laughter]. That's as far as I will go this morning [laughter]. I think almost all characters in the canon are like coral reefs. I mean, they are encrusted with tradition and various interpretive choices, and so for me it's really important to read the text naïvely the first time as if unaware of the various controversies that surround these people. At the beginning, I was aware that there were essentially two schools of thought on Polonius: There's the *pantalone*, on the one hand, which really takes care of act 2, scene 2 to Polonius' death; and then there's the Sir Francis Walsingham on the other side, which essentially argues for two scenes in the play. And so I went to the text, and was struck in act 1, scene 3 that even in the Folio version Polonius blesses his son twice. So I began to ask what a blessing constituted in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in both Britain and on the continent. It often constituted a kiss—a kiss on the lips or a kiss

on the forehead. For me, that was a crucial moment, because what opened up for me then was how Polonius as a man loves his children. I wanted that to be the spine of the character. So all the machinations of statecraft (for example, why does he work so hard to position Ophelia as a possible partner for Hamlet?) have to do with his fundamental love for his son and his daughter, along with his desire to further his "house," which in that period was a very appropriate way to show love for one's children. In Jim [Sullivan], I was lucky to find a director who was interested in approaching the script in that way and who thought that Polonius was a worthy character, and that's where we are.

Flachmann: Thank you, Michael. Bill, how did you approach Claudius?

Christ: Claudius is a man who is a politician first and foremost, who enjoys power, and who is happy to have gotten power, but has done it in a way that is causing him great pain. He loves his wife, the queen, and thinks he can be good for the state of Denmark. What was interesting in working on this with Jim is that we focused on the concept of public and private masks, on the face that Claudius puts on when he is in public to convince people that he is the man who can do the job and do it well, as opposed to those moments where he can reveal the private mask and show the torment going on inside because of what he has done. His guilt begins to creep up on him as things start to unravel through Hamlet's actions or the problems that Hamlet presents in contrast to the neat little scenario that Claudius has set up.

Flachmann: Thank you, Bill. I've got some other topics I'd like to guide you through. I know that nobody up here is shy, so if you have a comment you want to make, just start waving your hand, and I'll get to you. Brian, we talked about madness this week in the seminar, and there were a lot of references to the "antic disposition" your character puts on. And Emily, there was even a question about the extent to which you actually go mad in the play. Without revealing any "actor bag" moments here that would make the other participants uncomfortable, I wonder if you could talk a little bit, starting with Brian, about the madness. I haven't asked you this summer, Brian, but are there any moments when you feel Hamlet really succumbs to genuine madness, or is it all a carefully feigned antic disposition?

Vaughn: I think the antic disposition is a shield for him, a protective armor to seek truth in the midst of all this deception. The words Hamlet uses are his armor; his weapon is his wit. It's as if he's saying, "I will put on this antic disposition to keep everyone

off balance about what I'm doing." The first event that happens after he becomes "mad" is the entrance of the players, and he sees clearly the difference between "seeming" and "truth" through these performers who are professionally embodying a theatrical reality and doing it so realistically and convincingly. This realization allows Hamlet to go even farther with that notion, and I believe that his antic disposition lets him teeter on the brink of control where he believes he can almost change the "stamp of nature."

Later, when he tells Gertrude to "assume a virtue if you have it not," his madness has gained some control over him. He goes a little bit into that dark place when he kills Polonius, and then he comes out of it when he goes to England. Like many Shakespearean characters who go into forests or new environments, Hamlet learns a great deal about himself on the voyage to England and comes back to Denmark much saner than when he left. Ultimately, I think that's what happens with Hamlet: He plays with this fake madness, which overtakes him for a time, and then he steps away from it so he can take his revenge.

Flachmann: That's excellent. Thank you, Brian. Emily, I wonder about the quality of your madness in the play. Jim [Sullivan] has you eavesdropping from the upper stage for some of the scenes involving Polonius' death. How helpful was this in creating your character?

Trask: The difficulty with Ophelia's madness is that after the play within the play, she disappears for quite a while, and when she comes back, she's singing bawdy tunes and picking flowers [laughter]. So I'm really grateful that Jim added a few key moments for Ophelia to eavesdrop on the other characters. When she overhears that Hamlet "has in madness Polonius slain," the realization hits her that her father is dead. She also listens when Hamlet makes his jokes about Polonius being "at supper," after which she exits immediately. In my mind, I'm the first to find him, because I run out there before anyone else. The eavesdropping gives Ophelia more of a journey to take into her madness. Her love for the other characters is so great that when her brother leaves the country, her father is slain, and she discovers that Hamlet has killed him, she goes mad. I think she has gone through such a slow burn from the closet scene, through the nunnery scene ("O what a noble mind"), and into all these later discoveries and losses that she can't help but go mad.

