

SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

Shakespeare's Renaissance Realism

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I

AFTER DECADES OF EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE, no one now supposes that the realism of fifty years ago is the only realistic mode.¹ Several realisms are recognised, each with its own conventions; although realism can sometimes be thoughtlessly contrasted with 'convention'. But mind-sets change slowly, so that the realism of William Archer is still taken as normative for Elizabethan drama, much as single-point perspective is, for Renaissance art. Undeniable 'exceptions'—like Holbein's *The Ambassadors* with its anamorphic skull, or the *Unton Memorial* with its differently-scaled spatio-temporal insets—are commonly treated as oddities. Yet the possibility of multiple perspective and temporal viewpoints continued, well into the seventeenth century.² And Elizabethan

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¹ There is a large literature on mimesis and on realism in its various senses; see, e.g., Auerbach (1953); Stern (1973); Lyons and Nichols (1982), especially Beaujour; Nuttall (1983) 56–7 etc. Ermarth (1983) valuably traces the development of realism away from the spatial and temporal discontinuities of medieval art; relating this to the introduction of single-point perspective (albeit with some confusion between viewpoints and vanishing points). Hagen (1986) is useful on different perspective systems. And, for those who speak the language of poststructuralism, there is an interesting theory of meta-representational discourse in Weimann (1985).

² For Unton, see Llewellyn (1991) Figure 28; for Rubens, Vergara (1982) 48. Many Elizabethan portraits contain additional scenes or *parergies*, often removed in place or time: see, e.g., Strong (1987). Study of Renaissance perspective needs to begin with White (1987); Kemp (1990); Elkins (1994). See also Alpers (1983), e.g., 64–9; Bunim (1970); Lindberg (1976).

drama was similarly free to move among spatial discontinuities on the 'imagined wing' of its 'swift scene'.³ Time and place could be left unspecified, or have mainly symbolic import.⁴ Indeed, scenery came to the British stage only during the 1630s;⁵ and, even in Italy, architectural stages might exhibit incompatible perspectival recessions.⁶ Despite this, a continuous, single-point perspective—what I shall call 'spectator realism'—tends to be read back into drama innocent of its assumptions. Traditional and postmodern critics alike assume that by Shakespeare's time discontinuous, allegorical representation was more or less replaced by modern realism, with its post-Cartesian continuum of cause-effect sequences, inviting speculative extrapolation to supply missing details.⁷ But there is a distinct Renaissance realism, an intermediate mode between medieval and modern. Locally, this may imitate reality naturalistically; but in its larger coherence it adopts multiple perspective viewpoints that are often related morally or psychologically rather than causally.

Shakespeare's comedies even combine allegory with illusionistic representation. Instead of forcing them into a teleologically naturalistic strait-jacket, we should accept their own terms of realism. It is futile, for example, to demand a unified plot. Despite classicising theorists, Renaissance drama at its best often implies a romance poetic of interlace, separate viewpoints and multiple plots.⁸ Some of the more honest cinquecento theorists even doubted whether a single plot could hold an audience.⁹ Yet nowadays directors mostly rationalise Shakespeare's interwoven structures to a single sequence, or at least to a 'main plot' and 'sub-plot'. Elizabethan comedy was structured by scenes, not acts,

³ *Henry V*, III Chorus.

⁴ Dessen (1984); Kernodle (1944).

⁵ In a production of William Strode's *The Floating Island* (1638). Self-referring dialogue in J. Shirley, *The Triumph of Peace* (1633) 295–315, seems to imply the novelty of scenery; but this may need to be qualified for private theatres and great house venues, if the speculations in Mowl (1993) 150 are right.

⁶ e.g. G. B. Albanese's drawing of the proscenium of Palladio's Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza: Puppi (1989) 281.

⁷ Auerbach (1953) and Ermarth (1983) contrast the two mimetic methods.

⁸ See, e.g., Pettet (1949). On *entrelacement*, see Vinaver (1971); Bloomfield (1986). Illustration of *Orlando Furioso* is an obvious instance of the interaction of polyphonic romance and compressed-narrative, multi-perspective picturing; see Falaschi (1975).

⁹ Also, whether the 'other perfection' of romance was not preferable. See, e.g., Bernardo Tasso: Weinberg (1961) 1010; cf. Camillo Pellegrino, and especially Giosepe Malatesta: *ibid.* 1020, 1061.

however: by ideas, as much as plots.¹⁰ Suspend belief in plot unity, and Shakespeare's comedies turn out to have plot multiplicity.

Twelfth Night has something like eight stories.¹¹ Yet we conspire to discuss a main plot, with Orsino, Viola and Olivia as 'protagonists' — the solecistic plural gives all away — and a subplot, with Sir Toby, Feste and the rest. Malvolio's confinement in 'hideous darkness' (IV. ii. 30), when Sir Topas catechises him in Pythagorean doctrine, is treated as peripheral 'fooling'. Yet the play's occasion was Epiphany, and the Lesson for Epiphany concerned the palpable Egyptian darkness of sin. The Magi seeking the light were interpreted as the *praeparatio evangelii* of pagan wisdom, specifically including Pythagoras's.¹² Malvolio's instruction in ancient theology is thus anything but peripheral.

The Merchant of Venice, too, has many independent (although allegorically connected) plot strands. Among these is Shylock's plot of revenge on Antonio, which has proved hard to motivate without resorting to the soft focus of Heinrich Heine and Graham Midgley, or (like Lancelot Gobbo and Barbara Lewalski¹³) identifying him with the devil. As recipient of the ring of Leah (allegorised by St Paul himself as the Law¹⁴), Shylock symbolises legalistic belief in the Old Covenant, or its Christian equivalent, justification by works. He may be related to the intense seventeenth-century interest in the relation of Law and Gospel.¹⁵ Yet of course no allegorical interpretation can adequately address the play's complex treatment of the ethics of lending, venture capital, and contracts. Its profusion of stories, vignettes, cases enacted and cases alluded to constitutes a realism as multifarious as that of, say, Dos Passos' *USA*. It may include, for example, the unanticipated moral circumstance that in standing surety for Bassanio, Antonio was culpable.¹⁶ Again, Shylock perhaps calls Antonio a 'fawning publican'

¹⁰ Forgotten until recently. See Jewkes (1958); Jones (1971).

¹¹ e.g. Orsino's, Cesario's, Andrew's and Malvolio's suits to Olivia; Viola's love for Orsino; the intrigue of Maria's riddle; Antonio's love and imprisonment; Cesario's and Andrew's duel. Draper (1950); Hollander (1961).

¹² Gash (1988); Lewalski (1965); Fowler (1995) 120–6.

¹³ Lewalski (1962) 339.

¹⁴ Gal. 4: 22, a key passage in this context.

¹⁵ As witness, e.g., Rembrandt's Hebraism, and Milton's: see, e.g., Schwartz (1993). Portia's important speech on 'the quality of mercy' is based on Isa. 55, then commonly interpreted as an invitation to the New Covenant.

¹⁶ Nelson (1969) 153 cites Luther's condemnation of suretyship as un-Christian. The economic history is complex. Luther at first condemned usury, but later altered his position. Shakespeare's choice of *mise en scène* is pertinent: Venetian fraternities made free lending a condition of membership, only introducing usury (at low interest) in the sixteenth century. See Bossy (1985) 61, 77 ff; Ferber (1990) 461, 459–62; Braudel (1982) 438.

because he is like those Biblical publicans (Matthew 5: 47) who salute only their own friends.¹⁷ Shylock is usually discussed in relation to Antonio's sacrifice. But Shylock has a sacrifice, and a plot, of his own. He could be seen as a sharp business man enforcing a bond that, allowing for metaphor, is only a little more rigorous than some Elizabethans would have approved.¹⁸ His revenge gets as far as it does because the authorities worry about Venice's credit, if the bond is not honoured. They can find no way of saving Antonio, since in effect Shylock's law is theirs too.¹⁹ He comes close to being a revenge hero. He might have exposed the horrors of the new business world of unregulated contracts²⁰ more heroically, however, if he had kept his 'oath in heaven' (IV. i. 228). What if he had taken, as we say, his pound of flesh? In a good production, much will hang in the balance as Shylock hesitates—'Why doth the Jew pause?' But in the event he breaks his oath. Unable to cut Antonio's flesh without spilling blood and so incurring the death penalty, he shrinks from performance of his covenant, which is impossible without self-sacrifice.²¹ W. H. Auden, in what A. D. Nuttall calls 'one of the most brilliant critical remarks of the century', gets it exactly wrong when he writes that Shylock 'did, in fact, hazard all for the sake of destroying the enemy he hated'.²² Shylock is not prepared to sacrifice his life, as Antonio is.

Michael Ferber is right, then, to reject Terry Eagleton's idea of a Shylock with more respect for the law than Portia, and impelled to expose Venetian law as a sham.²³ But it will not do to rule out Eagleton's view on the ground that it does not fit with the overall meaning of the play's unified plot—its 'sequence of virtual actions unfolding in time before a real audience'.²⁴ Elizabethans were used to multiple plots with multiple meanings, and would have been quite prepared to consider Shylock's perspective. It may well have had for them, however, a

¹⁷ Lewalski (1962) 330–1.

¹⁸ On possible English referents for Shylock, see Ferber (1990), esp. 444–5.

¹⁹ *Pace* Eagleton (1986) 37, Venice to preserve its credit is quite prepared to sacrifice Antonio.

²⁰ Ferber (1990) 457–8.

²¹ Leviticus 17: 10–16 requires separation of flesh and blood in sacrifice: Ferber (1990) 463.

²² Auden (1963) 235; Nuttall (1983) 127: 'W. H. Auden in one of the most brilliant critical remarks of the century observed that this requirement [to give and hazard all] is met by two people in the play, neither of whom is Bassanio'. In fact only Antonio hazards his life.

²³ Ferber (1990) 461. On Marxist interpretations by Nerlich, Eagleton, Greenblatt and others, see *ibid.* 457 ff.

