

Shakespeare's Mirrors

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Chapter 4

“The Mirror up to Nature”

Hamlet's Metaphysical Revolution in the Purpose of Playing

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4 “The Mirror up to Nature”

Hamlet’s Metaphysical Revolution in the Purpose of Playing

In this chapter, Hamlet’s “the mirror up to nature” lecture on the aim of drama will be reinterpreted as a revolution against the classical stage-as-mirror theatrical convention to unfold conscience and his own metaphysical understanding of nature. Three further mirror and glass metaphors will likewise be interpreted as companion idioms that further enrich Hamlet’s evocation of St. Paul’s theatre of the world.

The effect of Hamlet and Ophelia’s mirror imagery will be used as a starting point for a reappraisal of the play as a poetic, ethical and metaphysical reflection of Pauline theology. Firstly, the use of metadrama to subvert the classical literary tradition will be addressed. How this subversion functions as a metatheatrical exposé of Shakespeare’s rivalry with Ben Jonson is the second topic to be explored. Thirdly, it is conjectured whether Hamlet’s education at Wittenberg, the university at the heart of the Lutheran Reformation, might explain his attachment to Pauline doctrine. Fourthly, the Gravedigger Scene will be considered as a critique of Elizabethan neoclassicism while providing a Christian exegesis on the ethical justification for Hamlet’s rebellion against the demands of revenge. Finally, the idea of conscience produced by the mirrors in the play will be relocated within the social, cultural and scientific context of sixteenth-century Europe.

Hamlet

Hamlet’s description of drama as “the mirror up to nature” (3.2.23) is the most consequential theatre of the world metaphor in Shakespearean drama. The meaning of the protagonist’s mirror profoundly impacts our interpretation of *Hamlet*. It also impacts our interpretation of the plays preceding and succeeding Hamlet’s “purpose of playing” (3.2.21) lecture on drama.

Shakespeare revised *Hamlet* as Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour* was being performed at the Globe. Shakespeare acted in Jonson’s debut

success, but remained “conspicuously absent from the list of those who acted in Jonson’s *Every Man Out*.”¹ However, he likely attended rehearsals of his rival and colleague’s first production at the Globe in 1599. The mirror up to nature is remarkably like Ben Jonson’s Ciceronian theatre of the world metaphor that opens *Every Man Out of His Humour*.

The mirror metaphor in Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour* champions mimetic convention derived from classical antiquity. Asper opens the first scene with a succinct theatre of the world idiom:

And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirror
 As large as is the stage whereon we act
 Where they shall see the time’s deformity
 Anatomised in every nerve and sinew

(1.1.125–8)

Asper’s mirror is derived from Cicero.

Theatre as a mirror was said to have been aphorized by Cicero in remarks on the Roman comedian Terence, “comoediam esse Cicero ait imitationem vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imaginem veritas,” according to the Roman grammarian Donatus. In 1612, Thomas Heywood translated Donatus in *An Apology for Actors*: “Cicero saith a comedy is the imitation of life, the glasse of custome, and the image of truth.”² Jonson explicitly defines drama in *Every Man Out of His Humour* using this Ciceronian precedent which he repeats in its original Latin: “let him content himself with Cicero’s definition ... who would have *Comoedie* to be *Imitatio vitae, Speculum consuetudinis, Imago veritatis*” (3.6.203–6). The classical authority for Jonson’s conception of drama, “the origins of this speculative metaphor lie in some lines attributed to Cicero on the nature of comedy,” implies the sincerity of Asper’s Ciceronian mirror.³

Hamlet’s analogous mirror metaphor precedes an inset play, *The Murder of Gonzago*. Before staging his play for the assembled cast of *Hamlet*, he lectures the First Player:

The purpose of playing,
 whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as ’
 twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her feature, scorn
 her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form
 and pressure.

(3.2.21–5)

Hamlet’s mirror up to nature is commonly interpreted as a copy of Jonson’s Ciceronian mirror. Herbert Grabes identified “nothing extraordinary” in

Hamlet's mirror up to nature.⁴ *The Arden Shakespeare* finds the source for Hamlet's mirror in Ciceronian philosophy and cites the mirror metaphor in *Every Man Out of His Humour*. This overlooks the unstable syntax of Hamlet's mirror up to nature, its metatheatrical situation, and evidence from the surrounding play that encourages a contrarian reading.⁵

Hamlet's mirror up to nature is elliptical, vague and disjointed. The prosaic and sceptical register, disjointed syntax and blurred imagery unsettle the complacency of the mirror metaphor used by Asper. The register of Hamlet's mirror metaphor is not "unambiguous," but an adaptation of Asper's commonplace.⁶

Prosaic and informal language typifies Hamlet's register. Asper, conversely, speaks in blank verse, flattering with Latinate vocabulary: "And to these *courteous* eyes oppose a mirror" [my italics] (1.1.125). Hamlet's monosyllabic vernacular prose ("first and now, was and is") feels uncertain, sing-song and perhaps a weary repetition of a familiar phrase. His use of "As 'twere" demonstrates his scepticism about the value of theatrical performance. This phrase appears 11 times in *Hamlet* for something that "seems" (1.2.76).⁷ Hamlet mocks the concept that superficial appearance is a display of morality: "to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image." This is consistent with mirror metaphors in the plays that precede *Hamlet*.

Asper's confident voice projects a distinct image of the theatre of the world, a linguistic *cristallo* mirror providing the Elizabethan spectator with a clear definition of dramatic purpose. His use of the word "anatomised" recalls dissection, clinical precision and the verisimilitude of Renaissance art and drama.⁸ Asper's mirror reflects "nerve and sinew." It is the physical reproduction of the spirit of the age, "the time's deformity," with moral failings envisioned as corporeal defect. Hamlet laments that "the time is out of joint" (1.5.196), thus challenging Asper's claim that drama can represent "the time's deformity." Hamlet's mirror represents a conception of nature beyond the mimetic representation of physical nerve and sinew described by Asper.

Hamlet's justification for drama as a mirror is elusive and vague. His "age and body" and "form and pressure" are doubled hendiadys producing an expanding and disintegrating image. The introductory "very" gives the abstraction pantomime conviction.⁹ Hamlet's casual register creates an obscure image of the theatre of the world, mixing the physical and the metaphysical: age with time, body with pressure. It is the syntactical equivalent of Richard II's looking-glass "crack'd in a hundred shivers" (4.1.289) and is unsuited to displaying the substance of human nature. Far from representing a clear image of the spirit of the age, the syntax of Hamlet's mirror has a disorienting effect.

Hamlet's lecture on drama superficially mimics the mirror in *Every Man Out of His Humour* to destabilize what might be termed the neoclassical

view of dramatic purpose. Jonson dismisses his own character Mitis as "a person of no action, and therefore we can afford him no character." This recommendation is lifted from Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*.¹⁰ Sidney determined the job of the playwright "the principal point of that one action which they will represent." Jonson sticks to the idea that action forms dramatic character.

Elizabethan neoclassicists can be reductively defined by their attraction to pagan literature as the primary source for poetic legitimacy. Sidney's conception of dramatic action is supported by Aristotle's *Poetics*: "tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions." This is the ultimate authority for Asper's mirror.¹¹ Jonson's theatrical method rests upon "the variegated body of theoretical material that had its origins (sometimes rather distantly) in the Greek philosopher's famous *Poetics*," thus giving philosophical justification for his theatrical style.¹² In *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Jonson defined character by the prominent feature of the role being played, with the idiosyncratic quality of each personage the essence of human character: "When some one peculiar quality / Doth so possess a man" (1.1.11–2).

The peculiar qualities that define an individual's character create satire in *Every Man Out of His Humour*. The characters are given Latin names, such as Fido the servant (literally Faithful) and Carlo Buffone, meaning Charles Fool. In "The Characters of the Persons," Puntarvolo is described as "a vainglorious knight," like the eponymous protagonist in Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus*. The name Fastidious Brisk matches his role as "a neat, spruce, affecting courtier." Asper, meaning "severe" in Latin, has a didactic persona, "an ingenious and free spirit, eager and constant in reproof, without fear controlling the world's abuses." His acumen at interpreting human show validates his mirror metaphor that describes the purpose of play.

Hamlet's mirror up to nature is an elliptic, metatheatrical repetition of the Ciceronian theatre of the world idiom. Hamlet, therefore, is also "an ingenious and free spirit, eager and constant in reproof, without fear controlling the world's abuses." However, his moral ethos is drawn from a different source. His characterization inverts the description of Mitis, "a person of no action, and therefore we can afford him no character." He reveals himself as a force of nature resisting the generic action of revenge tragedy.

The comparable mirror metaphors in *Every Man Out of His Humour* and *Hamlet* establish alternative visions of the theatre of the world in the opposing genres of comedy and tragedy. Interpreted through the conflicting theatre of the world mirror metaphors, the plays' differences—in genre, style, plot and characterization—index an unlikely interdependence. Jonson's comedy directly influenced Shakespeare's tragedy,

representing their struggle to define and find legitimacy for competing ideas of drama.

Asper and Hamlet's contrasting mirrors engender alternative perspectives on reality, reflecting the conflicting cultural innovations of the Elizabethan age, Venetian mirrors and English-language scripture with which this survey began. Two different conceptions of reality reveal contradictory social forces: the rise of the self-fashioning *homo economicus* captured in the expensive, imported mirror, and the spiritual brotherhood nurtured through the state-sanctioned dissemination of scripture in *The Geneva Bible*. The mirrors in *Every Man Out of His Humour* and *Hamlet* represent opposing ideas of drama to justify their plays as alternative visions of the theatre of the world.

Hamlet's sense of human nature surpasses outward show. He sees actions as performative, subject to deceit and manipulation, and innocent characters as suspect. He doubts Ophelia's integrity, "Ha, ha! Are you honest?" (3.1.103), and regards action as imitable, informing his scepticism over Ophelia's affections: "we are arrant knaves all, believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery" (3.1.129–30). Hamlet identifies the nunnery as a religious space for contemplation cloistered from dishonest play.