There's also some debate about whether Ophelia really does take her own life. For me, the moment of realization is in the mad scenes when she sings to herself, "Go to thy deathbed." Although

Gertrude comes back and says, "The limb broke," and it's quite possible that Ophelia just didn't struggle, I think it's a stronger decision and more "active" decision if Ophelia takes her own life. When I found out I was doing this role, I was living in Chicago, and I watched people on the elevated train who were having conversations with themselves. Ophelia doesn't know she's mad, so she's trying to sort out her problems. I think that when she really makes the decision to die, that's her sanest moment.

Flachmann: The eavesdropping helps me as an audience member because, otherwise, all you have is the out-of-synch "courtier's, scholar's, soldier's, eye, tongue, sword" line to indicate that your mind is starting to degenerate. Jim, Brian talked earlier about the theatricality of his antic disposition. How do you see that fitting in with the lovely device of the actors setting up the stage at the beginning of the show, which introduces the concept of artifice in the production?

Sullivan: So much of the play is about theatricality. The text completely provides that motif, most obviously with Hamlet's advice to the players. The business about Ophelia witnessing much of the action of the court wasn't my idea originally; I got that from a production that I read about in Sweden. The idea was to give her more presence so the full weight of Hamlet's killing of her father can help break her.

Flachmann: Ashley, there's a controversial moment involving you right before the duel when the poisoned and unbated sword is ready for you to grab. Osric sets it up for you, but you deliberately pick one of the bated, non-poisoned swords to begin the fight. Only after you become incensed do you go back and exchange the first sword for the more lethal one. Can you talk about that decision a little bit? I've never seen it done that way.

Smith: I'm not sure was if it was Jim's idea or Robin McFarquhar's [the fight director]. Robin is an excellent choreographer, and he was not only interested in the moves and the weapons, but also in figuring out what story we were telling with the fight. As you may know, the scene is usually done with Laertes taking a bated, un-poisoned sword first from the rack and then making a show of saying, "O, this is not the right sword for me; let me see another one." Then he selects the poisoned sword, and that's what he fights with. But Robin came up with the idea that Laertes is indecisive about whether he can really go through with killing Hamlet. As a result, he initially takes the poisoned sword, as if that was the plan, and then has second thoughts and takes a safe sword, with which he begins the fight. As the duel

progresses and gets a little bit out of control and Hamlet begins to humiliate him with his new-found expertise, Laertes starts to lose his cool and grabs the poisoned sword about halfway through.

I thought this was a very interesting choice that showed Laertes as a well-rounded, fallible, insecure person, rather than as a one-dimensional guy hell-bent on revenge. He's conflicted about killing Hamlet, which is realistic because they probably grew up together. Hamlet was the golden boy, the favorite son and heir to the throne, but at the same time they were no doubt good friends as they were raised, which means there's probably a lot of love there to complicate the issue for Laertes.

Flachmann: There's a nice moment in the second scene when you touch him on the shoulder before you and Ophelia exit the stage. I think that was a terrific decision, Brian.

Vaughn: Yes, Laertes and I are mirror images of each other in our revenge.

Flachmann: Michael, I wonder if you could explain a little more about the love Polonius has for his children? I'm also interested in the "neither a borrower nor a lender be" speech, which is often seen by scholars as a collection of clichés, but you make it really come alive. Talk about that, would you?

Connolly: Yes, I think you just put your finger on it. It's easy in scholarship to dismiss it as a collection of *sententiae*, easy to poke fun at. And I think this is probably the departure point for many actors and directors about Polonius because they look at the commentary on the speech and infer that he's clearly an egregious, self-important, pompous ass, so let's go ahead right from the very beginning and play him that way. On the other hand, you could also see Polonius being quite prescient at the moment. I mean, we say goodbye to our children with the assumption that, barring some act of madness, we are going to see them again. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, to say goodbye to someone who was traveling to Paris carried with it no assurance that they would ever return. Polonius is giving advice to Laertes as if it's the last time he will see him, which raises the stakes considerably. He's ensuring a kind of intellectual and moral patrimony, which seems to me the core of it.

I have to look at the speech as an actor. I can't interpret it the way a scholar does; I can't search for all the various sources from which these moralisms are drawn. I have to find my "action": What do I want to do with my son, and what am I trying to instill in his character so that when he goes to Paris—the great Catholic cesspool of the world in the early seventeenth century, right next

to Vienna then and only trumped by Rome—he is protected. Why is it necessary for a good Protestant boy to get this kind of advice? I think that's the reason. I don't believe I'm ever going to see him again. We had to cut the speech significantly in the interest of time. But what I try to do every night is invent it on the spot, as opposed to another production I unfortunately witnessed where Polonius had a crib sheet on which he checked off all the pieces of advice. I really wanted to avoid that. I don't think Polonius is a fool. I wanted to sidestep that naïve interpretation. Does that answer your question?