²⁴ Ferber (1990) 462.

more religious point: namely, the impossibility of satisfying the law, and the need for grace. 'Is this the law?' exclaims Shylock. When the Duke forces Shylock to give away all he has (in literal enactment of Luke 18: 22), he makes the Jew a fuller practitioner of the New Covenant than the Venetian Christians themselves—a characteristically Shakespearean outcome, barbed and thought-provoking.

In such ways, Shakespearean comedy is a mosaic of parts, realistic or romantic, which may have tenuous motivational or causal connection at a narrative level. The overall coherence lies in a pattern of ideas, rather than in naturalistic realism.

II

Perhaps true of the comedies, it may be argued; but some of the major tragedies are more naturalistic. In *Macbeth*, or *Othello*, all plots are tributaries of the main stream; 'causes are all contained';²⁵ and the protagonist's motivation is continuous and detailed. Already in the cinquecento, theorists focused on tragedy their calls for unified mimesis. Even in England, continuity was obligatory by the end of the seventeenth century, just as artists (in Shaftesbury's view) were 'debarred the taking advantage from any other action than what is immediately present'.²⁶ From chronological continuity, it is a short journey to novelistic motivation—which more distinctly originates in the tragic art of Richardson than in the comic art of Fielding. The route is a familiar one: from Romantic subjectifying of *Hamlet* (in 1713 William Guthrie thought Hamlet spoke the language 'of the human heart'²⁷), to A. C. Bradley's separation of character from plot, to Freud and Ernest Jones. Hamlet's delays must have psychological causes, discoverable through sufficiently minute analysis.²⁸ This is far from ridiculous. Hamlet displays simulated or actual symptoms of melancholy, or depression, as identified by Renaissance authorities. His vituperation, his histrionism, his seeing of ghosts: all these were melancholy symptoms.²⁹ He displays enough symptoms, indeed, to suggest

²⁵ Kastan (1982) 26.

²⁶ Cooper (1713): reprinted Holt (1958) 2. 246.

²⁷ e.g. Wiggins (1994) 209.

²⁸ *ibid.* 213.

²⁹ Colie (1974) 211. For ghosts as a melancholic symptom, see R. Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* I. ii. 1. ii, cit. Dodsworth (1985) 50; Aubrey (1898) ii. 266; (1972) 460.

‘anatomy’, or epitome, rather than case study: some of his complexity comes from Shakespeare’s amalgamating distinct melancholic types (or else from Hamlet’s indiscriminate drawing on his reading of psychology).³⁰ And it is true that motivation abounds in *Hamlet*. That is not quite the same, though, as continuous motivation throughout the play. The Renaissance theatre had no continuity girl. Psychological motivation was less relentlessly expected, when actions could be moral or spiritual.

Romantic focus on expressive language was succeeded by two centuries of criticism devoted to construing psychological motives, sometimes for moral actions that had none. Well may Howard Felperin say ‘we half-perceive and half-create Falstaff’.³¹ For we invent streams of consciousness like our own—or like those in novels. So Felperin, Graham Bradshaw, and others have done a service by showing that Shakespeare constructs characters on archaic armatures, or as types, and afterwards plasters them with complications and deviations—as if Hamlet were not so much like a real-life revenger as unlike the revenger of the ur-*Hamlet*.³² Nevertheless A. D. Nuttall’s view, or Arthur Kirsch’s, seems preferable: that Hamlet is drawn from life. Only, to appreciate Shakespeare’s realism, one needs perpetually to adjust to his assumptive world (to use the psychologists’ convenient term). Modern assumptions are so strong as to be easily confused with nature herself. And when that happens, any departure from the uniformity of ‘nature’ (like the double time-scheme in *Othello*) is so disconcerting that it calls all in doubt.³³

Yet such anomalies are the rule, not the exception. *Hamlet*, too, has multiple time-schemes, as one can find by asking, with Barbara Everett, how young the young prince is. Hamlet changes, without corresponding lapse of fictive time, from the undergraduate age (somewhere between sixteen and twenty-three) to the politically dangerous near-maturity of thirty. (The gravedigger entered his trade ‘that very day that young Hamlet was born . . . thirty years’.)³⁴ Hamlet’s age is not ambiguous;

³⁰ As Colie (1974) 210 suggests.

³¹ Felperin (1977) 66.

³² See Felperin (1977) *passim*; Empson (1986) 86 etc.

³³ On this so-called double time-scheme, see Ridley (1958) lxvii–lxx.

³⁴ V. i. 143, 157. Throughout, *Hamlet* references are to the text in Jenkins (1982). Questions of textual revision are largely passed over, since they do not alter the fact that multiple perspectives were allowed to remain in late versions of the play. See Everett (1989) 19–20. For documentation, see Jenkins’s Long Note to V. i. 139–57. Jones (1971) 80 ff proposes a two-part structure, corresponding to the two temporal phases.

rather does he age during his sea voyage in a quantum leap—'jumping o'er times'³⁵ or stages of life. The representation comprises two 'takes', from distinct chronological viewpoints, which are juxtaposed without any attempt to reconcile them within a single temporal frame. (One might compare the compressed narrative of many Renaissance pictures.) We are given two perspectives of Hamlet, or two Hamlets, one young and another mature. In the second perspective, the Ghost—already silenced by the oaths of Act I—has disappeared altogether as a public, debatable phenomenon. Deutero-Hamlet may be said to have introjected the Ghost, abandoning scepticism and suspicion.³⁶ He is now hardened to honourable revenge, unlike the hesitant, perplexed young Hamlet.³⁷ Such multiple perspectives must surely figure in a critical account, even if they usually pass unnoticed in the theatre.

It seems appropriate to broach the subject of mimesis on this occasion, since Shakespearean tragedy early achieved great triumphs of realism. In *Hamlet*, as early critics observed, we seem to see nature herself.³⁸ The speeches, movingly natural, appear to voice a human consciousness directly. And Hamlet's censorious advice to the players—surely it is a manifesto of naturalism, the basis of Shakespeare's own art?—except that that would put it under the head of art rather than nature. 'Hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature': surely the actors are to make themselves virtual images of life? But the Elizabethans had no large mirrors like ours; and Hamlet tells the actors to hold the mirror, not appear in it.³⁹ He means, in short, a moral mirror, in which audiences may see themselves—a mirror 'To show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image'. This verse, by the way, invites a *distinctio*.⁴⁰ Virtue and Scorn are now rightly regarded as opposites; but the aristocratic Hamlet (though not Shakespeare) may well mean them as synonyms. Virtue may be *virtus*, valour or the inward aspect of honour; Scorn may be *sdegno*, noble disdain for everything base.

³⁵ Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Prol. 29.

³⁶ Cf. Alexander (1971) 50.

³⁷ See Dodsworth (1985) 236, 252, 264 against the notion that the deutero-Hamlet is regenerate or superior.

³⁸ Although there would soon be more methodically uniform examples in Beaumont and Fletcher; cf. Felperin (1977) 60. On eighteenth-century appreciation of the natural in Shakespeare, see Nuttall (1983) 99–100.

³⁹ Frye (1984) 5. On the implications of the mirror, see Grabes (1982) 102–3. Felperin (1977) 45–6 transfers the demand for 'lifelike illusion' to the passage following ('the very age and body of the time his form and pressure'), which however will not bear that sense.

⁴⁰ On this strategic figure, see Skinner (1994).

Hamlet clearly conceives honour as requiring disdain. He scorns his servants ('I am most dreadfully attended': II. ii. 369); he scorns the courtier Osric (''Tis a chuff [churl]': V. ii. 88–9); he scorns Polonius; he scorns Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ('baser natures': V. ii. 60); he scorns the players; and he scorns Ophelia, Gertrude, and women generally. He even scorns those who write legibly (another 'baseness': V. ii. 34).⁴¹

If the speeches in *Hamlet* are natural, the soliloquies are positive touchstones of the natural, direct expressions of Hamlet's thoughts. Of the fourth soliloquy ('To be or not to be': III. i. 56–88) Harry Levin writes 'we are permitted to share the stream of [Hamlet's] consciousness'.⁴² Yet, marvellously eloquent as the speech is, it lacks immediate motivation. The audience last saw Hamlet eagerly planning to put on *The Murder of Gonzago*, the mousetrap to catch Claudius's soul; they have no reason to expect thoughts of suicide.⁴³ Among attempts to supply motives, Levin, working on old Freudian assumptions, diagnoses a 'death-wish'; Philip Edwards finds a pessimistic sense of the impossibility of reform; Harold Jenkins, a vision of total depravity; Kay Stanton, improbably, a 'performance' by Hamlet (to divert the eavesdroppers' attention from his *Gonzago* plan).⁴⁴ Others cut the Gordian knot by moving the soliloquy elsewhere.⁴⁵ It is not felt to belong to the same cause-effect sequence with the scene before and after.⁴⁶

Many feel it as direct address (a more common form of dramatic discourse before proscenium arches framed off the fictive world⁴⁷): a *parodos* speech in the dramatist's own person: an archaic convention: an example of what Levin Schücking called 'primitive devices'.⁴⁸ For it

⁴¹ *Scorn* can be taken as 'objects of scorn': Jenkins (1982). For disdain as a basis for moral action, cf. Bruno's *Degli Eroi Furori* (1570), cit. Alexander (1971) 65, and see Fowler (1964) 108, 110, 112–13. On Hamlet's standing on rank, dispensing with degree only when it suits, see Dodsworth (1985) 105–6, 154, *et passim*. For a good guide on the honour code, see Dodsworth (1985), esp. ch. 1, with refs.; also Empson (1986) 118 ff; Quint (1992b).

⁴² Levin (1959) 68.

⁴³ Clemen (1987) 133 has to admit that here 'the dovetailing with the dramatic action is less apparent'.

⁴⁴ Levin (1959) 70; Jenkins (1982) 152; Stanton (1994) 175.

⁴⁵ Edwards (1985) 25–7. On the placing of the speech, see Dodsworth (1985) 109.

⁴⁶ Dodsworth (1985) 94 strains to find a single sequence.

⁴⁷ Bradbrook (1952) 111.