The dishonesty of putting on a front is typified by his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's embodiment of fork-tongued courtiers: "my two school-fellows, / Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd" (3.4.204–5). Their deceptive mission to return Hamlet to the conventions of court negates their individuation. Interchangeable and unindividuated, Gertrude finds them indistinguishable: "Thanks Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern / Thanks Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz" (2.2.33–4). They describe their duality as agents in a shared line: "We'll wait upon you" (2.2.268). The two symbolize deceit and duplicity, two faces that are two faced, mirroring each other's deceptive, unindividuated exterior.

Hamlet repeatedly states that he cannot trust what he sees and hears. His father's clandestine murder destroys his faith in show. He states, "to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand" (2.2.178–9). Honesty, a word associated with Christian authenticity, is lacking among the players in the genre of revenge tragedy in which Hamlet finds himself.¹³ More generally, he disabuses typecasting and parodies theatrical caricature, mocking humdrum personae, "the adventurous knight shall use his foil and target, the lover shall not sigh gratis" (2.2.322–4). Hamlet describes role-playing as deceptive, outward show being a poor indication of genuine character. He rejects performance as posturing: "I set it down / That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain" (1.5.107–8). Hamlet reprimands Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for attempting to decipher his nature through the peculiarities of his actions: "how unworthy a thing you would make of me ... you would pluck out the

heart of my mystery" (3.2.366–9). Hamlet's mystery, his sense of himself beyond the actions that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seek to define, and thereby manipulate, reflects his conception of nature in his elliptic lecture on drama.¹⁴

The question remains: what does Hamlet mean by nature? The best way of approaching this question is to explore his reason for staging a play. The stated purpose of *The Murder of Gonzago* is a revised version of the action preceding *Hamlet* to trap the watching Claudius.¹⁵ He declares the purpose of his production, "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (2.2.607), hoping to trap Claudius by pricking his conscience with a theatrical representation of his crime. Hamlet's reason for putting on his play is conscience.

Conscience—*syneidesis*—is taken from St. Paul's writings translated in *The Geneva Bible*. Hamlet states that conscience is the prime reason for his self-conscious uncertainty about revenge: "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all" (3.1.83). It produces hesitation and justifies putting on a play, which provide theatrical space and time for the revelation of Hamlet's conscience, an antidote to the generic purpose of playing the avenger.

His categorization of conscience unveils what he means by nature. During the opening scene at court, he criticizes Aristotelian poetics as "actions that a man might play" (1.2.84) to interpret nature: "I have that within which passes show" (1.2.85). Performance—"actions that a man might play"—and costume—"the trappings and the suits of woe" (1.2.86)—cloak that "within which passes show:" conscience. Hamlet conceives himself a metaphysical being exceeding physical interpretation: "O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space" (2.2.255–6). His nutshell is the confined stage at Elsinore, which represents the immoral construct of revenge tragedy and the Stoic theatre of the world. Hamlet's infinite space reveals his faith in a boundless metaphysical alternative.¹⁶

Hamlet's infinite space challenges Aristotelian poetics, providing an alternate purpose of playing based on the ethics and ontological metaphysics of St. Paul. He is paralyzed by divine judgement: "But that dread of something after death, / The undiscover'd country" (3.1.78–9). His purpose is blunted by Christian eschatology: "lose the name of action" (3.1.88). He weighs the Stoic philosophy that justifies the genre in which he is playing with the theology underlying his reimagining of dramatic purpose.

Hamlet's central soliloquy commences with his uncertainty and apparent inability to act in the shadow of divine judgement: "To be or not to be" (3.1.56). He critiques Stoicism with Pauline theology, rehearsing the Stoic idea of death as terminal, "To die – to sleep, no more" (3.1.60–1).

However, he immediately imagines the metaphysics of the afterlife: "To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there's the rub" (3.1.65).¹⁷ The "rub" is infinite metaphysics captured inside the nutshell of a vernacular monosyllable. He mixes registers within the speech, describing the trials of a mundane Stoic life and rehearsing the anguish caused by quotidian injustices: "the proud man's contumely, / The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay / The insolence of office" (3.1.71–3). Imagining suicide and the prospect of divine judgement, Hamlet initially echoes John Dolman's 1561 translation of Cicero, "my sense shall be extyncte, and my death resemble sleepe, whyche often without anye trouble of dreames, doth brynge a man most quiete rest." However, Hamlet is distracted by the disabling fear of divine retribution physically manifested in the Ghost: "what dreams may come" (3.1.66).

Hamlet's scriptural understanding of metaphysical nature is revealed within the poetics of soliloquy. He applies St. Paul's doctrinal letter to the Romans within soliloquy to explore his nature and repeats St. Paul's description of original sin: "O that this too too sullied *flesh* would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew" [my italics] (1.2.129–130). St. Paul's description of original sin is related to action: "For I know, that in me, that is, *in my flesh*, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me: but I find no means to perform that which is good" [my italics] (Romans 7:18).¹⁸ Pauline scripture infuses Hamlet's rhetorical conception of nature.

Hamlet compares conscience to physical drive and echoes St. Paul in decrying inaction, "I do not know / Why yet I live to say this things to do / Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means" (4.4.43–5). St. Paul wrote: "For I allow not that which I do: for what I would, that do I not" (Romans 7:15). St. Paul's self-admonishment, "O wretched man that I am" (Romans 7:24), is matched by Hamlet's, "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I" (2.2.550). Pauline ethics contradict Stoic philosophy that justifies revenge and suicide: "Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God! God!" (1.2.131–2). Conscience is evidence of human nature subject to divine judgment. St. Paul wrote, "their conscience also bearing witness ... at the day when God shall judge the secrets of men" (Romans 2: 15-16).¹⁹ Hamlet unfolds conscience in soliloquy, suspending the Stoic demands of revenge tragedy with poetics adapted from St. Paul's letter to the Romans.

Hamlet's mirror up to nature is not directly attributable to St. Paul; however, a scriptural precedent demystifies its metaphysical effect. St. Paul used a glass metaphor to explain the metaphysics of monotheism and Hamlet's description of nature recalls the glass metaphor in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then shall we see face to face" (13:12). St. Paul's glass, familiar to an Elizabethan audience steeped in scripture, suggests metaphysical truth

obscured by heavenly design. Hamlet's elliptical mirror up to nature is veiled by syntactical imprecision that casts an equivalent shadow on sensory reality.

Hamlet resists the principal action of revenge tragedy to self-dramatize human nature. His inquiry into human nature is both revolutionary—a leap forward in dramatic self-realization—and retrograde, rooted in the theology of St. Paul. Three further mirror and glass metaphors in *Hamlet* complement a theological reappraisal of Hamlet's mirror up to nature. Theological justification for this reappraisal in *Hamlet* is fragmentary but, pieced together, imbues the mirror up to nature with its metaphysical effect.

Recent scholarship has focused on the paradoxical inventiveness of Hamlet's theatrical self-awareness. Rhodri Lewis, Margreta de Grazia and Debora Shuger correctly argue that Hamlet is not a pioneer of modern individualism.²⁰ The mirror up to nature overturned Elizabethan conceptions of dramatized life with a revolutionary theatrical performance underwritten by scriptural authority.²¹ Hamlet's revolutionary performance is, therefore, fundamentally reactionary.

The revelation of conscience—human nature beyond physical action—is the justification for Hamlet's playing, for his resistance to performing his generic role, for his production of drama to catch conscience and for his theologically inspired soliloquies. Theological considerations prevent Hamlet from slaying Claudius: "Now might I do it pat, now a is a-praying. And now I'll do't. [*Draws his sword*] And so a goes to heaven" (3.3.72–4). Hamlet cannot kill Claudius while the latter is praying, as it will provide "salvation" (3.3.92). He challenges the ethics of revenge: "And am I then reveng'd, / To take him in the purging of his soul" (3.3.84–5). Hamlet thus rejects the demands of revenge tragedy and directly contravenes the Aristotelian observation on tragedy in *Poetics*: "the worst is the situation in which someone, aware of the relationship, is about to do another a deadly injury and does not do it." However, as the play reaches its inescapable resolution, Hamlet asks Horatio, "is't not perfect conscience / To quit him with this arm?" (5.2.67–8).

In the ethical and metaphysical world described by St. Paul, vengeance is sin. St. Paul determined, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Punishment, in Hamlet's mind, is meted out by heaven, making revenge obsolete. He believes revenge undermines divine justice, "his audit stands who knows save heaven" (3.3.82), and describes his lack of purpose within the Stoic genre: "What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?" (3.1.128–9). However, in the final scene, the action of revenge tragedy is forced on him by his Stoic foil, Laertes.

The justification for Hamlet’s ethical resistance to vengeance as a theatrical purpose is foreshadowed in the initial neo-Senecan demand for revenge by the Ghost. This is tempered with the Ghost’s call to prayer from Purgatory: “Remember me” (1.5.91).²² Hamlet responds, “I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past / That youth and observation copied there” (1.5.99–101), prefiguring “the very age and body of the time his *form* and *pressure*.” He evokes the wax tables of a grammar school, erasing the lessons of Stoic antiquity in which vengeance and suicide bestow honour, instead offering an alternative, “for my own poor part, I will go pray” (1.5.137–8), that expresses faith in divine justice and contemplative prayer as the means to avenge his father’s tormented soul.

Conscience supersedes the individual playing a role and reflects the ontology of human nature under the watchful eye of God, a matter of faith for Hamlet in an artificial and immoral theatre of the world plotted by villainous Claudius. St. Paul identified faith as a collective submission to divine judgement: “we approve ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). Hamlet observes other characters through the medium of Pauline metaphysics, “I see a cherub that sees them” (4.3.51), viewing the corrupt consciences around him as reflected off heaven. Metaphysical truth cannot be observed directly. Asper’s didactic Ciceronian mirror to the spirit of the age is unfit for purpose.

Hamlet’s mirror metaphor is consistent with the Christian theatre of the world (*theatrum mundi*) devised by English theologian John of Salisbury. Adapting the metaphysics of St. Paul, Salisbury coined the term in his 1159 Latin text *Policraticus*, in which he claimed God “looks down from eternity upon the tragicomic business of the theatre of the world.” His conception of dramatized life imagined God perplexed by human role-playing within the divine scheme.²³ Hamlet evokes Salisbury’s conception of nature as he observes other characters: “I see a cherub that sees them.”