Flachmann: Beautifully! Thank you very much. Bill and Leslie, I wonder if you want to talk about your back-story. Enquiring minds want to know if there was hanky-panky before old Hamlet was killed?

Brott: If you want to know whether we were fooling around before Hamlet was killed, read John Updike's novel *Gertrude and Claudius*, OK? The ghost says that with his wit and his gifts, Claudius seduced his "most seeming virtuous queen," and I think that's plenty of information for you to devise something in your heads about what went on. It certainly was plenty for me, but you do have to listen to the play [laughter].

Flachmann: That's great. Bill, what percentage of your desire for the throne is lust for power, and what percentage is lust for the beautiful Gertrude next to you?

Christ: Well, I would say that the lust for power dominates Claudius.

Flachmann: Thank you. Another question that comes up often in seminars of this type is how much of your portrayal of the character is yours and how much is the director's? Is it possible to parse these things, or is the process so complex and technical that you can't disentangle your role from the director's suggestions?

Smith: He's in the room, you know [laughter].

Flachmann: Do you want to hold your ears, Jim? [laughter]

Smith: There's a tricky thing that happens for me: I'll have an idea about what I'm going to do, and then a director will say, "Hummm, maybe we should try it a different way." Sometimes that can rub you the wrong way, but I think a good director is someone who can guide you rather than imposing his ideas on you. I think Jim is very good at looking at what we are doing and then guiding us to some new ideas and discoveries. Now that we've been running for four or five weeks, I don't actually remember which ideas were originally mine and which were his, because I sort of feel like they were all mine [laughter]. I respond

best to that kind of direction: being guided rather than being pushed.

Connolly: I've done three shows with you, Jim. It's always been a cooperative experience. The expectation is that the actor will show up loaded for bear, and that the director is certainly going to be loaded for bear, and then the next several weeks are what the Italians call a *converzatione* kind of exchange. Then when you are running the show, the audience will teach you things as well. At this point in the second week in August, the only time you are aware that "this was Jim's idea" or "this was my idea" is when the idea isn't working, and then you have to negotiate with yourself to find a choice that will work and will satisfy your director's vision and the play's storytelling narrative needs. There's a lot of crap written about actors and their ego, and the bottom line is that there is very little ego involved in this process. We serve the director; we serve the playwright; and we serve the audience. If you let your desires get in the way of any of those three elements, I think that's when you start to become a monster.

Leslie: Jim and I have worked together four or five times, and it's always been a happy association. He really helped me this time because I could not get out from under the weight of "Hamlet, the Mt. Everest" thing. I teach acting, but I could not always see how to play the positive choices in each scene. This is what we do in life, of course: We try to fix the situation, to bring it back to equilibrium or a pleasurable balance. I was originally playing the problem because I knew the end of the play; I knew it carried heavy casualties, many bodies on the stage. I didn't have confidence in my effort, and Jim always steered me back toward believing as a character that the most important thing I could do was to fix the problem in the moment: preventing somebody from being killed, trying to restore somebody to their psychological equilibrium. Whatever I wanted to fix, he kept pointing me back towards the positive. Moreso than in our other associations, I really had a lot of difficulty getting out from under the weight of four hundred years of scholarship. Usually I'm just brilliant without him, but this time I really needed him [laughter].

Flachmann: Thank you, Leslie. Jim, do you want to chime in on that?

Sullivan: When I directed *I Hate Hamlet* at the Festival few years ago, which I really loved doing, David Ivers was in that show, and there's a moment when the television actor is going to be in the Shakespeare in the Park production of *Hamlet*, and he says, "*Hamlet!* Whoa!" That was the Mt. Everest moment again.

That show is about the ghost of John Barrymore coming back to coach the guy. We all need help in life. We need help everyday. Mary Tyler Moore used to tell a story about Carl Reiner, who got the Mark Twain Prize for Humor for writing the *Dick Van Dyke Show* and other brilliant work in comedy. She said that whoever had the best idea, that's what they went with. And if that meant that the guy who came in to change the water cooler happened to watch the scene and had a great idea, that was what went into the mix.

I think the actors respect me for my eye and my ear because they know I am on the outside of the process watching them, and I respect them because they are the play. If we can be in a situation where we can help each other get to the bigger thing, which is the play, that's all that matters. I have had situations, less than ideal situations, where an actor wasn't ready to give to the others in the cast, and I have had to come in and deal with that firmly. Ultimately, we are playing this play together, and that includes you as audience. When the play starts, the audience has an important voice in the performance. This summer company is a very fine group of actors, and that has made all the difference.