⁴⁸ Cit. Clemen (1964) 26 n. 9. Nuttall (1983) 145 discusses the German tradition Levin Schücking represents. On the actor as rhetorician, cf. Burns (1990) 10. Rose (1985) 111–12 needlessly invokes Freud's idea of plays depending on 'the neurotic in the spectator' and 'crossing over the boundaries between onstage and offstage'.

is a general meditation, only broadly appropriate to the immediate circumstances. 'The insolence of office' is hardly a scorn Hamlet has to bear; far from suffering 'pangs of disprised love', he is about to inflict them on Ophelia; and not all the 'thousand natural shocks/ That flesh is heir to' have shocked *him*. The perspective is as general as that of the Gravedigger's cogitation (which similarly extends to a whole community of sinners—lords, lawyers, tanners, ladies, jesters). It is as Everyman, elsewhere, that Hamlet admits to being an arrant knave (although he is complacent in the knowledge of being 'indifferent honest'); it is as Everyman that he shares the universal melancholy anatomised by Burton.⁴⁹

This is not to say, with Edward Burns, that Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' speech is *unmotivated*,⁵⁰ a *declamatio* or essay like Seneca's, say, or St Augustine's, ordered rhetorically rather than psychologically.⁵¹ Indeed, Hamlet might say with Montaigne 'I only speak others in order better to speak myself'.⁵² For one thing, the speech follows a specific, dichotomising method: 'To die—to sleep/ No more [sc. no more than a sleep]'; and later 'To die, to sleep;/ To sleep, perchance to dream.' Levin shrewdly identifies this method as Ramist; one may add that Ramist rhetoric was in England a mark of militant Protestantism.⁵³ The monologue is apt, then, to a student from Wittenberg, the home of scepticism, reform, Lutheran Protestantism in religion and 'mixed Ramism' in rhetoric.⁵⁴ In its highly theoretic generalising about humankind, the speech suits Hamlet's youth and his evasion of simple duty.⁵⁵ Its extremity may suggest the 'beleaguered sanity' characteristic of

⁴⁹ III. i. 122–30; cf. Alexander (1971) 27, 60. Hamlet may however *think* of himself as suffering all this by a sort of legal fiction: cf. Dodsworth (1985) 158.

⁵⁰ Burns (1990) 147.

⁵¹ Clemen (1964) 23 remarks its unusual reflectiveness; cf. Edwards (1985) ('extraordinary'). The soliloquy, and much else in *Hamlet*, owes a debt to St Augustine's study of the infirm will in *Confessions* VIII. ix–x. There may also be an echo of Petrarch's assurance that the 'arrows of fortune' cannot touch the citadel of mind, unless will opens the gates: *Fam. Epist.* XVIII. xv.

⁵² Montaigne, *Essays* I. xxvi.

⁵³ Levin (1959) 69. See Miller (1939); Seaton (1950) xi; Ong (1958); Shuger (1988) Index s.v. Ramism, Puritan, esp. 96; and the Ramist analysis of Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology* by his secretary William Temple: Webster (1984).

⁵⁴ Wittenberg was associated with both Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon. For mixed or Philippo-Ramism, Melanchthon's systematic version of Ramism, see Ong (1958) 298–9; Howell (1956). Jenkins (1982) 436 and Brandes (1902) 358 take the reference as local colour: it was common for Danes to go for education to Wittenberg.

⁵⁵ Everett (1989) 22.

stoicism's contained passions.⁵⁶ And it is thematically apt, in that it sets out the play's central issue—in the central of seven soliloquies—the choice between responsibility and evasion, between being and not being, between aggressive action and passive submission. (Alternatives developed separately in the perspectives of Laertes and Ophelia, according to the convention of genealogical allegory whereby siblings stand for complementary or contrasting effects.)⁵⁷ The malcontent diatribe is also apt, in that it amounts to a *contemptus mundi* removing any justification for ever avoiding a duty, no matter how dangerous. The monologue is on a different scale, however, from the rest of the scene. It dramatises the *longue durée*, as it were, of Hamlet's consciousness of evasion. Its perspective is more distant, if not exactly detached.⁵⁸ Yet, like Pyrrhus's speech, it is indispensable. No less indispensable than, say, Bellini's landscape parergon in the throne of his Pesaro *Coronation of the Virgin*, or insets in the picture-within-a-picture genre, or the play within the play.⁵⁹ Nigel Alexander has shown how closely relevant such elements as Pyrrhus's speech are. My aim is to generalise this, arguing that such apparently artificial digressions come within the orbit of Renaissance realism.

Others of Shakespeare's soliloquies similarly disappoint modern expectations of a continuously maintained viewpoint.⁶⁰ 'Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I' (II. ii. 575–673) follows closely enough after the weeping Player's compassion for Hecuba—a compassion Hamlet himself lacks. But then (again convincingly) Hamlet thinks of a plan—'I'll have these players/ Play something like the murder of my father' (590–1)—which is the very plan he put into effect forty lines earlier (at 531–6). The soliloquy thus resembles his stream of consciousness, but not consciousness of the same time when it is voiced. Here Muriel Bradbrook and Wolfgang Clemen fall back on the non-explanation of a special archaic convention, retrospectively explanatory direct address.⁶¹ And there is talk of textual inconsistency. Already in

⁵⁶ Cf. Nuttall (1983) 103, 107.

⁵⁷ Cf. Alexander (1971) 75, 121; Backman (1991).

⁵⁸ For arguments against detachment here, see Dodsworth (1985) 108; elsewhere, however, Hamlet often affects a spurious aristocratic detachment; see *ibid.* 263.

⁵⁹ 'Repetition, discontinuity and excess . . . run right through the fabric of the play': Rose (1985) 117. Cf. Burns (1990) 145–6 on the difficulty of putting Ophelia's report of Hamlet's 'down-gyved' state into a cause-effect sequence.

⁶⁰ Similarly the second soliloquy compresses several states of consciousness: Fowler (1987) 79.

⁶¹ Clemen (1964) 14.

1935, however, J. Dover Wilson suggested that the soliloquy recapitulates Hamlet's earlier emotions, and is 'a dramatic reflection of what has already taken place'.⁶² This gives us our clue. The earlier, external representation shows the putting of the plan in motion; the later voices the vague internal planning that achieved specificity in enactment. Again, two distinct versions of the same action. Such redundancy is sometimes put down to incomplete revision. But this explanation (or explaining away) may often be unnecessary. Multiple, paratactic representations of the same action are normal in Elizabethan drama, as in Renaissance picturing.⁶³

III

Questions about mimesis have often centred on Hamlet's problematic character. From the time of William Richardson (1743–1814), those identifying with Hamlet—and who has not done that?—have had difficulties with his cruelty, aggression, and especially his wish to kill Claudius in a state of mortal sin (Dr Johnson called this 'too horrible to be read or to be uttered'). Hazlitt, Levin, George Hunter, Nuttall and others have followed Richardson in supposing, subtly, that Hamlet's holding back in the prayer scene results from 'amiable sensibility'.⁶⁴ The malicious reason he expresses for delay must be rationalisation, since 'nothing in the whole character . . . justifies such savage enormity'. Hamlet deceives himself, since he is ashamed of his moral scruples (his true reason, or excuse, for inaction).⁶⁵ Without disagreeing with Hunter that Hamlet's sympathetically hesitating nature is 'fully human',⁶⁶ one is struck by how often such rescuing of Hamlet's amiability generates increasingly speculative interiorisation.⁶⁷ Yet all these idealising efforts have scarcely irradiated Hamlet's obscure irresolution. (Martin Dodsworth seems nearer the mark in detecting culpable evasion of responsibility.) And psychoanalytic criticism, while admittedly raising more

⁶² Wilson (1935) 142n.

⁶³ Cf. Dodsworth (1985) 163–6 on double representation in the dumb show and the Gonzago play.

⁶⁴ Richardson: Vickers (1974–81) 5. 159; Hazlitt (1902) 234; Levin (1959) 34; Nuttall (1983) 107. On eighteenth-century censure of Hamlet, see also Prosser (1967) 244 ff.

⁶⁵ These 'would expose him . . . to censure': Richardson, reprinted in Vickers (1974–81) 6. 365–8.

⁶⁶ Hunter (1963) 98.

⁶⁷ Cf. de Grazia (1991) Afterword, esp. 223 ff.

metaphysical questions, has supplied so many answers to them that one concludes they are not answerable. Is Hamlet an Oedipal father-hater perplexed to find his new rival a fellow-father-killer? Does Hamlet's femininity identify passively with Gertrude's?⁶⁸ (One suspects that family relations may have been a good deal different in an age when well-born infants seldom saw their mothers.) So many psychological inferences have been invented that fainthearted poststructuralists despair of a coherent protagonist; announcing that there is no reality, no 'essential Hamlet', behind his show.⁶⁹ But this capitulation hardly satisfies.⁷⁰ Constructive inference needs to be sustained; although hopefully with more thought for relevance to pre-novelistic conditions.

The old question why Hamlet delays is not exclusively one of character; at times, indeed, delay seems a device to allow prolonged analysis of honourable duty.⁷¹ The duty to revenge is seldom questioned very deeply in revenge tragedy; and some critics accept it as par for the Jacobean course.⁷² Yet revenge is anything but Christian.⁷³ And Shakespeare's profound realism examines the call to requite wrong more searchingly than to accept repetition of the wrong as a duty. In particular, a distinction between private revenge and civil retribution emerges as crucial.⁷⁴ Not least for a prince, honour itself—the displaced chivalric ethic of an outworn ancestral order—had grown problematic.⁷⁵ Hamlet is torn between disagreeable alternatives: on one hand public confrontation, challenge and perhaps insurrection; on the other, individual heroic agency. Significantly, the Ghost has for Horatio a political explanation, whereas Hamlet avoids any political role.⁷⁶ After the inset play (which might have been an opportunity for public initiatives), deuterio-Hamlet's thoughts of revenge take on an increasingly private, malicious character.⁷⁷ The change is emblemised by the Ghost's third appearance, to Hamlet alone, in a private closet. He

⁶⁸ Jones (1955) 88, 106, cit. Rose (1985) 113.

⁶⁹ e.g. de Grazia (1991) 224–5; Belsey (1985) 50.

⁷⁰ Cf. Nuttall (1988) 59.