The mirror up to nature as a theological idiom justifies Hamlet’s enigmatic performance. Rosencrantz says of his mysteriousness, “But from what cause he will by no means speak” (3.1.6).²⁴ Guildenstern says Hamlet, “with a crafty madness keeps aloof” (3.1.8); the crafty madness allows him to evade the role of avenger: “I essentially am not in madness, / but mad in craft” (3.4.189–190). Myriad explanations for Hamlet’s contemplative prevarication justify the Pauline poetics of his “antic disposition” (1.5.180), crafty madness being an evasive ploy reflecting a Pauline spirit trying to escape the philosophical constraints of the Stoic genre.

The common reading of the mirror up to nature as a Ciceronian idiom is echoed by Stoic characters misinterpreting Hamlet’s antic disposition. Claudius tries to find the cause for Hamlet’s behaviour in “the head and source of your son’s distemper” (2.2.55). Stoic characters in *Hamlet*

exaggerate their own part in causing Hamlet's distemper. Gertrude insists, "I doubt it is no other but the main, / His father's death and our o'er hasty marriage" (2.2.56–7), while Polonius believes that forcing Ophelia to distance herself from Hamlet caused "sadness [...] and, by this declension, into the madness wherein now he raves" (2.2.147–50). Scholars often project their own fixations as a rational explanation for Hamlet's distemper.²⁵

Spectators, such as the Stoic characters in *Hamlet*, are encouraged to project their own concerns onto his inscrutable performance. However, countless interpretations of his performance merely confirm the protagonist's self-conscious, theologically inspired inscrutability. Hamlet's performance, justified by Pauline theology, does not deny the validity of psychic explanations; rather, it envelops them as inventorial divisions, distinct components of Hamlet's inscrutability. Judged by outward show, Hamlet takes many shapes, just as a cloud may seem like a camel, a weasel or a whale (3.2.379–383). Polonius accepts all three classifications for the shape of the cloud; Hamlet none. He believes the cloud is defined by its nature, not its superficial shape.

Hamlet's nature, not his psyche, provides a distinct ethical and ontological categorization of his performance. He describes his performance as "such ambiguous giving out" (1.5.186), hoping "antique Roman" Horatio (5.2.347) will understand its purpose through "grace and mercy" (1.5.188). Christian idiom, "grace and mercy," is a direct interpretative recommendation regarding Hamlet's own antic disposition. Claudius senses the metaphysical in Hamlet's performance: "Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little, / Was not like madness. There's something *in his soul*" [my italics] (3.1.164–5). The "something in his soul" is the Pauline source of Hamlet's distemper.

Aristotle's *Poetics* eclipsed a classical precedent for the possibility of metaphysical truth beyond dramatic action. Plato dismissed Attic drama, codified by his pupil Aristotle, as a failure to represent metaphysical truth. Declaring theatrical performance counterfeit, Plato argued, "then must we not infer that all these poetical individuals ... are only imitators; they copy images of virtue and the like, but the truth they never reach."²⁶ Hamlet creates a drama beyond copied images, "virtue and the like," ironically echoing Plato, "to show *virtue* her feature, scorn her own image," thus achieving metaphysical reclamation for poetical individuals through faith in conscience beyond the spoken, visible and performed: "that within which passes show."

Before looking at three further mirror and glass metaphors in the play which serve to enrich and validate Hamlet's metaphysical conception of nature, a brief look at the scriptural underpinning of what Hamlet considers natural and unnatural is useful.

His conception of what is natural and unnatural reveals his ethos. Stoic revenge tragedy is unnatural: "revenge his foul and most *unnatural* murder" [my italics] (1.5.25). The supernatural Ghost, materializing from purgatory, forewarns, "If thou has *nature* in thee, bear it not / Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest" [my italics] (1.5.81–3). The Ghost is only obliquely a manifestation of the supernatural Stoic tradition derived from Seneca.

The unnatural actions and ethics of Stoic revenge tragedy are overturned by Hamlet's conception of nature. He offers the First Player advice on the accurate representation of human character, while his own behaviour is anything but modest: "this special observance. / That you o'erstep not the modesty of nature" (3.2.19–20). Cicero had similarly argued for modesty in *De Officiis*, "the gestures of actors on the stage are not always free from affectation; but simple, unaffected manners are commendable in both instances" (1.130). To this, Hamlet provides a colloquial update, contrasting unnatural action and natural grace: "Do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently" (3.2.4–5).²⁷ While invalidating classical custom, Hamlet tells his mother to submit to Ciceronian exercises, thus acquiring morality through mimetic repetition: "For use *almost* can change the stamp of *nature*" [my italics] (3.4.170). In other words, mimicking virtue can almost amend bad conscience.

Claudius, bemused by the depths of Hamlet's mourning, worries that true nature resides with God, thus evoking divine judgment as true action: "There is no shuffling, there the action lies / In his *true nature*" [my italics] (3.3.61–2). He identifies Hamlet's mourning and mistakenly elides nature and reason: "a fault to nature, / To reason most absurd" (1.2.102–3). Hamlet's grief shows nature overcoming rational play to reveal the truth. Rational play, in the scheme designed by Claudius, permits immoral action.

Hamlet's burgeoning understanding of nature is antirationalist, which explains the depth of his mourning. He considers the hypocrisy of the people paying homage at Elsinore while buying miniatures of Claudius, the newly painted king: "'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out" (2.2.368–9).

Hamlet uses painted miniatures to mark the superficiality and immorality of revenge tragedy. He shows his mother two likenesses, comparing old Hamlet and Claudius as Stoic foils, his father "the front of Jove himself" (3.4.56) and his villainous uncle "a mildew'd ear" (3.4.64), reflecting the method of old Hamlet's murder.²⁸ Hamlet takes the miniatures from the Stoic prop cupboard, "the *counterfeit* presentment of two brothers" [my italics] (3.4.54), and compounds words to portray his father's Olympian persona, "*New-lighted* on a *heaven-kissing* hill" [my italics] (3.4.59), creating a hyperbolic and classical rendition of his father's tormented soul.

Hamlet fails to redeem his mother by amending *The Murder of Gonzago*, the play he intended to be the mirror up to nature. She rejects the portrayal of the faithful wife: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (3.2.232). However, Hamlet transforms himself into a mirror to his mother's corrupt nature, his glass metaphor trying to turn Gertrude's gaze inwards: "You go not until I set you up a glass / Where you may see the inmost part of you" (3.4.18–19). Initially, she misinterprets Hamlet's glass as a Ciceronian metaphor, with her classical interpretation summoning Polonius from his hiding place: "What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help, ho!" (3.4.20–1). Without time for contemplation, Hamlet accidentally murders Polonius. Gertrude's neo-classical interpretation of Hamlet's glass, presuming it is a metaphor for vengeance, has neo-Senecan consequences not only for Polonius. Hamlet is now destined to be killed by his Stoic foil, the classical avenger Laertes who declares his intentions: "Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!" (4.5.132).

Hamlet had intended to reflect the inmost part of his mother to provide redemption. On his approach to her chamber, an inner sanctum within the rotten court, he refuses to play his part in an unnatural neo-Senecan revenge tragedy using anti-Stoic terminology: "Let me be cruel, *not unnatural* / I will speak daggers to her but use none / My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites" [my italics] (3.2.394–9). Speaking daggers but using none is a metatheatrical and ethical description of Hamlet's assault on his mother's conscience; "hypocrite," as we recall, is the Greek word for "actor."

Hamlet's glass is a self-conscious attempt at showing Gertrude "that within which passes show." Conventional syntax fragments into abstraction. Gertrude's fall from grace is impossible to explain on Christian terms, her moral trespass a failure to apprehend the unnatural plotting of Claudius: "for madness would not err / Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd" (3.4.73–4). Sense, the rational method of interpreting what is spoken, visible and performed, fails to decode Gertrude's immoral performance. Associated with the failure of empirical sense, literal description cannot reveal a sinful conscience. Gertrude's guilty conscience is exposed by Hamlet's vain struggle to understand her unethical actions, his language fragmenting, like the syntactical obscurity of the mirror up to nature, to engender an abstract image of Gertrude's corrupt nature.

Finding no tangible cause for Gertrude's betrayal, Hamlet repeats his bewilderment, "Have you eyes? [...] Ha, Have you eyes?" (3.4.65–7). The failure to make sense of Gertrude's actions reveals sin: "Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, / Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all" (78–9). He frames sense and reason in the absence of conscience as enablers of immorality through paradox: "Since frost itself as actively doth burn / And reason panders will" (3.4.87–8), sense and reason are subject

to will, and will is the performance of self-serving action without conscience, revealing a sinful nature.

Hamlet’s linguistic abstraction is a mirror to his mother’s sinful soul. Recognizing the disintegration of language and logic, Gertrude sees her conscience inside Hamlet’s ethical glass: “Thou turn’st my eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grained spots” (3.4.89–90). The failure of empirical sense, rationality and language focuses attention on Hamlet’s seeming madness, which reflects his ethically, ontologically and metaphysically Pauline conception of nature.

Hamlet’s glass is conceptually like Caravaggio’s *Martha and Mary Magdalene*, completed in 1598 (Figure 4.1):

The convex mirror in Caravaggio’s painting reflects divine light. Martha’s words from the shadows light Mary’s face with the revelation of sin. However, the convex mirror, a metaphor for the vanity apparent in Mary’s dress and performance as a courtesan, provides a different source of morality. The revelatory light provoked by Martha’s admonishment is divinely ordained. Martha, sitting opposite the mirror, like Hamlet across from Gertrude, provides access to the divine light seen through a glass



Figure 4.1 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Martha and Mary Magdalene*, ca. 1598, oil and tempera on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of the Kresge Foundation and Mrs Edsel B. Ford, 73.268.

darkly, except that, in the case of Hamlet, he makes himself the mirror to his mother’s guilty conscience.