Flachmann: Great, thank you. There's so much richness and ambiguity in the script. We've just spent three days with the Wooden O Symposium talking about some of the shades of meaning, and you can't watch a brilliant production like the one we have here without being aware of that. From an actor's point of view, can you play "ambiguity"? Can you play "richness"? Or do you have to go for specific moments and let them all meld together into an artistic whole that can be described later as "ambiguity"?

Brott: As an actor, no, I don't think you can play ambiguity, but hopefully there will be some ambiguity when you as audience members reflect on the production. If we play specifically from moment to moment, the production supplies its own ambiguity. But you've always got to play the text with absolute concrete specificity so the audience can hear the subtleties.

Flachmann: What was the toughest scene or moment for you to do in this particular production?

Christ: I don't want to flag anything that the audience can notice tonight [laughter].

Connolly: There are still a couple of moments in this little role where every now and then I come to the theatre and think, "How's this going to work?"—which I believe is a healthy reaction. There are still two little moments where every night I have a new decision about what is happening, and they both have to do with

listening to Brian and responding. That's fun because he comes up with new stuff almost every second, so that's a great ride.

Brott: The toughest moment for me is trying to figure out what is really bugging Hamlet in the closet scene. I don't want to say the specific lines, but there are a couple of lines where every night I say to myself, "Faker, faker, lousy faker; you should be fired" [laughter]. If we could restore about fifteen of Brian's lines, I think I could get it.

Vaughn: Many scenes are tricky for me to play. John Gielgud said that the most difficult scene for him was the Ophelia-Hamlet "nunnery" scene. What I find especially interesting in playing the part is the moments where you feel like something is not happening correctly, yet the problem is in the character and not the actor. If you're going through a struggle, more often than not the character is going through the same difficulty you are. That was particularly clear to me in the first part of act 2, where Hamlet comes back after seeing the ghost and begins to put on his antic disposition. In the midst of this, I said to Jim one day during rehearsal that I felt like I wasn't doing anything, that I was just reacting to what was happening to me on stage. While I was playing the truth of these moments, Hamlet begins to talk about the fact that he's not doing anything. And that's exactly what's happening to Hamlet and the actor at the same time! And I think that's frequently true with Shakespeare. The tricky part about my scene with Ophelia is maintaining the balance of doing one thing to her and feeling another thing inside. That scene is driven by love for her, but in the midst of it I'm also trying to discover who's plotting against me, so that was a perilous balance to play.

Trask: What's the most difficult and scary part, other than being lowered into the grave? [laughter] Actually, that's not me at all; I get to sit that one out. It comes in the "nunnery" scene, but actually it's after Hamlet leaves, which is the only time Ophelia is truly alone with her thoughts. As I explained earlier, in my particular take on the character, it's all about her love for other people—especially Hamlet. To keep that moment honest and active and connected to other people when I am alone on stage is always a challenge for me.

Smith: For me its when Gertrude enters in act 4, scene 7, and tells us that Ophelia has drowned. Laertes' response is, "Where?" It's not the kind of response I would personally make. If I were writing the scene, I probably would have written something like, "O my god! You're kidding!" I would have written this long speech, but Shakespeare doesn't give me that. For a while, I just

kept trying to figure out what I should be doing there: What's my job in this moment? And finally I talked to Jim about it, and we just tried not doing anything, just being still. When Gertrude is describing Ophelia's death, there's really nothing to do there. But I still get that voice in my head—"Shouldn't you be doing something right now?"—and then I have to relax that and just be still.

Flachmann: Great. Jim, did you find any particular moments or scenes that were especially challenging to stage?

Sullivan: The hardest moment for the director is when the play opens. You are the most useless person in the room at that point. I love this show. And I love these people doing it. So the hardest thing for me is to let go of it, as they would probably confirm [laughter]. I'll be watching a movie or a TV show, and I'll look at my watch and think, "O, they're doing the nunnery scene about now."

Flachmann: It sounds like "Directors Anonymous" here [laughter]. What about Hamlet's epiphany in the nunnery scene when he seems to realize that Ophelia has lied to him?

Trask: Can I change my mind and say that's the most difficult part in the play for me? [laughter]

Vaughn: Well, it's a gray moment theatrically. There's a realization that somebody is there, that she's being stage-managed, which is very painful for me because she's the one person in this entire kingdom who, I hope, would be truthful with me. This mixture of deceit and passion is particularly chilling because I know she's a victim in this whole situation. When he sees her being lowered into the grave later, he wants to go back in time and do things differently. I firmly believe that those two characters have to be deeply in love. So in that earlier nunnery scene, there is such a communion of spirit, of mind, of body, and of soul, and in the midst of that she can't be truthful. And I have to make a quick right turn in the scene. All this stems from the regret and the loss and the pain.

Flachmann: Jim, did you want to add something?