⁷¹ As Alexander (1971) 10. On the ambiguity of the Ghost's 'call to honour', and Hamlet's unpreparedness for it, see Dodsworth (1985) *passim*.

⁷² Levin (1959) 35; Cruttwell (1963) 118 ff.; Alexander (1971) 189–90.

⁷³ As Alexander (1971) rightly stresses. Cf. Montaigne, *Essays* II. xi, 'Of Cruelty'.

⁷⁴ Cf. Kirsch (1993) 113–14.

⁷⁵ As Mousley (1994) 79 suggests, overstressing Hamlet's conscious scepticism. For the broad sense revenge might have in the sixteenth century, see Dodsworth (1985) 63.

⁷⁶ e.g. I. i. 83–4; cf. Robson (1975) 20; Dodsworth (1985) 49; Battenhouse (1969) 246. On Hamlet's eventual choice of private revenge, see Bowers (1989) 96; Nuttall (1988) 61.

⁷⁷ *Pace* Bowers (1989); cf. Prosser (1967) 199.

appears 'in his nightgown', lacking the moral armour of the public appearances on the Platform, when he was visible to Horatio and the others.⁷⁸

Much turns on the Ghost's authority. The challenge of the dead is that of honour, of duty to an inherited, ancestral ethic. But is the voice of honour to be obeyed without question? Is there a divine commission to revenge—an appointment, even, as 'scourge and minister'? All this is left realistically uncertain. And when Hamlet ceases to question it, when he becomes a 'true believer', a certain moral coarsening sets in. Nevertheless, Shakespeare does so much to make the Ghost's visitations portentous, that they acquire an authoritative significance, perilous to ignore. Honour must be satisfied. The generalising application seems inescapably universal: everyone is given, like Hamlet, an absolute obligation to reform the world ('born to set it right'). In this very broad sense, Hamlet's delaying needs no explanation. He delays as culpably as everyone else, leaving undone those things which he ought to have done. (In 1713, interestingly, Guthrie could still perceive Hamlet as an Everyman, speaking 'the real language of mankind, of its highest to its lowest order'.)

Hamlet's delay is sometimes attributed to mental disturbance. But, as Arthur Kirsch reminds us, 'Hamlet is always conscious of the manic roles he plays and is always lucid with Horatio'.⁷⁹ If Hamlet is continuously rational, though, his apologies to Laertes for the distraction with which he is 'punished' invite unpleasant inferences. Assuming he was only ever 'mad in craft' (III. iv. 187), with north-north-west madness, his apologies must be similarly Machiavellian. Patrick Cruttwell shrewdly remarks that Hamlet's madness is most emphasised by those who wish to avoid confessing his faults.⁸⁰ Perhaps his protean madness may partly be explicable in terms of multiple perspectives corresponding with different irrational responses to the rational madness of society. His irrationality can be youth's subversive wildness,⁸¹ careful evasiveness ('crafty madness keeps aloof', III. i. 8), licence for aggressive truth-telling (as in Marston's satiric malcontents and the Amleth of Saxo's *Danish History*), or simply a refuge in which to

⁷⁸ For the doffing of armour as implying a dangerous moral fluidity, cf. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I. vii. 2 (also VI. iii. 7 etc.), discussed in Leslie (1983) 126.

⁷⁹ Cf. Kirsch (1990) 33.

⁸⁰ Cruttwell (1963) 114; cf. Alexander (1971) 27, 'What alienates Hamlet from us is his inhumanity.'

⁸¹ Cf. Everett (1989) 22.

hide from responsibility.⁸² And, of course, with continued pressure, there is also the threat of really insane sanity like that of Kohlhaas in Kleist's powerful story. To Polonius, Hamlet is insolent in a way once taboo with seniors, even if socially inferior. To Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he is as deviously manipulative, taking advantage of inconsequentiality, perhaps, to turn a casual question about recorder-playing into sudden accusation. Hamlet is a chameleon. Or, as W. S. Gilbert puts it in his *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* libretto,

Some men hold
That he's the sanest, far, of all sane men—
Some that he's really sane, but shamming mad—
Some that he's really mad, but shamming sane—
Some that he will be mad, some that he *was*—
Some that he couldn't be. But on the whole
(As far as I can make out what they mean)
The favourite theory's somewhat like this:
Hamlet is idiotically sane
With lucid intervals of lunacy.⁸³

Undoubtedly 'one man in his time plays many parts'. Nevertheless to regard Hamlet as a walking contradiction would be simplistic. Allowing for subclinical instability and occasional losses of control ('passions'),⁸⁴ his moods vary intelligibly enough with his interlocutors.

IV

Consider the nunnery scene, Hamlet and Ophelia's first meeting on stage. The dutiful daughter, who is being used to test Hamlet's disposition, returns his love tokens. But Hamlet says—with the thoughtlessness of recently acquired honesty—'I never gave you aught' (III. i. 96). After a few clever, sharp words, he makes inadequate amends: 'I did love you once' (III. i. 115); yet within four lines he takes even that away: Ophelia should never have believed his vows—'I loved you not'. And he launches defensively into misogynistic diatribe.⁸⁵ Faced with these baffling vacillations, some follow Dover Wilson in supposing

⁸² Cf. Dodsworth (1985) 86.

⁸³ Gilbert (1982) 176.

⁸⁴ On the extent of Hamlet's madness, see Dodsworth (1985), e.g. 156.

⁸⁵ This aggressiveness continues, as V. i. 190 ff. shows.

Hamlet aware of eavesdroppers.⁸⁶ Many invent previous erotic passages. Salvador de Madariaga, like some earlier German critics, thought Ophelia was Hamlet's mistress; Kay Stanton imagines Hamlet's visit to Ophelia's closet as a scene of rape—his doublet was not unbraced for nothing; and even Eleanor Prosser visualises the leave-taking of a lover too sensitive to be a trifle.⁸⁷ Harold Goddard, in a way more sceptical, takes the entire visit to be Ophelia's invention; perhaps he remembers Goethe's percipient remark that Hamlet's feeling is 'without conspicuous passion'.⁸⁸ Others invent various acceptable emotions explaining Hamlet's cruelty in the nunnery scene. He is ending a relationship that must now lead to suffering.⁸⁹ Or, he is voicing disgust at Gertrude: 'I loved you not' means 'there is no such thing as pure love'.⁹⁰ Or, Ophelia has taken his love too seriously; he realises he has never been in love as she is. Faced by honest love, he is guiltily incoherent: his vacillation expresses faltering commitment.⁹¹ Or (a plea of self-defence), he would rather reject than be rejected. Or (applying Felperin's genetic theory), Hamlet falls short of the revenger's role, and turns to the reformer's—to *sermo*, to the satiric, misogynistic discourse of Wittenberg.⁹² But it is useless. We are like eavesdroppers ourselves, unable to make sense of what we hear. Even Bradley, who carried motive-hunting as far as anyone, confesses its futility here: 'What is pretence, and what sincerity, appears to me an insoluble problem'.⁹³

Instead of immediately construing motives that exculpate Hamlet, one might consider what other perspectives Shakespeare has given of Hamlet's love. Ophelia, reporting his visit to her closet, describes him as mad with love (II. i. 85–6). But her wishful view is surely undercut by dramatic irony. The audience recognises Hamlet's 'wildness' as simulated, his disordered dress as antic costume; being prompted to

⁸⁶ The text counts against this speculation, as the best recent editors, Harold Jenkins and Philip Edwards, agree.

⁸⁷ Madariaga (1948) 64; Stanton (1994) 168; Prosser (1967) 130, 146. Everett (1989) 31 more subtly suggests that Ophelia's madness takes the form of *believing* she has been 'brutally seduced'; but see Empson (1986) 108.

⁸⁸ Goddard (1946) 462–74; Gervinus (1883) 579.

⁸⁹ Hazlitt (1902) 236 obscurely argues that Hamlet could not 'wound her mind by explaining the cause of his alienation'.

⁹⁰ Cf. Burns (1990) 145: the diatribe has little to do with Ophelia herself.

⁹¹ Cf. Alexander (1971) 112.

⁹² On the composition of role from fictional ingredients, see Felperin (1977) 55–61, Dods-worth (1985) 252.

⁹³ Bradley (1920) 157–8. The insolubility has continued to influence acting: Ian McKellen's style consistently seeks to validate indeterminacy: cf. Hodgdon (1994) 263, 270.

this recognition by an introjected memory of the Ghost in Hamlet's look—Ophelia describes him looking 'As if he had been loosed out of hell/ To speak of horrors'.⁹⁴ He is not thinking of her.

Then, there is the love-letter, which to Polonius proves Hamlet to be in love. This letter carries the weight (considerable in that age) of documentary evidence:

Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love. (II. ii. 115–18)

Jenkins is alert to a danger here of insincerity: 'Since each of the poem's first two lines assumes the certainty of what had now begun to be doubted, there is an irony of which Shakespeare (though not, I take it, Hamlet) must have been aware.' But Hamlet must have meant the irony. He cannot for a moment have been unaware of the controversies besetting the sun's motion, for his university was famously in the forefront of astronomical thought. The junior mathematical professor at Wittenberg was George Joachim Rheticus himself; while the senior professor was none other than Erasmus Rheinhold, foremost astronomer of the century after Copernicus.⁹⁵ In short, Hamlet's love letter is malapert, as flip as its facile parody of poetic conventions might suggest.⁹⁶ Beneath its frivolity there is a disagreeable suggestion of evasiveness, of casual, patronising over-confidence. Its only sign of grace is the compunction of its breaking off—unless that, too, is a trick of languid offhandedness. Hamlet and Ophelia, in fact, have very different conceptions of the love that divides them—hers the true nobility of generous, virtuous love, his the lordliness that does honour by loving.⁹⁷ Ophelia, we recall, admits Hamlet never promised marriage, but only gave 'countenance' to his love speeches 'With *almost* all the holy vows of heaven'.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ II. i. 83. Cf. Alexander (1971) 129.