The divine light seen through a glass darkly leads Gertrude to recognize Hamlet as her “scourge and minister” (3.4.177). However, she fails to apprehend the full meaning of Hamlet’s revelation. An invisible truth reveals itself to Hamlet in the shape of the Ghost. Gertrude says, “you do bend your eye on vacancy” (3.4.118), to her the apparition from purgatory is invisible. Hamlet turns to Christian salvation: “Save me and hover o’er me with your wings, / You heavenly guards!” (103–4).²⁹ The Ghost instructs Hamlet to rescue Gertrude from the anxiety revealed by his glass, “amazement on thy mother sits. / O step between her and her fighting soul” (3.4.112–3). This is a merciful gesture from the ghost of a husband betrayed.

Gertrude, having played her scandalous part, cannot see what is apparent to Hamlet:

HAMLET:

Did you see nothing there?

GERTRUDE:

Nothing at all; yet all that is I see

(3.4.132–3)

She cannot see “all that is,” her corrupt conscience blinding her to the ethical source of Hamlet’s madness: “This is the very coinage of your brain. / This bodiless creation ecstasy” (3.4.139–40). However, Hamlet’s ecstasy, originally identified by Ophelia in a mirror metaphor, represents an ethically Pauline response to the immorality of Stoic revenge tragedy. He remarks, “Ecstasy! [...] It is not madness that I have uttered” (3.4.143–4). Hamlet’s ecstasy is Christian: “Mother, for love of grace, / Lay not that flattering unction to your soul, / That not your trespass but my madness speaks” (3.4.146–8). This echoes the Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer: “And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us” (286). Hamlet’s glass reveals that which cannot be observed: St. Paul’s conception of human nature.

Hamlet is teaching Gertrude a Pauline lesson. She feels the effect of his glass with a contronym, “O Hamlet, thou has cleft my heart in twain” (3.4.158). “Cleaving” means both “splitting” and “joining,” a split and conjoined internal image presented by Hamlet’s ethical glass—her physical self, her fighting soul; her “age and body” its “form and pressure.” Hamlet uses paradox, echoing God’s redemptive purpose for Christ, “I must be cruel only to be kind” (3.4.180), and recommends an ethical revolution against Stoic custom, “Confess yourself to heaven, / Repent what’s past, avoid what is to come” (3.4.151–2). Hamlet is the mirror up to nature,

playing the ethical glass that permits Gertrude to see her conscience by displaying the inadequacy of language, sense and reason in the representation of metaphysical and ethical truth.

Gertrude learns from Hamlet how to correctly interpret Ophelia’s death. She initially echoes Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, describing the mythical change created by intense feeling:

Her clothes spread wide,
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element

(4.7.175–80)

Marking a shift from Virgilian declamation, which is the subject of the First Player’s speech, to Ovidian metamorphosis, Gertrude remembers Ophelia’s death by inserting Catholic prayers from the English, Christian tradition into classical poetics: “she chanted snatches of old lauds.”³⁰ Conventional characters in the play, like Polonius and particularly Laertes, cannot comprehend the ethical message of Hamlet’s antic disposition.

Ophelia, however, is granted recognition of Hamlet’s ethical message, and it drives her mad. She responds to Hamlet’s abusive rejection with a mirror metaphor deconstructing his antic disposition:

O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown!
The courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s, eye, tongue, sword;
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion, and the mould of form
Th’observed of all observers – quite, quite down
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh;
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy.

(3.1.150–61)

Hamlet, the glass of fashion, is an exemplar Renaissance prince. Ophelia lists stock characters, objects and props, “the courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s, eye, tongue, sword,” that jumble the courtier’s tongue, the scholar’s eye and the soldier’s sword. Language and image disintegrate as Hamlet escapes Ophelia’s attempt at reclamation.

The observed of all observers, Hamlet's preeminent position in court, his role as prince, deflects attention from his true nature. The hendiadys, "expectancy and rose," blurs the exemplar image, while the "mould of form," an amorphous object representing its own nature, prefigures Hamlet's own description of drama: "the very age and body of the time his *form* and pressure" [my italics]. Ophelia evokes the deception inherent to speech: "And I, of ladies most deject and wretched / That sucked the honey of his music vows." However, she recognizes Hamlet's transcendence, "That unmatched *form* and *feature* of blown youth / Blasted with *ecstasy*," the blown youth like an exemplar glass figurine smashed to pieces and ecstasy a synonym for madness, from its literal meaning "to stand outside."³¹ St. Mark described Jesus's madness: "And when his [Jesus'] kinsfolks heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said that he was *beside himself*" [my italics] (Mark 21:3). The New Testament Greek for "beside himself" is "ecstasy." The word is related to prophecy in Judeo-Christian scripture such as, for instance, Saul's madness in the Book of Samuel.

Ophelia's name, the lamenting O, all-encompassing and void, and the Greek for love used by St. Paul, *philia*, ordains her capacity to recognize Hamlet's ecstasy. She goes insane watching Hamlet's antirationalist performance. He no longer represents sovereign reason. She witnesses him standing outside the immoral, Stoic theatre of the world, a prophetic emblem of Pauline Christianity.

Ophelia's insanity is represented by her obsession with fornication and Christian matrimony, "By Cock, they are to blame. / Quoth she, "Before you tumbled me, / You promis'd me to wed" (4.5.61–3). This psychological trauma resurfaces from her backstory with Hamlet. She evokes a Christian saint: "By Gis and by Saint Charity" (4.5.58). Her Christian lamentations trouble Claudius, who demands that rational, Stoic Horatio oversee the infectious insanity, "Follow her close; give her good watch, I pray you" (4.5.75); "I pray you, good Horatio, wait upon him" (5.2.315). Claudius repeats, "I pray you," demanding Horatio ensure the proper observation of the rules of Stoic drama. Claudius cannot grasp Ophelia's apocalyptic description, "O woe is me, / To have seen what I have seen, see what I see" (3.1.69–70); the soul of Hamlet's revelatory performance, breaking the exemplar role of prince, the fractured glass to an apocalyptic Pauline conception of nature: blasted with ecstasy.

The *Apocalypse of Paul*, a fourth-century work of New Testament apocrypha, describes the afterlife as revealed to St. Paul. Ophelia remembers her own father and prays for his salvation: "God ha" mercy on his soul! / And of all Christian souls! I pray God" (4.5.198–200). Insanity, therefore, reflects Christian ethics overwhelming the Stoic genre: "That's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray love, remember: and there is pansies,

that's for thoughts" (4.6.174–6). Rationalist Laertes misinterprets his sister's description of Christian salvation: "a document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted" (4.6.177). However, Hamlet's mother interprets Ophelia's madness correctly, "To my sick soul, as sin's *true nature* is" [my italics] (4.5.17). Gertrude has been taught to recognize conscience reflected in Hamlet's performance as the mirror up to nature.

Metatheatre Subverting the Classical Tradition

Hamlet's mirror up to nature reinterpreted as a Pauline metaphor is supported by the wider metatheatrical parody of classical norms in *Hamlet*. At the Globe Theatre in 1600, before staging an amended neo-Senecan revenge tragedy, *The Murder of Gonzago*, Hamlet lectured the First Player, played by his author, Shakespeare, about the purpose of playing.³² The purpose is to prick Claudius's conscience. His uncle flees the metatheatrical scene, but Hamlet, amused by the pyrotechnic impact of declamatory action, decries the artifice of neo-Senecan convention, "What, frightened with false fire?" (3.2.268). In the next scene, villainous Claudius performs prayer, a form of repentance that lacks conscience: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below / Words without thoughts never to heaven go" (3.3.97–8).³³ *The Murder of Gonzago* does not prick the missing conscience of Claudius as a Stoic archetype; rather, it scares him. However, he adopts the terminology for his nefarious ends, later spurring Laertes to vengeance: "Now must your conscience my acquittance seal" (4.7.1).

The Murder of Gonzago is superficially a neo-Senecan play. Hamlet considers the original work to be Renaissance and neoclassical: "extant and written in very choice Italian" (3.2.264–5).³⁴ But he adds "some dozen or sixteen lines" (2.2.5.41) to explain dramatized hesitation: "Our wills and fates do so contrary run" (3.2.213).³⁵ Inserting lines to redeem Gertrude, Hamlet illuminates his own dilemma, "But what we do determine, oft we break / Purpose is but slave to memory" (3.2.189–90). He amends the drama to trap Claudius within the scheme of divine retribution, to redeem Gertrude and, crucially, to give ethical validation for his failure to avenge.

Metatheatrical motifs within the play corroborate a subversive reading of Hamlet's mirror up to nature as a parody of Ciceronian idiom. Hamlet describes the physical structure of the Globe, "this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours" (2.2.300–5), and despairs of the dramatist's task of reflecting the metaphysics of human nature.³⁶ The flag over the thatched roof of the Globe depicted pagan hero Hercules and the motto *Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem*—"the whole world plays the actor."³⁷ Rosencrantz metatheatrically refers to the image on the flag: "Hercules and his load too" (2.2.362–3). Metatheatrical subversion of the theatre of the world that calls out the mascot and motto of the theatre constructed by

Shakespeare and his troupe justifies the search for an alternate conception of drama within Hamlet's metatheatrical parody of Ciceronian idiom.³⁸

Hamlet's mirror up to nature parodies Ciceronian idiom and precedes an inset play that reflects Elizabethan neo-Senecan revenge tragedy—the genre that *Hamlet* subverts. In *Defence of Poesy*, Sidney recommended Seneca as the Roman paragon for the Elizabethan stage. Polonius, playing a caricature of an ageing Elizabethan neoclassicist, tells Hamlet, "Seneca cannot be too heavy" (2.2.401). Translations and performances of Senecan tragedy on the English stage began in the 1560s and spurred imitations, such as *Gorboduc*, with its Ciceronian mirror metaphor.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is filled with seeming neo-Senecan tropes: the Ghost demanding revenge, Hamlet's madness, Polonius's aphorisms, Claudius's villainy, Gertrude's betrayal and Horatio's Stoic philosophising.³⁹ However, neo-Senecan commonplaces are inverted in *Hamlet*: the necessary action of revenge is suspended; unities of time, place and action are overturned during the sea voyage to England; declamation is ridiculed; mixed linguistic registers separate Latinate pagan verse from Anglo-Saxon prose, which is the register for plain-speaking Christianity.