Sullivan: I just wanted to say one word about that—he's not Prince Valiant; he's Prince Hamlet. He makes mistakes. He's a human being, not some storybook character, and he's paradoxical. He's noble, but there are times when he has to be vicious. He's all these things, and in the arc of becoming who he is by the end of the play, he goes through that process.

Flachmann: You all get so close to these characters during the rehearsal and performance process. Do they ever encroach upon your real lives?

Brott: I'm really glad Gertrude doesn't blur into my life. There's a fatigue level that affects me, but I'm just a person who wants to go home and go to bed and read a book or have a drink or gab at my friends [laughter]. I'm glad my parts don't blur over because I've played some scary people. Michael [Connolly] will probably tell you that I actually am Judith Bliss [laughter]. It's my job, and when I take the makeup off and go home and have a shower, I'm done.

Flachmann: Brian?

Vaughn: I agree with Leslie, I don't think you should embody the character. If I were playing the Scottish king, that's the last thing I would want to be doing. Or Iago! Taking him home with you might be dangerous. Actors have said to me, "You will be a different actor after you play this part; you will be a changed individual." Laurence Olivier said this play haunted him his entire life. There are insights in the play that I reflect on every single day. One of the brilliant insights about Shakespeare is that his plays are so much about the human condition, and that's why we keep doing them.

Brott: I tell my students that as an actor you do not have the luxury of living an unexamined life. You have to think about what it means to be alive. I'm not a religious fanatic, but I played one. And I had to do so with compassion. I'm intellectually stimulated 24/7 because I'm an actor.

Flachmann: One final question for Mr. Sullivan: When you direct a play, do you ever wonder what Shakespeare would think if he were sitting out in the audience?

Sullivan: Well, I wish he were. I have questions [laughter]. First of all, I'd want to know him. I'd want to know everything I could about that heart and mind and the experience of writing these plays. But I also would expect that he would say something along the lines of what Michael Connolly said earlier: All that matters is what works. You know he had a specific company that he wrote for, which accounted for their ability to mount these plays successfully maybe two or three times in a year. I read a description of Richard Burbage, who played Hamlet. He was violent, truculent, and not very honest, so he probably had a volatility that must have made that first *Hamlet* pretty exciting. Can you imagine creating the role of Hamlet? That's something to really think about. I believe Shakespeare's big idea is that the theatre is the world. As William Saroyan says in *The Time of Your Life*, "It takes a lot rehearsing for a man to get to be himself." So I think of myself as holding up the torch to that idea as best as I can.

Flachmann: I'd like to thank a number of people before we adjourn. Please join me in a round of applause for Mr. Sullivan and his wonderful actors [applause]. It's such a joy to have you share your craft with us. We discover again, as we always do with these roundtable discussions, how bright and engaged the actors are and how incredibly hard they work at bringing these productions to life. And I want to thank Michael Bahr for setting all of this up: He and his staff do a wonderful job with the Wooden O Symposium [applause]. And finally, thank you to the audience for supporting this place that we all love so much [applause].

UNDERGRADUATE PAPER

Death and the End of Testimony: Trauma Theory in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

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Although Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* long before modern literary theories, the themes and structure of the play promote a reading in light of such theories, particularly that of trauma theory. Notoriously, Hamlet, the character, has been all too frequently made a modern man by reference to psychoanalytic processes which, as many critics argue, are abstracted from the essence of the play's concerns. Instead, I would suggest that trauma theory can be used to view the text, rather than the characters—that is, to focus on the underlying themes of the efficacy of language, rather than the psyche of the protagonist battling his personal traumas within the play. To achieve such a reading necessarily calls for an analysis of the play in a way that is not involved with Shakespeare's immediate concerns, but rather with the larger theoretical concerns of language and representation throughout the history of literature.

Cathy Caruth's discussion of trauma in *Unclaimed Experience* is essential to my argument because she provides a preliminary basis for defining and remedying trauma. The origin of trauma, for Caruth, is prompted by "an event that . . . is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be fully known."[1] Caruth also suggests that trauma is "always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality of truth that is not otherwise available."[2] The wound or traumatic scar thus repeatedly calls out and requires the presence of an "other" through which to be heard. Caruth's ultimate solution to ending the perpetuation of such trauma comes in language itself—she claims that through testimony and listening to another's wound, we can overcome the repetitious calamity of traumatic denial to remedy the past with the present. However, to claim that testimony can be redemptive of past traumas is to suggest that an inherently traumatic system, language, is the solution to trauma—essentially prescribing in the antidote

the very thing that shaped the original disease. Language is traumatic due to the fact that it tries to impart a truth that will never be fully recognized—every time we try to represent reality, we are only creating and indeed depending on a void that enables non-truths to perpetuate the trauma of misrepresentation. Because language is traumatic in its failure to create completely truthful representations of reality, not only is it hard to fully believe that it can solve any trauma, but furthermore, through testimony one is only repeating and recreating the traumatic event in words, the sense of which cannot be policed. This essentially places testimony in the very place of the wound, calling out repeatedly to be heard, but due to its linguistic articulation, it will never be fully understood.