⁹⁵ Rheticus, an enthusiastic disciple of Copernicus, did much to assist the publication of the Copernican hypothesis by his *Narratio Prima* (1540); and Rheinhold compiled the first Copernican tables. Rheticus's edition of Sacrobosco was printed at Wittenberg, as was one of Copernicus's mathematical works. Other scientific luminaries there included Johannes Fleischer (optics and astronomy); and Michael Neander (medicine and astronomy).

⁹⁶ Cf. Dodsworth (1985) 155: 'innocently ludicrous sophistication'. Polonius's introduction of his reading ('I will be faithful': II. ii. 114) already introduces the notion of trust.

⁹⁷ On the distinction between *vera nobilitas* and merely ancestral nobility, a favourite theme in Jonson, see McCanles (1992).

⁹⁸ I. iii. 114 (my italics).

There is an additional viewpoint in the nunnery scene itself. Words are heard as well as spoken; and Ophelia *hears* Hamlet say 'I did love you . . . I loved you not'. What he means by this *correctio* or reformulation is reserved to his private consciousness (in which, possibly, he never gives Ophelia much thought).⁹⁹ What stands out for the audience is the words' painful impact on Ophelia. They are as relevant to her consciousness as to his; conveying, as they do, the contradictory feelings of rejected, 'disprised love'. Poor Ophelia has herself become uncertain about the mutual love her little intrigue was to prove (III. i. 39). The words mime *her* uncertainty, although Hamlet speaks them.

This reflexiveness appears in other ways too. Hamlet and Ophelia are both excessively attached to a parent; and each suffers 'distraction'. It is not exactly that Ophelia's 'real madness punishes the feigned insanity of Hamlet, which gave the first shock to her mind'.¹⁰⁰ In her image, rather, we see the morbid potential of Hamlet's irrationality. Their resemblances have been attributed to a 'multiple focus casting attention on Ophelia' and other characters 'as well as the protagonist'.¹⁰¹ But the reverse seems nearer the truth: the multiple foci are all on aspects of the protagonist. What they all reflect is Hamlet's experience, and, through his, Everyman's and Everywoman's.¹⁰²

V

The mirroring extends to details. Both Hamlet and Ophelia are given to carrying books, as critics have noticed. Attention to such material viewpoints has led to considerable advances in Shakespeare criticism.¹⁰³ Previously, exclusive concentration on verbal mimesis induced neglect of indirect, dispersed characterisation such as Warren Ginsberg has traced in ancient literature.¹⁰⁴ For one has to imagine, before our spectator realism, a realism more participatory, engaging the emotions

⁹⁹ On Hamlet's total silence about Ophelia to others, not to be explained in theatrical terms as concentration of focus, see Bradley (1920) 154, 158; he is not prepared, however, to think of the prince as having taken advantage of his rank.

¹⁰⁰ Gervinus (1883) 581.

¹⁰¹ French (1992) 109.

¹⁰² But see Showalter (1985) 113, where she objects to Lacan's treating Ophelia as an aspect of Hamlet.

¹⁰³ e.g. Alexander (1971), Doeblner (1974), Dessen (1984), Manning (1994).

¹⁰⁴ Ginsberg (1983); cf. Dessen (1984).

in a world less externalised. When Hamlet enters 'reading on a book',¹⁰⁵ the book is not only an appropriate accessory for a scholar: it characterises him. And when he swears that the Ghost's 'commandment all alone shall live/ Within the book and volume of my brain' (I. v. 102–3), one may guess that the actor carried Hamlet's figurative tablets literally, thus supporting Alexander's connection of Hamlet's 'word' (or motto) with the art of memory.¹⁰⁶ For, as Cesare Ripa explains, a book is Memory's attribute—her memory-prompt.¹⁰⁷ Frances Yates's white magic has rather obscured the fact that artificial memory was a religious discipline, designed to form the soul through meditation.¹⁰⁸ Hamlet's word 'adieu, adieu, remember me', besides referring to the sacred obligation imposed by the Ghost, echoes the Eucharist's memorial, 'do this in remembrance of me'. Yet in the same breath Hamlet speaks of forgetting:

Remember thee?
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond [foolish] records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
[impressions on his memory]
That youth and observation copied there (I. v. 97–101)

This must have been deeply shocking to a generation for whom the book was a symbol of devout Protestantism, appearing as such in countless sepulchral monuments.¹⁰⁹ In effect Hamlet's soon-broken promise is to forget all religion and tradition: to remember only revenge.¹¹⁰ He claims to prefer the sword of violence to the political, persuasive book.¹¹¹ And the passage may seem still more insistently

¹⁰⁵ II. ii. 167 Folio s. d.

¹⁰⁶ Dessen (1984) 67–8, 171n. 15; Alexander (1971) 47.

¹⁰⁷ Ripa (1976) 335–6. When Polonius accosts Hamlet when reading (II. ii. 168–71), another book emblem may be evoked: Whitney (1586) 171 ('study is useless without practice').

¹⁰⁸ See, e.g. Carruthers (1990).

¹⁰⁹ See Mowl (1993) 31.

¹¹⁰ Hamlet is not unaware, then, that memory's recollection counts against revenge, as Alexander (1971) 117 asserts. Mousley (1994) 71 sees an act of simplifying; Cruttwell (1963) 118 an act of forgetting.

¹¹¹ Since Hamlet's sword is probably unsheathed continuously from I. iv. 85 to I. v. 154, Shakespeare may also allude to a familiar emblem picturing a king (or Hercules his type) with book and sword, to signify that 'the ideal king masters both skill in arms and knowledge of liberal arts' (Wither (1635) I. xxxii), or that 'eloquence is better than strength' (le Fèvre (1536) 93: Alciati (1985) clxxxi).

overdetermined, still sharper in ironic challenges, if one recalls the VINDICTA DIVINA book emblem.¹¹² 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'

In the nunnery scene, Ophelia's book is similarly eloquent. She carries it to 'colour' her 'loneliness . . . with devotion's visage' (III. i. 45–6): to suggest 'orisons'. Hamlet, perhaps deceived, begs 'in thy orisons/ Be all my sins remembered' (III. i. 89–90). But, beneath its false appearance, Ophelia's book is a book of memory, too—memory of their mutual vows of love. Silently, it puts Hamlet's subsequent moralising in a bad light.¹¹³

In such ways, any material object or action may have an aspect to add to the total representation. The most profound example, perhaps, is that of the inset play, brilliantly interpreted by Anne Barton and Nigel Alexander. Hamlet may claim to 'know not "seems"', and have 'that within which passes show'.¹¹⁴ But as the plot unfolds, he is increasingly involved with show. He puts on an 'antic disposition'; he dresses for the part of prisoner of love (or of Denmark), with stockings 'down-gyved';¹¹⁵ he recites a dramatic speech; and he organises the performance of a show-within-a-show-within-a-show. All these counter-shows have the implicit effect of suggesting that Hamlet knows (or comes to know) 'seems' only too well.¹¹⁶ Illusion and false appearance are universal in the fallen world. Thus, the broken oaths in *The Murder of Gonzago* are Hamlet's too, to the extent that he spends time on theatricals—only tangentially relevant to his mission—instead of revenging. In the denouement, similarly, the ceremonious duel with its salutes of ordonnance completes the picture of Hamlet's ensnarement within the shows and customs of honour, the repetitive pattern of conflict that makes up fallen history.¹¹⁷

¹¹² See, e.g., Peacham (1612) 140: the divine wings of the emblem are appropriated at I. v. 29.

¹¹³ On the book as Ophelia's devotion, see Lyons (1977) 61. Alexander (1971) 131 supposes a book of contemplation; but the text's insistence is on memory: the love tokens are 'remembrances' (III. i. 93).

¹¹⁴ I. i. 76, 85. Often misinterpreted: e.g. Mousley (1994) 70 following Belsey; Potter (1991) 121; Burns (1990) 141, 154. 'That within' has little to do with 'essential subjectivity': Hamlet means he has real grief, not just its show—so Wiggins (1994) 215–16.

¹¹⁵ Dessen (1984) 37.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Weimann (1985) 288 ('Hamlet is both a product and, as it were, a producer of mimesis, a character performed in a role and one who himself performs and commissions a performance') and Wiggins (1994) 221 ('Hamlet must maintain an exterior persona that is wholly discontinuous with his inner self'). In *Doctor Faustus*, similarly, the middle scenes mime Faustus's frivolity: all he can think of to do with his powers is tricks.

¹¹⁷ Hunter (1963) 107.

These are large perspectives; but lesser details may have their own aspects. When Hamlet stabs Polonius, the arras functions of course as a necessary hiding-place (although not an inevitable one: in Saxo the eavesdropper is under the rushes). And it is a deliberately superfluous detail serving the rhetoric of realism: Hans Knieper's tapestry workshop at Elsinore was famous.¹¹⁸ Dessen suggests that symbolically the arras is 'a surface that prevents one from seeing the truth, . . . that epitomises the seeming world of Denmark' (tapestry was often symbolic, from its presenting figures and texts¹¹⁹); his Hamlet seeks truth under surface appearances. But a more relevant clue may be found in R. B. Graves's reminder that 'the overall illumination' of the Elizabethan stage encouraged 'a sense of continuity between . . . the actors and their background'.¹²⁰ Perhaps, then, the closet tapestry is to be interiorised. We recall how Spenser's Britomart gazes a long day at Busirane's erotic tapestries, while she orders her own chaste thoughts about love. And Francis Bacon quotes the observation 'that speech was like cloth of Arras, opened, and put abroad; whereby the imagery doth appear in figure; whereas in thoughts, they lie but as in packs'.¹²¹ If tapestries were associated with words and thoughts, Hamlet's killing through one may suggest that his thoughts have indeed become bloody, his words aggressive to a fatal degree. This resonates with his resolution to 'speak daggers' (III. ii. 387) and Gertrude's cry 'these words like daggers enter in my ears' (III. iv. 95); strengthening the idea of a matricidal impulse.¹²² Hamlet's emblematic insertion into his self-righteous text is intemperate violence—now the revenger's, now the reformer's, now the satirist's.¹²³ The incident, however indirect its mimesis may now seem, is plausibly realistic. Recognising such dispersed aspects of character, far from disintegrating Hamlet as an individual, helps to resynthesise his Renaissance subjectivity.