Sidney's prohibition on the mingling of kings and clowns is ignored in the gravedigger scene. Courtly euphuism and Sidney's argument for discretion are mocked by Hamlet, declamatory epic is parodied in the First Player's speech and a dumb-show preceding *The Murder of Gonzago* is included in celebration of the Tudor Interlude from native English drama, but also as a reference to the stylistic idiosyncrasies already extant in *Gorboduc* that challenged strict neo-Senecan imitation.⁴⁰ Hamlet describes his audience, "the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise" (3.2.11–13).

The neo-Senecan tradition recommended by Sidney was long outmoded, if it had ever strictly existed, partly the argument of *Defence of Poesy* in criticizing surviving elements from the English theatrical tradition that had come as early as *Gorboduc*. It was substantially overhauled by the playwright Thomas Kyd. A lost play from the late 1580s, probably written by Kyd, was Shakespeare's primary source for *Hamlet*.⁴¹ Kyd's earlier play typified the limitations of neo-Senecan revenge tragedy.⁴² In *Wit's Misery* of 1596, Thomas Lodge describes, "the Ghost which cried so miserably at the Theatre, like an oyster-wife: 'Hamlet, revenge!'" Thomas Nashe, commenting on Elizabethan theatre, linked Kyd's version with the Senecan tradition, "yet English *Seneca* read by candle-light [...] will afford you whole Hamlets, I should say handfuls, of tragical speeches."⁴³ These criticisms of declamatory Senecan rhetoric in the earlier *Hamlet* likely encouraged Kyd to reform the genre in *The Spanish Tragedy*.

The Spanish Tragedy was published in 1592, the year Shakespeare produced his first plays, the *Henry VI* trilogy. In *The Spanish Tragedy*,

Hieronimo is driven mad by the murder of his son Horatio. His act of revenge is delayed.⁴⁴ Hieronimo stages an inset play, which mirrors the preceding action, in which he casts his sons' murderers. Taking the metatheatrical role of avenger, he kills them during the performance. *The Murder of Gonzago* acknowledges the debt by using the name of its Spanish victim. Hamlet remodels Hieronimo's metatheatrical inset play to incite conscience rather than vengeance, replacing the centrality of revenge in the outer play with conscience projected in soliloquy.⁴⁵

Kyd's reformation of neo-Senecan convention also revealed problematic tensions in Elizabethan neoclassical theory. Sidney and Jonson, for instance, simultaneously championed Seneca and Aristotle. However, Senecan drama contravenes Aristotle's *Poetics*: "if one were to compose a series of speeches expressive of character, however successful they are in terms of diction and reasoning, it will not achieve the stated function of tragedy."⁴⁶ Seneca's closet dramas were declamatory set-pieces describing action.⁴⁷

The First Player's speech in *Hamlet* parodies Seneca's *Troades* and Hecuba's mourning for the ruins of Troy. Simultaneously, Marlowe's only play written for private declamation, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, is comically reimaged, "The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms, / Black as his purpose, did the night resemble / When he lay couched in the ominous horse" (2.2.453–55), parodying the stylistic dead end.⁴⁸ The First Player's speech is a metatheatrical satire of neo-Senecan declamation. The language of the speech is satirically overwrought, the blood-drenched imitation of *Troades* mocking Marlowe's *Dido*: "Now he is total gules, horridly trick'd / With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons" (2.2.458–9).

Mocking Marlowe's declamatory *Dido* critiqued Jonson's recent move to closed theatres, with the latter's *Cynthia's Revels* (1600) played by the Chapel Boys at Blackfriars.⁴⁹ Hamlet ridicules child actors: "there is, sir, an aery of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for't. These are now the fashion" (2.2.340–2). He does so to criticize the neo-Senecan recitations in closed theatres reprising a dramatic form already outmoded and comprehensively reformed by Kyd.

Closed theatres attracted the elites of Elizabethan London. Hamlet disdains the snobbery of declamatory performance, comparing it to an acquired taste: "I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted [...] for the play, I remember, pleased not the million, 'twas caviare to the general" (2.2.435–8). He seems to prefer drama acted for groundlings, or the "general," at the Globe.

Hamlet parodies Elizabethan neoclassical enthusiasm for the declamatory style:

and others, whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine – an excellent play [...] no matter in the phrase that might indict the author of affectation, but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine.

(2.2.438–446)

He lambasts the critics whose exalted judgment ignores the authorial affectation of declamation and, incredibly, judge the method honest before descending into their own critical and fatuous affectation: “very much more handsome than fine.” He attests to a cohort of self-serving critics, arbiters of taste who determine the right kind of drama while keeping the general audience at arm’s length as incapable of aesthetic sophistication.

Hamlet identifies the declamatory register of neo-Senecan drama as derisory: “mobbed queen?” (2.2.504), but Polonius mistakes his contempt, “That’s good; ‘mobbed queen’ is good” (2.2.505). A champion of neo-Senecan aphorisms—“neither a borrower or a lender be” (1.3.75)—Polonius is an exemplar of mid-sixteenth-century drama, like *Gorboduc*. Hamlet wants advocates for the neo-Senecan style to go into retirement, “These tedious old fools” (2.2.219) and mocks Polonius’s outmoded neoclassicism:

POLONIUS: My Lord, I have news to tell you

HAMLET: My Lord, I have news to tell you.

When Roscius was an actor in Rome –

POLONIUS: The actors are come hither, my lord

HAMLET: Buzz, buzz.

POLONIUS: Upon my honour –

HAMLET: Then came each actor on his ass –

(2.2.390–6)

“My lord” and “honour” associate neoclassical theory with the affected pose and register of court.

The First Player’s speech ironically includes a parody of a classical avenger prevaricating. Described action turns to superficial inaction: “So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood, / And like a neutral to his will and matter / Did nothing” (2.2.481–3). Pyrrhus’s character is aesthetically superficial, “a painted tyrant,” and Pyrrhus refuses his role, being “neutral to his will”; this is a metadramatic reference to “Will” Shakespeare. The action halts with, “did nothing,” a *reductio ad absurdum* of Hamlet’s hesitation to avenge. Polonius decides “this is too long” (2.2.499), providing a neo-classical critique of Hamlet’s prevarication in the outer play.

Hamlet describes the counterfeit nature of the First Player's speech and the inauthenticity of Senecan declamation as "a fiction, in a dream of passion" (2.2.552). This is a mockery of the true self and the antithesis of soliloquy. Outward show mocks nature, the First Player forces "his soul so to his own conceit" (2.2.553), his performance suborning the authenticity of his "soul" to the "conceit" of outward show. He rejects fraudulent declamation, "What's Hecuba to him" (2.2.559), the phoney and inauthentic register distinguished from Hamlet's authentic soul revealed through the declamatory interiority of his soliloquies. The dramatic purpose of soliloquy is the rhetorical projection of conscience.

The parody of Seneca's *Troades*, the attack on Elizabethan neo-Senecan declamation and the metatheatrical mirroring of *Hamlet* within the First Player's speech serve to undermine the genre of revenge tragedy that Hamlet interrupts with soliloquy.

Hamlet shifts between neoclassical ephemera and irreconcilable Pauline ethics, at once the fair nymph-like object of his affection, now the sinful ex-lover: "The fair Ophelia! Nymph in they orisons / Be all my sins remember'd" (3.1.88–9). He considers Ophelia's role untrustworthy after the Ghost's manifestation from purgatory: "God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another. / You jig and amble and you lisp [...] and make your wantonness your ignorance" (3.1.144–7). He judges ignorance to be an excuse for unethical lust and associates makeup with deceptive language: "How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience! / The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art, / Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it / Than is my deed to my most painted word" (3.1.50–4), once again evoking his conscience in contrast to words and action. His Pauline sensibility in a neo-Senecan play is maddening: "Go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad" (3.1.47–8). Stoic Horatio worries the Ghost "might deprive your sovereignty of reason / And draw you into madness" (1.4.73–4); Hamlet's antirationalism defines his antic metatheatrics.

Hamlet intensifies the role of antic as the on-stage audience arrives for the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*. Vulgar puns at Ophelia's expense, "Do you think I meant country matters?" (3.2.118), are combined with Christian sentiment, "But by'r lady a must build churches then" (3.2.134–5).⁵⁰ Hamlet's lecture on drama evokes the Christian Mystery Cycle by inserting the villain of the nativity: "It out-Herods Herod" (3.2.14). Such dramatic retellings of Bible stories maintained their provincial popularity during Shakespeare's youth.

Polonius, a mockery of Sidney as the Elizabethan poet-courtier, defines the hybrid structure of English drama along Aristotelian lines:

tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical,
historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical comical

historical-pastoral, scene indivisible, or poem unlimited: Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light

(2.2.398–402)

Aristotelian taxonomy parodies the pedantic small-mindedness of Elizabethan neoclassical theory, but Polonius unwittingly describes *Hamlet* as a "poem unlimited" (2.2.340–1).⁵¹ Hamlet responds by teasing Polonius with a reference to the Book of Judges, "O Jephthah, judge of Israel" (2.2.404), evoking the biblical injunction on murder related to Jephthah's refusal to honour a vow to murder his daughter. Jephthah's mother was a prostitute also. This obscure reference follows Hamlet's bawdy description of Polonius, father to a wanton Ophelia, as a "fishmonger" (2.2.174). Hamlet consistently uses biblical allusion to ridicule the genre of revenge tragedy and the Stoic observations of other characters, particularly Polonius and Horatio.

Hamlet appropriates terminology from Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*:

But, besides these gross absurdities, how all their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns [...] with neither decency nor discretion [...] is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained.

Sidney criticized English drama for having "neither decency or *discretion*" [my italics]. Claudius describes Hamlet's excessive, antirationalist mourning as overturning discretion, an organizing principle designed to protect the corrupt hierarchy: "Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature" (1.2.5).

Discretion is the imposition of oppressive decorum to control the stage. Polonius explains Hamlet's madness: "it is common for the younger sort / To lack discretion" (2.1.116–7). His madness is an insurrection against the expected rules of court. Hamlet regards discretion as a byword for the dramatic prison that denies his right to express his understanding of metaphysical truth. His lecture on drama parodies the theatrical injunction, "let your own *discretion* be your tutor" [my italics] (3.2.17–8). Polonius commends the satirical First Player's speech: "well spoken, with good action and good *discretion*" [my italics] (2.2.67–8). Hamlet identifies discretion as a theatrical trap recommended by Polonius to deny conscience and to maintain the rules imposed by the criminal hierarchy at Elsinore.