While Caruth's notion of trauma usefully underscores the ways in which representation itself is a traumatic event, I am unsatisfied with her solution. If the inability of language to represent reality is traumatic, then testimonial language cannot purport to solve its own trauma. Jacques Derrida assesses this problem in *The Gift of Death*, where he finds issue in the relationship between responsibility, faith, and gift-giving. Derrida suggests that the redemptive desire for language is nullified only when guilt and trauma cannot exist. However, the solution of giving the gift of death would result in the "verdict of non-historicity itself," which seems inherently unethical.[3] Thus, the gift that language tries to bestow through truthful representation can be ethical and without guilt only if the act of giving destroys itself, thus wholly negating the mystery. This moment of self-destruction must be committed in the instant: to meditate beforehand is to reckon linguistically and rationally with the action. Awareness of the consequences of the act shows a motive of revealing the whole truth; yet the whole truth will never be available if the gift-giver is aware of his self and the potential payback he could receive. Derrida sees a need to get outside the economic system of representation to resolve this trauma; however, he suggests that the only non-representative act is to evade representation through death. The paradox, in other words, lies in the need to act ethically through an unethical deed—this is where I feel Derrida and Shakespeare converge.

Hamlet the play and Hamlet the character are faced with a political/ethical dilemma: how can one redeem the past without perpetuation of that trauma? Hamlet needs to kill Claudius without becoming him—to confront his desires would essentially mean becoming the wound and source of the original trauma. Ultimately, the answer lies in death, but this death can only occur ethically once killing becomes a non-redemptive reflex against testimony and representation. To act in a redemptive manner by using language

and testimony would only propagate the wounds of history. Ultimately, Hamlet's revenge must come when he is no longer invested in the outcome: At the end of the play he is virtually dead himself and will not succeed as the king of Denmark; thus, he is no longer invested in the repetitious economic structure because he can no longer benefit from his actions. However, while the desire to act without motive and eliminate the trauma seems paramount, the ending of the play is problematic for two reasons: the survival of Horatio as the living testament to the story and the presence of Fortinbras in Denmark. Nevertheless, if one is to look at *Hamlet* (the play) in light of Derrida's writings on trauma and language, the action of the play suggests that a successful ending would consist in the death of language to ultimately produce a world in which the trauma of history no longer possesses the potential of repetition or the metaphysical drive of redemption. In this world, no prior knowledge would exist unconditionally, and therefore no need for revenge. If language ceases to exist, however, there can be no progress, and the play itself would be rendered void of meaning.

The primary motivator for much of the play's action lies in the eerie scene where the ghost recalls Claudius's rancorous actions against him and orders Hamlet to avenge his father's murder by killing Claudius. The rest of the play is invested not only in Hamlet's remembrance of his father's words, but also in the history preceding the ghost's testimony. Caruth's discussion of trauma is very pertinent when it comes to the ghost—ultimately the ghost will speak only to Hamlet and will continue to roam the castle's walls until his testimony is heard. When Hamlet encounters the ghost he exclaims, "Speak, I am bound to hear," and the ghost replies, "So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear."[4] This testimony does not provide an immediate solution; instead it calls for redemption through Hamlet. Furthermore, all of Hamlet's following actions are motivated by the past—the ghost's testimony perpetuates, rather than eliminates, the trauma of past actions. For Hamlet to avenge his father's murder, he must also become a murderer, and so forth. Caruth's notion of testimony cannot fully apply here because the ghost's testimony calls for further action rather than providing solution in itself. The ghost's last words are, "Adieu, adieu, adieu! Remember me" (1.5.91). Testimony thus requires memory and the recreation of past events. This act of reconstruction is essentially traumatic as it requires a linguistic and consequently unsatisfactory recollection of the past that will continue to haunt Hamlet and the play until the end. As Hamlet later says to Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern, "A dream itself is but a shadow" (2.2.260)—it is in the shadows of dreams and language that trauma resides.

After his fateful meeting with his father, Hamlet requires Horatio and Marcellus to swear upon his sword that they will not speak of what they have seen. He and the ghost repeatedly call for them to swear silence as Marcellus claims, "We have sworn, my lord, already" (1.5.148). The verbal staging of repetition following the testimonial scene echoes the call for redemption and revenge through repetition of the past murdering of the king. Ultimately though, this scene is problematic as Hamlet requires of his friends one thing: a spoken vow not to speak. The irony of speaking aloud a vow not to speak shows the problem Hamlet faces of trying to end the perpetual traumatic incursion of the past by ending language, but needing, nevertheless, a linguistic version of the events to ensure the symmetry between the binding force of the vow and the authenticity of the report of the events.