¹¹⁸ See Heiberg (1988) 115.

¹¹⁹ Dessen (1984) 151. Cf. *As You Like It*, III. ii. 273.

¹²⁰ cit. Dessen (1984) 77.

¹²¹ Bacon (1985) 84, developing Plutarch, *Lives*, 'Themistocles': 'men's words did properly resemble the stories and imagery in a piece of arras: for both in the one and in the other, the goodly images of either of them are seen, when they are unfolded and laid open. Contrarywise they appear not, but are lost, when they are shut up, and close folded.'

¹²² Mooted in French (1992) 104.

¹²³ On emblematic insertions in *Hamlet*, see Manning (1994). Cf. Mousley (1994) 73; and Prosser (1967) 199, on Hamlet's self-righteousness in the closet scene.

VI

Most often character was dispersed among personal surrogates. In *Hamlet*, these may be mythological, like the moral Hercules; historical, like the ruler-hero Julius Caesar;¹²⁴ or else contemporary, fictional people of Elsinore with characters of their own. Much as real princes were supposed to be mirrored in their courts,¹²⁵ Claudius's half-remorseful Machiavellianism is half-reflected in his unwitting *ficelles* Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. And, when Laertes' machismo is perverted by Claudius, his devious plot against Hamlet is a distorted reflection of the devious plots of his politique father. (Polonius makes deviousness so much a principle as to defend the family name by having his son accused of whoring—a tactic effectively revealing honour's double standard.) As for Hamlet himself, he is mirrored in Horatio his mentor, Laertes and Fortinbras his rivals for honour, the Ghost his chivalric self, and the First Player his compassionate self.¹²⁶ (Hamlet's compassion, being fictitious, is displaced onto an actor.) The First Player weeps for Hecuba as Hamlet cannot: a 'monstrous' disparity at which Hamlet exclaims, 'Had he the motive and the cue for passion/ That I have' (II. ii. 555–6). The occasion of the Player's tears is the important point in his speech when even Pyrrhus stops killing, arrested by Hecuba's piteousness; when an alternative to endless revenge is momentarily suggested.¹²⁷

Hamlet's personal mirrors, although usually treated as thematic parallels, are more integral than that—surrogates, rather; 'parts' he plays; sides of his nature; exemplars or descriptions;¹²⁸ selfs or potential selfs of social existence. (Hotspur and Falstaff are comparably selfs of Prince Hal and his father.) One is reminded that St Augustine's analysis of irresolution posits that 'there are as many contrary natures as there are wills in someone beset by indecision'.¹²⁹ Moreover, Hamlet's character-mirrors add independent views of him to the main representation, additional perspectives. Mirrors, we recall, were closely

¹²⁴ On these character-mirrors see Colie (1974) 231–2.

¹²⁵ For court as the king's mirror, see Grabes (1982) 79.

¹²⁶ Alexander (1971) 97; Colie (1974) 223–4.

¹²⁷ Hamlet (or Shakespeare) may allude to Plutarch, *Moralia* 334B, where the tyrant Alexander of Pherae was ashamed to weep for Hecuba in Euripides' *Troades*, when he himself had killed far more people, without emotion. See Jenkins (1982) 481.

¹²⁸ Cf. Hunter (1963) 94: 'figures whose meaning depends on their relationship inside the observing and discriminating mind of Hamlet himself'; Jenkins (1974) 98.

¹²⁹ *Confessions*, VIII. x. 23 (transl. H. Chadwick).

associated with perspective construction, from its origin in Brunelleschi's Florentine Baptistery demonstration, through its application in catoptric or reflected anamorphism, to its apotheosis in Vermeer's use of the camera obscura.¹³⁰ Shakespeare's mirroring can generally be naturalised into modern realism by treating the virtual images as completely separate individuals. But not always. In the closet scene, when Hamlet sees the Ghost, Gertrude sees 'nothing but ourselves' (III. iv. 134 f). To resolve this contradiction, some accept Hamlet's version of reality—confirmed, after all, by the Ghost's presence on stage¹³¹—and reject Gertrude's version. Perhaps Gertrude (innocent of considerations of honour) somehow cannot retrieve Hamlet senior's memory enough to shape the Ghost in her imagination; or perhaps she cannot remember what it was like to be honourable.¹³² Alternatively, Gertrude and her corrupt world may be sane, and the Ghost Hamlet's hallucination—'alas! he's mad' (III. iv. 106). But on the basis of continuous spectator realism, neither resolution will work. The Ghost's earlier appearances were seen by all.¹³³ Here, at least, the alterity of Shakespeare's realism must be admitted. In its own terms, the action of the closet scene is not contradictory.

Without inconsistency, the scene dramatises defective moral vision twice over, in two character-mirrors.¹³⁴ Thus, Hamlet sets a glass for Gertrude; but she is also a glass for him, as frequent verbal repetitions underline.¹³⁵ He makes her look at his father's portrait, the 'counterfeit

¹³⁰ See Kemp (1990), s.v. *Camera; Mirrors*; and especially 189, on use of the camera obscura in the sixteenth century. On distorted cylindrical mirroring, and anamorphic images generally, see Baltrušaitis (1977). Shakespeare had opportunities to see the anamorphic portrait of Edward VI in Whitehall Palace (a *memento mori* double image): see *ibid.* 18–19. Shakespeare several times uses 'perspective' in the sense of an anamorphic double view: see *Henry V*, V. ii. 338 'you see them perspectively, the cities turned into a maid'; *Richard II*, II. ii. 16–20 'sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,/ Divides one thing entire to many objects,/ Like perspectives, which, rightly gazed upon,/ Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry,/ Distinguish form.' For 'mirror' = true description, see *OED* s.v. *Mirror* 4; for 'mirror' = play, work of art, cf. Alexander (1971) 20–21.

¹³¹ Authorised by the important Q1 s. d., 'enter the ghost in his night gown'. See Potter (1991).

¹³² Cf. Dessen (1984) 141, 153.

¹³³ The same objection counts against Dodsworth (1985) 50, naturalising the Ghost as a manifestation of Hamlet's own nature. The Ghost is intelligible only as a separate, indirect perspective on Hamlet and other honourable men.

¹³⁴ See Dessen (1984) esp. 153 ff.

¹³⁵ e.g. III. iv. 8–9: 'Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended./ Mother, you have my father much offended'—discussed from a different viewpoint in Dodsworth (1985) 130, 185–6, 191, 212. On the Gertrude mirror generally, see *ibid.* 200 'In attacking his mother, Hamlet attacks the weak and "feminine" part of himself.'

presentment' of honour, to bring home to her the state of her 'inmost part' (III. iv. 19), her sinful soul. He repeatedly directs her to watch the Ghost—'look you, there, look' (III. iv. 136). But all the time Hamlet himself fails to see Polonius's body, to feel remorse for his death, to look into his own soul.¹³⁶ (I would have Gertrude, meanwhile, keep looking horrified at the corpse.) It is like the parable of the mote and the beam:¹³⁷ Hamlet is oblivious to the dead man he killed, yet impatient with Gertrude's obliviousness to a dead man's ghost, of whose death she is innocent. Similarly, Hamlet calls Polonius 'rash, intruding fool', having just himself committed a 'rash and bloody deed', as Gertrude rightly calls it.¹³⁸ He has broken his own vows, yet blames Gertrude for breaking hers. And he says heaven is 'thought-sick' at her act (III. iv. 50), without thinking to repent his own. Dessen treats Gertrude's blindness to the Ghost as a conventional device, adducing many comparable metaphorical failures of vision in contemporary plays. (In *Hamlet* itself, Claudius fails at first to see the dumb show.¹³⁹) But 'convention' hardly seems to fit the immediacy—psychological illusionism, even—of such discrepant perceptions. They are more like the discrepant viewpoints that form much of our experience of moral reality. In Shakespeare's world, Hamlet's and Gertrude's experiences both reflect the same moral failure. T. S. Eliot complains that Gertrude 'is not an adequate equivalent' for Hamlet's disgust; failing to see how adequately she mirrors Hamlet's lack of self-awareness.¹⁴⁰ She constitutes a powerfully diffuse metaphor of his moral insensitivity. For Hamlet the moral accuser displays a positively Pharisaic self-righteousness. Far from being exceptional, the closet scene typifies Shakespeare's realism. Dissatisfied with simple, direct representation of experience, he also represents it indirectly through mirroring characters, so adding subliminal complications.

As Gertrude offers a perspective of Hamlet's deficient self-aware-

¹³⁶ 'The pivotal not-seer is . . . Hamlet': Dessen (1984) 153. On Hamlet's lack of remorse for killing Polonius, cf. Dodsworth (1985) 253.

¹³⁷ Matthew 7: 3 f.

¹³⁸ Cf. Dodsworth (1985) 259–61.

¹³⁹ Prosser (1967); Robson (1975); Hawkes (1985) 325. Wilson (1935) naturalises Claudius's neglect of the dumb show, against W. W. Greg; so does Robson, more plausibly suggesting a gradual comprehension, reconcileable with the failure-to-see convention.

¹⁴⁰ Eliot (1945) 101, to which Rose (1985) 96 concedes too much. Hypocrisy is already a topic in Saxo: Amleth says to his mother 'thou shouldst weep for the blemish in thine own mind, not for that in another's': Bullough (1973) 66.

ness, so Claudius mirrors his heartlessness.¹⁴¹ Claudius's ruthlessness reflects Hamlet's own potential for Machiavellianism, as his mission degenerates into criminal counter-intrigue. Eventually the 'mighty opposites', never very mighty, are not opposites either. Hamlet, who once shared a compassionate speech with the First Player, now shares with Claudius the responsibility for a death-warrant. The murders of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been justified by Hamlet's admirers as self-defence.¹⁴² But they were unnecessary—and not even poetic justice, if, as seems likely, Hamlet's travelling companions were ignorant of the contents of their sealed commission.¹⁴³ Would Hamlet senior, whose ring reseals the commission, have judged the forgery honourable? The everlasting 'fixed/ His canon' against slaughtering others; only Hamlet's arrogant divinising of his rank allows him to eliminate 'baser nature' at will. Whatever else the doctrine of the Unjust Magistrate might legitimise, it hardly extended to murdering fellow students.¹⁴⁴ Significantly, this crime puts Hamlet in the same boat, or rather ship, with pirates, a type of lawless inhumanity.