Discretion requires the observation of decorum that endangers Hamlet and denies his right to resist, thus keeping his conscience in check. Indiscretion, therefore, saves his life: "Our *indiscretion* sometime serves us well" [my italics] (5.2.8). He takes lethal action to return to the court from his near-death experience at sea, his indiscretion confounding the plot

against him, declaring Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "not near my conscience" (5.2.58). In the context of revenge tragedy, indiscretion becomes an ethical choice to adhere to Pauline ontology, to resist the bonds of rationality imposed by the villainous oppressor, thus protecting the truth of human nature and freeing Hamlet to save himself from hypocrisy.

Shakespeare's Rivalry with Ben Jonson

Considering the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, why is Hamlet's mirror up to nature so often considered the repetition of a Ciceronian theatre of the world commonplace, similar to Asper's mirror metaphor in *Every Man Out of His Humour*? Perhaps Shakespeare's rivalry with Jonson encourages a misreading of the mirror up to nature as Ciceronian idiom. In his eulogy for the *First Folio*, Jonson wrote that Shakespeare "hadst small Latine, and lesse Greeke."⁵² His intellectual shortcomings, a supposed unfamiliarity with classical texts in their original, imply that Hamlet, by extension, does not have the wherewithal to parody the Ciceronian precedent, making his mirror up to nature likely a guileless repetition of Jonson's scholarly exemplar.⁵³

Jonson's inference was accepted by eighteenth-century literati. Alexander Pope argued that Jonson introduced "Aristotle's rules" to the Elizabethan stage and that Shakespeare remained "without that knowledge."⁵⁴ Samuel Johnson suggested, "whether Shakespeare knew the unities, and rejected them by design [...] it is, I think, impossible to decide." However, the prologue to *Henry V* alone provides ample evidence to refute this claim.⁵⁵ Voltaire continued the refrain, calling Shakespeare, "a savage who had some imagination."⁵⁶ However, the mirror up to nature was designed to overturn Aristotle's rules with an alternate purpose of playing anchored in Christian revelation.⁵⁷

Shakespeare's rivalry with Jonson should encourage a contrarian theological reading of the mirror up to nature. The subtext of their antagonistic, intellectual viewpoints on drama is repeatedly referenced in *Hamlet*. Guildenstern alludes to the *poetomachia*, the Greek moniker for the poets' war: "O there has been much throwing about of brains" (2.2.359–60). The *poetomachia* was deadly serious. In 1598, Jonson killed the actor Gabriel Spenser in a duel, escaping the hangman through a legal quibble that involved Latin recitation from a Bible. Improbably high stakes make it easy to miss the sly but steady barbs present in Elizabethan drama that define the relationship between *Hamlet* and *Every Man Out of His Humour* as adversarial conceptions of dramatic purpose.

The parry and thrust between established Shakespeare and newcomer Jonson reached a climax in 1600. James Bednarz writes, "Shakespeare's modern sensibility paradoxically militated to confer a very different kind of authorship on him, making him Jonson's most spectacular critic and

his foremost beneficiary," their mutually antagonistic approaches to drama providing both with inspiration.⁵⁸ As the players arrive at Elsinore, Rosencrantz answers Hamlet's questions on the matter: "there was for a while no money bid for argument unless the poet and player went to cuffs in the question" (2.2.355–7). In 1586, three members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men had performed at the Danish court at Elsinore.⁵⁹ Shakespeare wrote disputes about drama into the text of *Hamlet*, setting the play as a climactic episode in the *poetomachia*.

Rivalry in real life between "gentle Shakespeare" and Jonson underpins the continuous metatheatrics that characterize *Hamlet*.⁶⁰ Rosencrantz assesses this behind-the-scenes action: "there has been much to do on both sides" (22.353–4). The audience at the Globe was attuned to hearing Hamlet's mirror up to nature as adversarial, pitting Shakespeare, the preeminent playwright from the provinces, against Jonson, the upcoming satirist who had been classically educated at Westminster School. Jonson wrote in his eulogy for Shakespeare, "he was not of an age but for all time," ironically in the context of the eulogy in the *First Folio* fixing the mirror up to nature as a part of their artistic rivalry at the turn of the seventeenth century. Jonson reprised the *poetomachia* 23 years after *Hamlet* by memorializing his deceased rival's provinciality: "Sweet swan of Avon! what a fight it were / To see thee in our waters yet appeare, / And make those flights upon the bankes of Thames."⁶¹ Their rivalry, represented by differing modes of drama in *Every Man Out of His Humour* and *Hamlet*, has continued to shape dramatic criticism beyond their lifetimes.

However, contemporaneous commentary on Elizabethan theatre considered *Hamlet* a satire that reflected their creative rivalry. A Cambridge play, *The Return to Parnassus*, written in 1601, states, "our fellow Shakespeare hath given him [Jonson] a purge that made him bewray his credit" (4.3.17).⁶² *Hamlet* is the purge of Jonson's Ciceronian revival. *Parnassus* lifts words from Hamlet's most famous soliloquy, describing Shakespeare's company touring the universities, "England affords those glorious vagabonds / That carried earst their *fardels* on their backs" [my italics] (5.1.12–3), referring to Hamlet's, "Who would *fardels* bear" [my italics] (3.1.76).⁶³ Jonson responded to *Hamlet* with two neo-Senecan tragedies, *Catiline His Conspiracy* and *Sejanus His Fall*. Shakespeare dutifully acted in both; neither was a commercial success.

Jonson's and Shakespeare's intertextual baiting is legendary. In Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part Two*, written in the late 1590s, Rumour determined his role as "stuffing the ears of men with false reports" (1.1.8). He elaborates, "But what need I thus / My well-known body to *anatomize*" [my italics] (1.1.20–21). Jonson may have pilfered Rumour's deceptive "anatomize" for Asper's Ciceronian mirror, giving it the opposite meaning to subversive Rumour's "anatomize": "*Anatomised* in every

nerve and sinew" [my italics].⁶⁴ In 1598, Shakespeare acted in *Every Man in His Humour*. The character Sogliardo lampoons the coat of arms that Shakespeare had recently commissioned, suggesting that the motto be changed from the refined and Gallic "Non Sans Droit" to the rustic "Not Without Mustard." In this, Jonson teases the established playwright for provincial social climbing. Shakespeare refused a part in Jonson's sequel, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, while formulating his revenge in *Hamlet*.

Jonson used *Every Man Out of His Humour* as a vehicle to continue his satirical attacks on his illustrious rival. During a scene set in St. Paul's Cathedral, the character Clove ridicules *Julius Caesar* by mimicking Shakespeare's soaring "O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts" (3.2.105) with the continent, "reason long since is fled to animals" (3.1.137). The renowned "Et tu Brute" (5.4.201) is lifted by the jester Buffone for comic effect as a possible swipe at Shakespeare's Latin. Shakespeare included Jonson's asides on *Julius Caesar* in *Hamlet*. Polonius, a caricature of a neo-classical pedant, metatheatrically recommends Shakespeare's repertoire in a self-effacing nod to the mood of metatheatrical badinage: "I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i'th' Capitol. Brutus killed me" (3.2.104–5).

The two playwrights' antagonistic ideas about drama clarify the final mirror metaphor in *Hamlet*. Hamlet describes Laertes: "to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror and who else would trace his umbrage" (5.2.119–121).⁶⁵ Laertes is a seeming, a semblable, lacking substance or conscience, performing his role as a shadow of human nature. The exaggerated pastiche of courtly euphuism parodies the lofty register of ambitious but shallow courtiers. Hamlet's "true diction" is ironically replete with Gallic euphuism. He mocks Laertes' superficiality with prolix calculation: "Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you; though, I know, to divide him inventorially would dizzy the arithmetic of memory" (5.2.114–116).⁶⁶ Hamlet spikes courtly euphuism, the deceptive language of the oppressive hierarchy. Laertes is unaware that he is a theatrical cliché who lacks conscience and is Hamlet's undeserving foil.

In *Timber: or, Discoveries*, Jonson didactically describes communication as, "No glass renders a man's form or likeness so true as his speech."⁶⁷ The clear image provided by speech is destabilized by courtly euphuism, hendiadys and the continual mixing of registers, prose and poetry, Latinate and Saxon, which characterize *Hamlet*. Sometimes Hamlet muddles registers within single ideas creating contradictory tones mirrored within a single sentence: "The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold" (1.4.1); "Marry, this is miching malicho. It means mischief" (3.2.139–40).⁶⁸ Hamlet's panic that the destructive relativism of language challenges underlying theological truth, "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (2.2.250–1), exposes the possibility of Pauline conscience: "were it not that I have bad dreams" (2.2.256–7). Hamlet rejects the constituent part

of drama, “words, words, words” (2.2.192), but maintains faith in the ethical and metaphysical Pauline conception of nature beyond the spoken, visible and performed.

Hamlet’s Pauline Education at Wittenberg

Claudius suspects that the theology department at the Saxon university of Wittenberg is the ideological source for Hamlet’s disruptive mourning: “For your intent / In going back to school in Wittenberg / It is most retrograde to our desire” (1.2.112–4). Gertrude likewise warns against return to Wittenberg: “I pray thee stay with us, go not to Wittenberg” (1.2.119). She fears her son will be subject to the indoctrination of progressive Lutheran theologians. The University of Paris is the alma mater for Hamlet’s neo-Senecan foil, Laertes. From the Elizabethan perspective, Paris was a centre of learning based upon rigid, Gallic classicism, typified by the continent’s most autocratic court.