If the ghost's testimony is the agent for Hamlet's subsequent actions, then the soliloquies act contrary to the forward motion of the play. In his many speeches we can see Hamlet struggle with the task ahead of him—he grapples with the problem of ending the trauma of his father's murder through revenge, while he also tries to avoid falling into the same pattern of repeating Claudius's actions. Hamlet sees himself as a coward, "unpregnant" of his cause, resorting to words rather than actions to revenge his father's murder (2.2.568). Before constructing the mousetrap, Hamlet is distraught when he claims,

> This is most brave,
> That I, the son of a dear father murthered,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,
> And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
> A stallion. (2.2.582-87)

Unable to redeem the past without falling into the very trauma that caused the ghost's testimony, Hamlet feels inadequate in his use of words to remedy the problem, knowing well that to achieve his goal, a more dire action is required of him. It is in these moments of soliloquy that Hamlet's revenge is halted, reckoned with linguistically, and slowed down. The famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy presents Hamlet's musings on death and suicide as he wonders whether trauma can be reconciled only through death, or by actions (3.1.55-89). Hamlet imagines that in death, perhaps, trauma ceases to exist, but then he realizes that even in death, there are dreams and, ultimately, trauma's afterlife. Hamlet's

soliloquy thus is a pendulum swinging between action and non-action, ultimately to "lose the name of action" and postpone the success of his revenge (3.1.87). His musings on how to kill without becoming a killer, how to act without acting, lead only to the conclusion that he must no longer have a conscience, the very thing which "makes cowards of us all" (3.1.82). In his powerful soliloquy after running into Fortinbras's troops on the way to England, he concludes with the commanding statement, "My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" (4.4.66).

Hamlet's temporary solution to his quest to act ethically lies primarily in the creation of the mousetrap, a play within a play wherein the characters are not immediately invested in the outcome, but—precisely in being so divested—could possibly reveal a truth which is not instantly available. Hamlet suggests that he will hold the play "as 'twere the mirror up to nature" (3.2.22). In doing so, Hamlet hopes that Claudius's guilt will become apparent and that he can validate the ghost's words: "If his occulted guilt / Do not itself unkennel in one speech, / It is a damned ghost that we have seen" (3.2.80-83). However, the problem here is Hamlet's use of an imaginary recreation to reveal true culpability. In using the metaphor of a mirror, it is evident that the mousetrap is nothing more than an imperfect reflection of reality, an imaginary recreation that ultimately will hold only incomplete or partial truths. In his attempt to create verifiable knowledge through the imaginary recreation of the past, Hamlet ultimately repeats past actions and only furthers the repetition of trauma by providing a platform for the murder of Polonius and Laertes' motive for revenge.

Polonius's death has many fascinating aspects, one of which is the impulsive and irreverent mode of Hamlet's actions. It seems that Hamlet acts without thinking of anyone—it is irrelevant whether he thinks Claudius or Polonius is behind the curtain, and he himself does not care about the consequences. He merely cries out, "How now? A rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!" (3.4.23) The near lack of language, reason, and planning—the sheer accidental nature of the deed—shows Hamlet's attempt for original action. The murder is so unlike Claudius's of his father that it seems he might have succeeded in his task if it had been Claudius behind the arras. Hamlet's action, therefore, can happen only when he is acting without direct purpose and planning. By accidentally killing Polonius, Hamlet is able to establish Claudius's identity without fully becoming him. However, in relation to the play at large, Hamlet is the very same to Laertes as Claudius, and he unsurprisingly feels the need to avenge Polonius's murder. The death of one creates a machine of

death for another, just as the verbal acts of the mousetrap operate as a theatrical machine within the play to further the repetition of the original traumas.

Polonius's death is also important in its engineering of Laertes' revenge as well as Ophelia's madness and probable suicide. The succession of events after Hamlet stabs Polonius further supports the idea that language cannot stop perpetuating trauma. Hamlet's mistake—killing Polonius—alters the prospective outcome: instead of killing Claudius ethically, Hamlet's actions ultimately fall into the category of the actions of a mere murderer. Consequently, Laertes becomes bound to revenge just as Hamlet was in hearing the ghost's testimony when he claims, "Let come what comes, only I'll be reveng'd / Most thoroughly for my father" (4.5.136-37). It is this vow to revenge which ultimately destroys Hamlet, Laertes, Gertrude and Claudius. Laertes' linguistic reckoning with his bondage to revenge is in this sense redundant: it simply provides further evidence of the traumatic patterning of language as a propagator of misrepresentation.