VII

That Laertes is another character-mirror, Hamlet himself tells us, in curiously recursive, not to say reflexive, syntax: 'by the image of my cause I see/ The portraiture of his [Laertes]' (V. ii. 77–8); and again (addressing Osric): Laertes' 'semblable is his mirror, and who else would trace him, his umbrage [shadow], nothing more' (V. ii. 118–20). To translate this camped-up, ironically encomiastic court-speak: Hamlet cannot emulate Laertes except by becoming Laertes himself. The comparison with painting, implied in 'portraiture', signals a fresh perspective on Hamlet, in which he becomes, or assimilates, Laertes the new man of correct honour.¹⁴⁵ Contrasts between Laertes and Hamlet

¹⁴¹ And much else; cf. e.g. Dodsworth (1985) 93.

¹⁴² On the speculation that Hamlet found evidence incriminating them as accomplices: Bowers (1989); Cruttwell (1963).

¹⁴³ Cf. Prosser (1967) 203–4; Dodsworth (1985) 180.

¹⁴⁴ On resistance theory, see Frye (1984) 41 ff. Although Calvin himself argued for obedience even to tyrannical magistrates, *Institutes* IV. ii was used to justify ecclesiastical and political disobedience. Belsey (1985) 114–16 imagines that 'orthodoxy' permitted passive disobedience only. Whose orthodoxy?

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Alexander (1971) 120. On shadow ('umbrage') as a painter's term of art (sometimes used for the painting itself), see Gent (1981) and Dundas (1993) Index s.v. *Shadow*.

are regularly remarked;¹⁴⁶ but the resemblances that emphasise these, and the strikingly similar circumstances, are more numerous. Each loses a father; each loves Ophelia; each gives her moral advice; each is a gambler and a duellist; each, out of filial piety, is bent on revenge. Each is the 'calendar of gentry', 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form'—the latter Ophelia's description of Hamlet, not Osric's of Laertes. Each, moreover, is represented in two phases. As there is a young as well as a mature Hamlet, so there is a callow embarrassed stuffed-shirt Laertes who goes off to Paris to learn French fashions and earn a reputation, to sow wild oats and imitate Lamord; and there is a tougher Laertes who returns, in whom we see 'immaturity harden into forms positively evil'.¹⁴⁷ The young Laertes can set nature above—or at least alongside—honour; the elder reverses this hierarchy. Laertes the honour machine is of course very different from Hamlet the humanly perplexed, hesitating Prince. But in his stereotypical behaviour Laertes reveals the pressure of the time—of the honour code—under which Hamlet also acts, albeit more consciously and reluctantly. The virtual image brings out how Hamlet, confronted by a similar challenge, chose not to respond.¹⁴⁸ For, if the rabble call Laertes lord, Hamlet too is 'loved of the distracted multitude'.¹⁴⁹ Laertes' insurrection shows how Hamlet might have used his own much greater eloquence to enforce retribution publicly.¹⁵⁰ Hamlet's sympathy with Laertes' cause is thus insightful. But it is also inculpatory, since Laertes represents the questionable aspects of honour Hamlet has been drawn to imitate. He is much given to measuring himself against the field of honour—against Laertes, against Fortinbras.

When Hamlet wrestles with Laertes in Ophelia's grave, he thus wrestles with his own image—with the Antaeus of his own 'towering passion', his competitive vying ('emulate pride'). Descending to Laertes' level as a man of earth and invoker of rebellious Titan myths ('o'ertop old Pelion': V. i. 246), Hamlet lowers himself to competitive boasting. He is more bereaved; his honour is more injured. Although he thinks he is like 'Hercules himself' (V. i. 286), Hamlet loses this wrestling: to engage in it at all shows that status matters more to him

¹⁴⁶ e.g. Jenkins (1982) on IV. v. 132–5.

¹⁴⁷ Dodsworth (1985) 28.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Jenkins (1974) 103.

¹⁴⁹ IV. iii. 4; cf. IV. vii. 18. Not merely Claudius' improvisation: Laertes finds the excuse plausible.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Jenkins (1974) 103. But see Hunter (1963) 97–8; Frye (1984) 132–5.

than anything. He is more passionately resentful of the 'bravery' or magnificence of [Laertes'] grief than passionate with grief himself, or even respectful of poor Ophelia's grave. It hardly seems apropos to speculate whether Hamlet belatedly falls in love.¹⁵¹ Both wrestlers think they love; but both, thinking they love honour more, trample the loved body. Some say the Folio and Q1 stage direction here must be corrupt: no sensitive person like Hamlet would ever jump into a grave. But even above ground, wrestling at a funeral is not a very convincing sign of sensitivity. In fact, the struggle shows how brutalising a single-minded pursuit of honour has been to Hamlet.¹⁵² There is little to choose, at this stage, between his histrionics and Laertes'. The episode is not exactly a *psychomachia*—allegorising, say, a struggle against false honour. ('Shakespeare never sacrifices naturalism to symbolism'.¹⁵³) But neither does the doubled image dramatise external behaviour of a brother and a lover, merely for the sake of sociological comparison. The complementary perspectives of bereavement emphasise by repetition how the emulousness of competitive honour is able to displace the natural passion of grief.

Making a triptych with the perspectives of Laertes and Hamlet, there is a third character-mirror, Fortinbras. That 'delicate and tender prince . . . with divine ambition puffed' (IV. iv. 48–9) is the subject of Hamlet's seventh and last soliloquy, full of admiration of his rival's honourable achievements:

Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. (IV. iv. 53–6)

There is no ironic censure in Hamlet's wonder-struck admiration of this prince's readiness to send 20,000 men to their deaths 'for a fantasy and trick of fame'. Like Hamlet's, Fortinbras' portraiture comes in two perspectives, two very different temporal views. The earlier Fortinbras is an adventurer of 'unimproved mettle, hot and full', who has 'sharked up a list of lawless resolute'. But the later is a 'tender prince', the ego-ideal of Hamlet's mirror-gazing, who leads a regular, well-disciplined

¹⁵¹ As Alexander (1971) 127, 131, 149, 159.

¹⁵² Cf. Dessen (1984) 21. Edwards (1985) 27 and Nuttall (1988) 58 reject the leap, the latter describing Hamlet's demeanour as courteous. Empson (1986) 100 is good on this issue.

¹⁵³ Colie (1974) 236. Ophelia's 'maimed rites' (V. i. 212) might hint at the Reformation's disfigurement of traditional ceremonies; but only as an enhancing suggestion.

army. The contrast is so extreme that to Jenkins it suggests revision.¹⁵⁴ But it may be that here again we have to do with the before-and-after vignettes of Renaissance compressed narrative.

Fortinbras, unlike Laertes and Hamlet, seems not to suffer moral deterioration. He submits to the King of Norway, and promises not to proceed revengefully against Denmark. He pursues, in fact, a legal course of action, however displeasingly martial this may seem to modern critics. Similarly, he is prepared to submit his 'rights of memory' in Denmark to due election by 'the noblest'; thus again taking an honourable course.¹⁵⁵ Is then Fortinbras' honour superior to Hamlet's, as Hamlet himself thinks? Certainly war was an appropriate context for chivalric honour—was, indeed, its ultimate validation. The symmetry of the triptych implies a formal distribution of matter between the private honour of Laertes and the monarchic or martial honour of Fortinbras. Hamlet himself is irresolute, divided between ideals of revenge (passionate Laertes) and of public redress (disciplined Fortinbras). The highest honour must, it seems, be Fortinbras'. But Shakespeare with his usual realism complicates this scheme to the point of enigma. For Fortinbras' incessant martial enterprises have an alarmingly Tamburlainian or Cromwellian aspect. Is Fortinbras' efficiency altogether preferable to Hamlet's hesitations and botched attempts? Would the world not be better off without an honour that kills so many thousands? Honour has been one of the cultural forms bringing mankind from the law of the jungle to the order of civil society. And indeed elements of the code continue still to be valuable. Yet, as ever, Shakespeare challenges still more discrimination, more charity.

From the mirror of Hamlet's confidant Horatio (to whom he mostly presents his agreeable side), one might expect a more flattering image. And indeed, in the final scene Horatio projects his own resignation, so that many suppose Hamlet dies well, justifiably comparing himself to the Morality Everyman—'this fell sergeant, Death,/ Is strict in his arrest'.¹⁵⁶ Taking his cue from this, the scholarly Horatio alludes to

¹⁵⁴ Jenkins (1974) 101–6.

¹⁵⁵ In contrast to Claudius, who 'popped in' (V. ii. 65).

¹⁵⁶ Jenkins (1982) V. ii. 341 Long Note; Felperin (1977) 64. Cf. *Pilgrimage of the Soul* (OED s.v. *Sergeant* 4b) ('death's sergeant, malady'); Tourneur, *The Transformed Metamorphosis* xli ('sergeant death'); John Knox, *The History of the Reformation in Scotland* IV (OED s.v. *Sergeant*, 1563) (Death 'laid on his areist'); Sylvester, *Divine Weeks*, I. iv. 818 ('Serjeant Death's sad warrant').

the Everyman morality in his prayer 'flights of angels sing thee to thy rest'.¹⁵⁷ But, if Hamlet is Everyman, what of Everyman's companion, Good Deeds? Fredson Bowers thinks Hamlet guiltless of murder: his death expiates all.¹⁵⁸ And Roland Mushat Frye, with able special pleading, finds triple 'endorsements' of Hamlet, by his friend, his adversary, and his rival for royal honour.¹⁵⁹ But Laertes' forgiveness of Hamlet ('my father's death come not upon thee': V. ii. 335) partly depends on his believing Hamlet's dubious excuse ('what I have done . . . was madness': V. ii. 226–8).¹⁶⁰ And Fortinbras' endorsement proceeds from ignorance; he accords Hamlet the 'rite of war' with no more to go on than an impressive head-count ('This quarry cries on havoc': 'what a king is this!'), and, of course, reputation.¹⁶¹ Hamlet's mission of retribution has come down to messy slaughter: his 'most royal' martial honour is achieved largely by accident.¹⁶²

But what of the third endorsement, Horatio's? Hamlet's better part can hardly endorse private vengeance. Promising to tell 'How these things came about', Horatio specifies 'casual [chance] slaughters', which must include Polonius's killing, and 'deaths put on by cunning and forced [contrived] cause', which presumably includes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's. Hamlet may think himself a divine minister (V. II. 48), but Horatio says nothing about that. There remains only his prayer that Hamlet may be sung to rest by angels, which is surely well short of an endorsement. Meanwhile, Hamlet has something other than angels in mind: namely fame's afterlife of honourable remembrance. He forbids

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Felperin (1977) 64. With Horatio's prayer cf. *Everyman* 891–3, where an angel sings 'come excellent elect spouse'. The detail of the singing angel indicates allusion, as against the commonplace envisaged in Frye (1984) 270–1.