St. Paul was the theological inspiration for the Reformation.⁶⁹ In 1518, the firebrand Professor of Theology at Wittenberg, Martin Luther, justified his heresy: “I must believe according to the testimony of my conscience.”⁷⁰ This echoes St. Paul’s message: “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly pureness” (Corinthians 2.1:12). Luther described the letter to the Romans that features prominently in Hamlet’s soliloquies: “the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian’s while not only to memorize it word for word.”⁷¹ Hamlet seems to have taken the Lutheran lesson on board. At the end of the play, he provides Horatio with the doctrine of readiness from Luther: “we defy augury: there’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ’tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now ... Let be” (5.2.218–23).⁷² The Pauline underpinning of the Lutheran reformation and the emphasis of scripture translated into vernacular might explain Hamlet’s rejection of Stoic drama as ethically, ontologically and metaphysically out of joint with progressive early modernity.

Lutheran subtext infiltrates Hamlet’s wordplay. He refers to Luther’s trial at the Diet of Worms, “A certain convocation of politic worms are e’en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet” (4.3.19–21). The “politic worms” is wordplay describing the reactionary ecclesiastical forces trying to suppress the progressive spirit of the age, oppressors trying to safeguard their own privilege by clamping down on the reawakening of Pauline theology. Hamlet repeats “woke” Lutheran doctrine: “Looking before and after, gave us not / That capability and godlike reason / To fust in us unus’d” (4.4.37–39).⁷³ Hamlet concurs with Luther that true reason is revelatory and godlike, not sensory and rationalist. However, in a crucial way, the Lutheran rebellion against the Roman church, the struggle

between the oppressed and the ultimate oppressor, was a reiteration of the original theological revolution of the first century AD.

Seneca and St. Paul were contemporaries in Rome under the Emperor Nero in the first century AD. The former wrote his revenge tragedies, while the latter ministered. Nero's mother, meanwhile, married the Emperor Claudius, who adopted Nero. Not coincidentally, the villain in *Hamlet*, is named Claudius, making Hamlet a mirror to Nero. Expressing anxiety about his role, Hamlet references the historical stage that Rome shared with early Christianity: "O heart, lose not thy *nature*; let not ever the soul of Nero enter this firm bosom" [my italics] (3.2.395–6), his nature being the Christian remedy to Neronian turpitude. Hamlet imagines the Stoic soul of the archetypal bloodthirsty tyrant who kills his mother and persecutes Christians. The rejection of Stoic dramatic form with the authority of Pauline scripture mirrors first-century history, as the pagan era, reaching a moral nadir, was met by the awakening piety of Christianity.

The scripture of St. Paul undermines the genre of revenge tragedy derived from the Stoic philosopher Seneca. Not only was Seneca Nero's tutor, but the latter was allegedly responsible for beheading St. Paul,⁷⁴ his depravity leading to Seneca's suicide. These elements provide historical justification for the use of Pauline scripture to overturn the clichés of revenge tragedy. Hamlet defines his nature in opposition to the Stoic philosophy of Nero's Rome. His nature mirrors St. Paul's historic response to Roman immorality. Hamlet's conscience, then, can be considered an Elizabethan reiteration of St. Paul's historical revolution.

This historical subtext for *Hamlet* makes the ethical case for Hamlet's resistance to Stoic custom. St. Paul and Seneca attended the *Neronia* in AD 65 where, according to Suetonius, Nero sang to the masses on his lyre of Niobe's bereavement. Hamlet describes his mother's suspect mourning, "Like Niobe, all tears" (1.2.149), from the tale that Ovid retells in *Metamorphoses*.⁷⁵ Following the *Neronia*, a third of Rome burnt to the ground, allegedly at Nero's command. Reportedly, "enraptured by what he called 'the beauty of the flames,'" Nero "put on his tragedian's costume and sang *The Fall of Ilium* from beginning to end."⁷⁶ This further informs Hamlet's choice for the First Player's speech. In the Elizabethan imagination, Troy, Rome and London were close-knit; London was said to have been founded by Brutus, a Roman ancestor of the Trojan Aeneas and, in *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser lauded the city as the "third Troy."

The historical overlap between Stoicism and Pauline Christianity begets linguistic confusion in *Hamlet*. Horatio muddles pagan and Christian: "A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye" (1.1.15), evoking St. Matthew's, "sees thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye" (7.3). Stoic Horatio corrects himself, describing the Ghost as a neoclassical apparition: "the most high and palmy state of Rome, / A little ere the mightiest Julius fell"

(1.1.116–7). Nomenclature in *Hamlet* similarly demonstrates the tension between the Senecan and the Pauline, with Latinate names representing the Stoic tradition and Anglo-Saxon names the Christian: Hamlet is Anglo-Saxon; Lucianus, a Latinate stand-in for Hamlet in *The Murder of Gonzago*, ironically evokes Lucifer, the Christian devil; Gertrude recalls the crucifixion, with *Ger* a Saxon word for the spear thrust into Christ's side and *Rood* the Old English for cross. Horatio, meanwhile, as the play's nominal Stoic, is an Elizabethan aristocratic name derived from the Roman Horatius, evoking the heroic soldier that singlehandedly barred the Pons Sublicius, preventing exiled King Tarquin from re-entering Rome at the head of the Etruscan army, as recounted in various classical sources including Plutarch. It is worth noting that Shakespeare's only son, who died in 1596, was called Hamnet.

The tension between Stoicism and Pauline Christianity explains Horatio's Stoicism. Hamlet describes his temperance, "whose blood and judgment are so well commedled / That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger" (3.2.70–1), his Stoic philosophy a bulwark against the vagaries of pagan fortune. Hamlet asks Stoic Horatio to delay suicide: "Absent thee from felicity awhile, / And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain / To tell my story" (5.2.354–6); felicity here meaning resignation through suicide.⁷⁷ Hamlet paradoxically echoes Tacitus's description of Seneca's death: "he bequeathed to them the only but still the noblest possession yet remaining to him, the pattern of his life" (15.62), despite his story having an alternative purpose. Stoic Horatio, accepting the request to tell the story, interprets *Hamlet* as a neo-Senecan revenge tragedy: "So shall you hear / Of carnal, bloody, and *unnatural* acts" [my italics] (5.2.387–8), thus denying the purpose of Hamlet's theological resistance. Stoic Horatio's misreading of Hamlet's story as representing the carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts of Roman tragedy ironically recommends an alternative Pauline reading of *Hamlet*.

The Ghost manifests from purgatory. Despite generational schism, both Hamlets are emphatically Christian. Christ's birth coincides with the Ghost's instigation of revenge tragedy. Making sense of the apparition, Marcellus announces, "that season comes / Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated" (1.1.163–4). The Ghost seeks Christian redemption and salvation through forgiveness: "Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven" (1.5.85–6). The demand that Hamlet should ignore Gertrude's guilt fuels meditation on divine judgement. If Gertrude is best left to heaven, Hamlet's soul might abdicate its Stoic responsibility to avenge his father's death.

Hamlet recognizes the insertion of Pauline ethics in his father's speech from purgatory and rejects Horatio's Stoic response to the Ghost: "there is more in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your

philosophy" (1.5.174–5). Stoic Horatio speaks in the formal, Latinate register: "Season your admiration for a while / With an attent ear, till I may deliver, / Upon the witness of these gentlemen, This marvel to you" (1.2.192–4). Hamlet responds impatiently, a Christian response in vernacular Anglo-Saxon, replete with monosyllables: "For God's love, let me hear" (1.2.192–5).

Hamlet references Saint Patrick, the guardian of purgatory, to reject Horatio's Stoicism: "Yes by Saint Patrick but there is, Horatio" (1.5.142).⁷⁸ He turns to metadramatic irony to draw attention to the overturning of Stoic custom by Pauline ethics: "Remember thee? / Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat / In this distracted *globe*" [my italics] (1.5.95–7).⁷⁹ Remembrance, the essence of Pauline redemption, alerted the distracted audience at the Globe. Hamlet interprets the Ghost with an appeal to providence: "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" (1.4.39).⁸⁰ Stoic Horatio responds, "These are but the wild and whirling words, my lord" (1.5.133), recognizing the syntactical fragmentation of language that characterizes Hamlet's mirror up to nature which derationalizes mimetic display to frame metaphysical truth.

The Gravedigger Scene as Christian Exegesis

In the gravedigger scene, Hamlet justifies the English theatrical tradition of mixing comedy with tragedy, making palatable complex thematic exegesis: "some necessary question of the play be then to be considered" (3.2.43–4), flouting Sidney's disdain for "mingling kings and clowns." Hamlet's antic disposition is humorously bracketed with faith:

Hamlet: How came he mad?
Gravedigger: Very strangely, they say
Hamlet: How 'strangely'?
Gravedigger: Faith, e'en with losing his wits
(5.1.155–8)

Losing his wits commends faith in the ethics of St. Paul by derationalizing mimetic display.

The gravediggers' discussion of Ophelia's burial explores the tension between Stoic suicide and its Christian prohibition. The gravediggers discuss suicide and Christian burial rights in relation to Ophelia: "Is she to be buried in Christian burial, when she wilfully seeks her own salvation?"; "If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian burial" (5.1.1–2; 23–5). The gravediggers offer a comic solution to the sin of suicide by mirroring Gertrude's poetic account of Ophelia's death:

If the man go to
 This water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he
 goes, mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he
 drowns not himself. Argal, he that is
 not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life

(5.1.16–20)

The Latin *ergo* becomes the English argal, emphasizing the gravedigger’s plain-speaking Christianity. The prohibition on suicide is overcome by the comic judicial argument that water may possess a motive for murder.

The gravediggers are interpreters, a comic chorus overseen by Hamlet, as they point the observed of all observers towards the moral of his tale. One gravedigger believes Hamlet was sent to England “because he was mad: he shall recover his wits there; or if he do not, tis no great matter there [...] there the men are as mad as he” (5.1.164–169). Hamlet’s sea journey to England breaks the unities of time, place and action, and the theatrical madness native to the English, those vulgarities identified by Sidney, recommends the idiosyncrasies of the native Mystery Cycles. English collective madness is identified with Hamlet’s nature, reflecting Christian consciences observing what is playing out at the Globe.