Only in Ophelia's case do we begin to see the efficacy of language unravel. In Ophelia's madness lies the end of language and reason. She spatters off nonsensical words and song, emphasizing that in madness, reason and language cease to exist. Her ambiguously suicidal death marks the first occurrence of a genuinely new action within the play. Because she is mad, there appears to be no reasoning and no clear motive behind her actions; rather, she appears to act on pure impulse. The problem here lies in the way in which others try to reckon with her death. Gertrude's recollection of the suicide scene is problematic in the very fact that she speaks reasonably as if she were at the scene, when no textual evidence supports such a view. Her recollection undermines the uniqueness of Ophelia's actions by rendering her story in terms that do not fit together coherently. As suicide, her actions mark the death of language, but the aftermath of her suicide only perpetuates history's wounds through language. The problem of her burial remains indebted to the protocols in reason and language, but her actions issue from madness and produce song, not propositions. The problem, therefore, should not be whether or not she committed suicide because in Ophelia's lyrical escape into madness, such notions do not, and cannot, apply.

We see that Ophelia has given herself the ultimate gift of death—she acts ethically in a Derridean sense, if not a Christian one, because there is no possible way in which committing suicide can be within one's own self interest. It is in her case that we begin

to see the possibility of conclusion and the end of trauma, at least for her sake. Yet, this option is not feasible for Hamlet. Due to the fact that Hamlet is not mad, but only acting, he cannot commit such an act—Hamlet's actions must be a spawn of a different mother.

The final battle scene and consequent massacre provide the ultimate answer to Hamlet's dilemma: that is, how he can kill Claudius with no mark against his immortal soul. The ethical import for Shakespeare's culture was most definitely based in a Christian—and economic—sense of the afterlife in relation to choices made before death; but if we are to look at the final scene in a Derridean sense, we see Hamlet's challenge: he must act ethically and without self-interest, regardless of the economic payoff or damage that could result from his actions. Hamlet is able to take action and forsake words only because of one fact: poisoned and near death, words are no longer relevant, and action supersedes reasoning. He puts little thought into his slaughter of Claudius, merely exclaiming, "The point envenom'd too! / Then, venom, to thy work" (5.2.321-22).

If the play were to stop here, it would arguably be more effective in the sense that at this point it seems that language, testimony, and therefore the trauma of Denmark's history are abolished. The muddle of near-comical corpses produces a scene which seems nearly void of meaning; the overwhelming presence of death inhibits the genuine feeling of tragedy one feels over Gertrude's or the others' deaths. However, while one might conceivably wish that this were the "real" ending, there remains the troubling presence of Horatio, who has somehow survived the massacre. He acts as a living testimony, but for what purpose?—to carry on the past trauma when Hamlet calls to him,

> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity a while,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story. (5.2.346-49)

Thus, while the play suggests a solution in the closure of testimony—after all, every instance where language preceded action has only caused further trauma and repetition—Horatio's presence only solidifies the enduring presence of testimony in the history of the trauma. Hamlet's choice of words, calling Horatio to draw his breath in pain, reflects the furthering of the trauma to cause pain to others still in the world of the living.

Horatio's presence at the end of the play is troubling enough in its reinforcement of future trauma within Denmark, but more

troubling still is the appearance of Fortinbras. The importance of Fortinbras getting in the last words at the conclusion of the play seems to nullify any notion of resolution: Fortinbras's presence and words indicate that such trauma will continue well into the future. As a military figure, Fortinbras represents the reinstatement of the traumatic political structure in which brothers can murder brothers for the throne. His last words, "Go bid the soldiers shoot," buttresses the prolonged presence of violence and death as it makes reference both to the funerals and the inevitable battles to come (5.2.403).

It is certain that Shakespeare was not reading Derrida when he wrote *Hamlet.* But the play nonetheless presents a provocative lens through which to consider the efficacy of language and testimony in relation to trauma theory. Hamlet's disgust with the efficacy of "words, words, words" (2.2.192) reflects the entire play's movement towards an ending in which words are irrelevant. However, the conclusion does not fully abolish testimony and thus suggests that the trauma will only continue to pervade the world of Denmark. This conclusion can be applied to recent studies of the trauma of language according to the logic of the double bind—language is traumatic, but without it, meaning would cease to exist. A full investment in Derrida's ideas on death would, in fact, bring the verdict of non-historicity and, in that case, the destruction of art itself. Literature may produce only a shadow of history, but perhaps that shadow is the best representation of truth available to us. If we are to abolish trauma, there will be no life and no art, in a way. It is the trauma created by misrepresentation that reminds us of what is real and what it means to live—and to die.

Notes

1. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

2. Caruth, 4.

3. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5.

4. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Herschel Baker (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 1.5.6-7. Subsequent in-text line references are to this edition.

I would like to give special thanks to UCLA, especially the Department of English, for a wonderful undergraduate education and to Professor Lowell Gallagher for his mentorship and guidance. Also thanks to Robert Watson and Chris Mott for their support and assistance.