¹⁵⁸ 'There can be no question of Hamlet's death in continuing sin or crime': Bowers (1989) 135. Cf. Everett (1989) 27 on the 'accidental killing of Polonius'; Alexander (1971) 182 (Polonius was killed in self-defence); Cruttwell (1963) 119 on the 'wild justice' of killing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

¹⁵⁹ Frye (1984) 135, 256, 259–62.

¹⁶⁰ V. ii. 226–8. Nuttall (1983) 164 compares Agamemnon's excuse in Homer, *Iliad* xix. Another pertinent source is St Augustine's analysis of the infirm will in *Confessions* VIII. ix. 21, asking whether it has an explanation in *latebrae poenarum hominum et tenebrosissimae contritiones filiorum Adam* ('the hidden punishments and secret despondences that befall the sons of Adam').

¹⁶¹ V. ii. 404. Hawkes (1985) 331 improbably proposes that Fortinbras orders the rite for Claudius.

¹⁶² Kastan (1982) 27 argues that Fortinbras' command to bear Hamlet 'like a soldier' symbolises the displacement of humane by martial values. Perhaps, rather, displacement of Christian values by honour.

his friend's suicide because he wants his own reputation cleared.¹⁶³ Felperin connects the 'multiplicity of responses' to Hamlet's guilt with Shakespeare's repudiating the older 'drama of salvation and damnation'.¹⁶⁴ But, even on the newest Renaissance assumptions, the dying perspective reveals desperate obduracy. There cannot have been many different responses to Hamlet's total lack of remorse, let alone contrition, at this solemn juncture.¹⁶⁵ Claudius voices remorse in the prayer scene; Laertes voices remorse in his dying speech; Hamlet, never. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are 'not near [his] conscience'.¹⁶⁶ Do we honestly suppose that Hamlet—a man who destroys the entire Polonius family and who murders two former friends—do we suppose that such a man can make a good end without repentance? Yet, if any perspective is privileged in Renaissance tragedy, it is that of the dying scene.

VIII

All the character-mirrors and multiple representations—whether models, foils, contrasts, *repoussoirs*, 'sides' of Hamlet, analogous narrations, or relational images—together compose an astonishingly complex representation. The individual identity, the self, was formed and apprehended—then as now—through relations with others. (Shakespeare anticipated the psychologies of Jung and Fairbairn, quite as much as that of Freud.) I am not suggesting that Shakespeare's magic can be explained as all done by mirrors. But, by assembling the relational images of Hamlet, one can in principle arrive at a full estimate of his character (one not without its vacuities). Defective motives have been taken to betray the absence of inner subjectivity. But often the gaps are defects only on the assumption of continuous spectator realism. In Shakespeare's Renaissance realism, what may seem gaps are really transitions between perspectives. And the separate

¹⁶³ Kastan (1982) 90 finds this quite fitting.

¹⁶⁴ Felperin (1977) 64–5.

¹⁶⁵ For all Hamlet's talk about Gertrude's repentance, his own remorse for Polonius's death is limited to the perfunctory 'For this same lord/ I do repent'—followed by self-exoneration, blaming heaven. Cf. Prosser (1967) 199, 202n. on Gertrude's invention of his weeping; Battenhouse (1969) 251.

¹⁶⁶ V. ii. 58; cf. V. ii. 67. Cf. Prosser (1967) 202 and Dodsworth (1985) 180 on Hamlet's malice towards Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

psychological perspectives can be synthesised, much as a multi-perspectival illusion is formed by a stereoscopic viewer. Whatever it is that Catherine Belsey calls 'essential subjectivity'¹⁶⁷ may not yet have developed; but that does not mean there was no realism, no dramatic illusion. Still less, that 'emergent illusionism' was in 'collision' with an emblematic mode. Realism through relational mirror images seems to have been quite accessible to Renaissance audiences. Direct and indirect mimesis were not conflicting opposites but complementary, mutually supportive perspectives. Shakespearean mimesis could 'suit the action to the words', combining indirect with direct representation, 'external' metaphors with subjective introspection.¹⁶⁸

Shakespeare's psychological realism may be compared with that of *The Faerie Queene*.¹⁶⁹ In Spenser, he found not only precedents for mixing allegory with direct mimesis, but also examples of multiple character-mirrors. Spenser tells us he represents Queen Elizabeth in Gloriana, 'and yet in some places else' (that is, in Belpheobe and Britomart) 'I do otherwise shadow her'.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps because few Shakespeareans have been avid readers of Spenser, the extent of emblem and allegory in his tragedies—like the frequency of multiple perspectives—is insufficiently recognised. What I have tried to describe is no mere 'residue' of untransmuted archaism 'left behind by the ever-encroaching tide of naturalism',¹⁷¹ but rather a distinct mode of realism, corresponding to a changed experience of the world itself. Although Shakespeare, like Spenser, was to be a pivotal figure in the development of naturalistic realism, he did not practise it as automatically as we have come to suppose. Indeed, it was a conspicuous mark of his dramatic style to enliven traditional genres, supplementing the new with the old, direct with indirect mimesis.¹⁷² He may have sensed that indirect implication was more richly communicative.

What, then, do the separate perspectives in *Hamlet* combine to represent? Most generally, our inheritance of depravity, the 'vicious

¹⁶⁷ Belsey (1985) 26.

¹⁶⁸ III. ii. 17–18, related in Weimann (1985) to the discursive/non-discursive polarity.

¹⁶⁹ See Potts (1958); Watkins (1950); Hamilton (1990).

¹⁷⁰ Letter to Raleigh.

¹⁷¹ Felperin (1977) 58–60.

¹⁷² Cf. Felperin (1977) 58. In the inset play, similarly, 'we watch Shakespeare's play approach and embrace, as it were, its own archaic prototype, only to turn and flee it in an almost choreographic pattern of meeting and parting'.

mole of nature'¹⁷³ in a world like 'an unweeded garden/ That grows to seed', 'rank and gross' (I. ii. 135–6), where the legacy from father to son, from Achilles to Pyrrhus, Polonius to Laertes, Hamlet to Hamlet, is evil and the duty to reform it, 'to set it right' (I. v. 197). More particularly, the tragedy of chivalric honour's displacement by unheroic, politique forms of ambition.¹⁷⁴ The change and decay of honour is, indeed, a frequent subject in Shakespeare: one thinks of *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Troilus and Cressida*. From *Romeo and Juliet* to *As You Like It*, duelling especially is attacked—a practice to which the militant Protestant nobility (Leicester, Sidney, Essex, Raleigh) were prone. And in *Hamlet*, the new honour, although not a central subject, is a principal assumption.¹⁷⁵ Hamlet never swerves from commitment to princely honour: his doubt is only whether it is *nobler* in the mind to suffer or take arms. But he shrinks from the duties of honourable action, and, at least at first, hesitates before the homicidal implications of the honour code. More particularly still, *Hamlet* is the tragedy of an attractive but unstable, idealistic but weak young prince, yearning for true nobility, faced with a moral challenge too formidable for him: the tragedy of the ruin of his better features by the logic of honour. As he matures and his hesitancy disappears, his noble honour hardens into egomaniac self-justification.

The problem of *Hamlet* criticism is not Hamlet's delay, but the delay of the critics. Eleanor Prosser made a case against him already in 1967, and Martin Dodsworth's decisive examination should have clinched the matter in 1985. Yet the enigma of Hamlet is still defended against all their arguments. There is a natural reluctance to admit how unpleasant the Everyman in Hamlet is. Just as Hamlet satirises many sorts and conditions of people who have motes blinding them, so he himself has many planks; and we, identifying with him, share this denial. But there is also an aesthetic reason for our delay: namely, the difficulty of appreciating Renaissance realism.

The play's hermeneutic task is to discern the corruption of Hamlet's honesty, in face of an eloquence that gilds his words seductively—the seductive charm honour really had for many Elizabethans. After all, 'the right use' of Renaissance tragedy was to show forth 'ulcers that are

¹⁷³ I. iv. 17–38. The theme is already present in Saxo, whose Amleth mysteriously discerns the inheritance of death in things: e.g. Bullough (1973) 68.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Cruttwell (1963) 121–2 on the muddle of contradictory moralities; Mousley (1994) 72–3, 79.

¹⁷⁵ See Dodsworth (1985) *passim*, esp. ch. 1.

covered with tissue' and the 'weak foundations gilden roofs are builded' upon¹⁷⁶—as Hamlet himself is clearly aware when he plans to 'tent [probe] Claudius to the quick' (II. ii. 593) with *The Murder of Gonzago*, or when he warns Gertrude not to ignore his censure, since that 'will but skin and film the ulcerous place'.¹⁷⁷ But in his righteousness he is oblivious of the tragedy designed to tent his own, and our, ulcers. Dr Shakespeare comes with his lancet, and we say, 'No need to operate, doctor! The patient has an amiable sensibility'.

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¹⁷⁶ Sidney (1973) 96.

¹⁷⁷ III. iv. 149; cf. IV. iv. 27–8: 'th'impostume of much wealth and peace,/ That inward breaks, and shows no cause without/ Why the man dies.'

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