The cockney Gravedigger, a comic reflection of a groundling observing Hamlet observe him, describes Christian temporal space from Creation to Apocalypse, referring to digging as “Adam’s profession” (5.1.31), “a gravemaker” the greatest of workers as “the houses that he makes last till doomsday” (5.1.58–9).⁸¹ Hamlet provides a biblical precursor for Claudius’s fratricide: “how the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain’s jaw-bone, that did the first murder!” (5.1.82–4). Claudius, who is familiar with scripture but lacks faith, similarly acknowledges his crime: “O! my offence is rank, it smells to heaven; / It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t; / A brother’s murder” (3.3.36–8).

Hamlet addresses the tragic fate of antique heroes and reduces the mighty Macedonian conqueror to a grimy plug: “Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander, till he find it stopping a bung-hole” (5.1.201–3), describing pagan Alexander’s dust converted into a “stop for a beer-barrel” (5.1.210). Elsewhere, he describes death without Christian redemption as “bestial oblivion” (4.4.40).⁸² He mimics the mawkish gravediggers, simultaneously referencing Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, the Roman play that precedes Hamlet’s insurrection against Roman ethics: “Imperious Caesar, dead and turn’d to clay / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away” (5.1.235–6).

The Priest reminds the mourners that suicide is a sin and Ophelia’s rights to a Christian burial are “doubtful” (5.1.249), since she should

"in ground unsanctified have lodg'd / Till the last trumpet" (5.1.51–2). Laertes, troubled by restricted burial, echoes Hamlet's words on seeing the Ghost: "A ministering angel shall my sister be" (5.1.262). Laertes is stuck in hyperbole, emphasizing his role as Stoic foil. Angered by the Priest's insinuations, he describes Ophelia's "fair and unpolluted flesh" (5.1.237), his hyperbole inferring the truth that Ophelia was "polluted" by Hamlet.

Laertes' classicist hyperbole highlights his failure to learn the lesson of Ophelia's death. Jumping into his sister's grave, he demands, "Now pile you dust upon the quick and the dead" (5.1.273), contravening Hamlet's earlier musing on burial: "for the dead, not for the quick" (5.1.136). Laertes imagines soil piled high, "To o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head of blue Olympus" (5.1.251–2). His creaking rhetoric—"skyish head"—irritates Hamlet: "What is he whose grief / Bears such an emphasis?" (5.1.253–4), who views his classical register as a sign of inauthenticity. "Hamlet the Dane" (5.1.256) mocks Laertes' histrionic classicized grief with exclamatory Anglo-Saxon rounded off by the ludicrous image of eating a crocodile: "Woo't weep? Woo't fight? Woo't fast? Woo't tear thyself? Woo't drink up eisel? Eat a crocodile?" (5.1.274–6).

Hamlet satirizes Laertes' classicist register with the giants that piled Pelion onto Ossa, another mountain in Thessaly, before being killed by Apollo. His inauthentic neo-Senecan bombast includes a silent evocation of Apollo, the burning zone, the Greek God of poetry, truth and prophecy: "Singeing his pate against the burning zone, / Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth / I'll rant as well as thou" (5.1.282–4). Hamlet defines classicist histrionics as ranting—"I'll rant as well as thou." When Laertes bellows, "the devil take thy soul!" Hamlet responds, "Thou pray'st not well. / I prithee take thy fingers from my throat" (5.1.258–9).⁸³ Hands clasped together in prayer, not vengeful strangulation, is the passive action demanded by Christian contemplation.

Hercules, pictured on the flag above the Globe, was the archetype of pagan action. Hamlet wants Laertes to question his neoclassical role: "What is the reason that you use me thus? / I lov'd you ever: but it is no matter; / Let Hercules himself do what he may" (5.1.311–4), and to accept the redundancy of seeking vengeance. "I loved you ever," he says, evoking Pauline *philadelphia*. Ovid's account of Hercules ascending on Jupiter's four-horse chariot is matched by Horatio's, "And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest" (5.2.366).⁸⁴ Hamlet evokes Hercules as his inverted image to mark the epic scale of his Pauline transfiguration.

Hamlet identifies Christianity as his tragic flaw and claims madness the source of his unethical action:

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
 And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes
 Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it
 Who does it then? His madness

(5.2.233–6)

He defines his tragic flaw by referencing St. Paul's letter to the Romans: "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but the sin that dwelleth in me" (7:21). St. Paul's word for "sin" was *hamartia*, the Greek word for "tragic flaw" used by Aristotle.⁸⁵

In Greek, *hamartia* literally means "to miss the mark." Hamlet, therefore, reveals his belief that his tragic flaw is "madness" representing Christian faith in response to the immorality of Stoic revenge tragedy: "That I have shot my arrow o'er the house / And hurt my brother" (5.2.242–3). Hamlet's madness causes him to miss the mark by accidentally killing Polonius. Laertes, seeking revenge, is unaware of his outmoded neo-Senecan role: "I am satisfied in *nature*" [my italics] (5.2.243). Hamlet, aware of Laertes' dramatic function, responds, ironically, "I'll be your foil, Laertes" (5.2.255).

Venetian Mirrors and the Representation of the Self in the Context of the Revolutionary Social, Religious and Scientific Developments of the Sixteenth Century

Hamlet's theological conception of his nature contests alternative Elizabethan notions of selfhood that have often been associated with the influx of Venetian mirrors as everyday objects.⁸⁶ More distinct images in mirrors imported from Venice may well have encouraged a burgeoning individualism in Elizabethan society. This notion of early modern individualism is typified by Michel de Montaigne's essays translated into English in 1603 but already available in French, and Hamlet's soliloquies seemingly share Montaigne's brand of individual self-perception.⁸⁷ Hamlet begins a soliloquy on his failure to act, matching the introspective solitude of the French scholar: "God buy to you. Now I am alone" (2.2.549).⁸⁸ In *On Glory*, Montaigne wrote, "It is not for outward show that the soul is to play its part, but for ourselves within, where no eyes can pierce but our own."⁸⁹ Hamlet's mirror up to nature likewise places the idea of selfhood, Montaigne's "ourselves within," beyond outward show.⁹⁰

However, Hamlet implies the truth of "ourselves within," conscience, to be an obscure reflection of heaven by rejecting visualized glorifications of the individual mortal acting in the mundane theatre of the world: "What a piece of work is a man ... in apprehension how like a god ... and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust" (2.2.305–10). This echoes the essence of creation in Genesis, "thou art dust" (3:19). The rest of the

passage has been compared to Psalm 8.⁹¹ Hamlet's conscience produces and is syntactically reflected in his elliptic "stage as mirror" metaphor, revealing the metaphysical nature of his theological self-identification.⁹²

Three analogous and roughly contemporaneous works of art and fiction, unknown to Shakespeare at the time, shed light on the turbulent spirit of the age that arguably provoked the reimagining of the theatre of the world idiom in *Hamlet*.

In his 1611 *An Anatomy of the World*, John Donne describes the burgeoning individualism of early modern England: "Prince, subject, father, son, are things forgot."⁹³ He describes feudal hierarchies challenged by the new economy, defined by a merchant importing a Venetian mirror. A decade earlier, Hamlet remarks, "the age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe" (5.1.38–40). Hamlet is perhaps less troubled by the social upheaval of the time, considering his own rebellion against the political hierarchy at Elsinore. However, the thrusting Elizabethan staring into a Venetian mirror as feudalism crumbles and Drake circumnavigates the globe is not the purpose of Hamlet's playing.⁹⁴

There is no straight answer to Bernardo's opening line, "Who's there?" (1.1.1), an existential question about human nature posed by a fearful soldier staring into the abyss on the rampart of political order. Hamlet provides a response to Francisco's demand, "Nay, answer me: stand and unfold yourself" (1.1.1–2), by poetically unfolding himself in soliloquy to explore Bernardo's initial existential question.⁹⁵ Hamlet's enacted conscience, unfolding himself, is revealed in the mirror up to nature metaphor and provides an indirect answer that echoes the ontological metaphysics of Pauline scripture.⁹⁶

The effect of *Hamlet* has equivalence in the visual arts of post-Renaissance Mannerism.⁹⁷ The Copernican scientific revolution and the Protestant Reformation were the cultural contexts for the destabilized imagery of both Mannerism in the visual arts and Hamlet's mirror up to nature metaphor.⁹⁸ Copernicus was slowly developing his critique of Aristotelian cosmology through letters and publications as Luther formulated what became his *Ninety-Five Theses* of 1517. According to Copernicus's observations, the sun was at the centre of the solar system with the planets orbiting in ellipses. This destabilized the Ptolemaic system of the sun and planets orbiting the Earth in neat circles, thus destabilizing the classical Aristotelian theory of homocentric spheres. It has been argued that Copernicus's work made the proportioned accuracy of High Renaissance art untenable and encouraged the unstable Mannerist interpretation of nature.⁹⁹ *Hamlet*, reflecting the new science, is poetically post-Aristotelian because he inhabits a Copernican universe.¹⁰⁰ Hamlet refers to cosmic uncertainty: "Doubt that the sun doth move, / Doubt truth to be a liar / But never doubt I love"

(2.2.116–18).¹⁰¹ However, his love is upended: “I did love you once [...] I loved you not” (3.1.115–19).

Copernicus’s *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* was printed in 1543 in Nuremberg, Germany. This draws our attention to yet another technological revolution of the sixteenth century, the development of printing presses that allowed for the widespread dissemination of scripture, such as *The Geneva Bible* of 1560. In 1616, a month before Shakespeare’s death, *De Revolutionibus* was placed on the Vatican’s *Index of Forbidden Books*. In a rare show of theological consensus between warring churches that would leave many millions of Europeans dead over the coming half-century, Lutherans were equally appalled by the implications of *De Revolutionibus*.¹⁰²

As Shakespeare was putting the finishing touches to *Hamlet*, the schism of the Reformation in Christendom had already fanned a pervasive cosmic uncertainty fostered by the Copernican revolution. Hamlet’s Pauline response to this turbulent scientific and cultural environment is peculiarly redolent of an unrelated but coeval representation of the troubled age in Caravaggio’s counter-reformation *The Conversion of St. Paul*, which was completed in 1600, as *Hamlet* was being performed. The apostle is painted thrown back from a stationary horse. Arms outstretched, the power of divinity disarms and blinds the belittled human subject with a stream of light (Figure 4.2).

Intense chiaroscuro depicts St. Paul blinded by the truth of Christ’s divinity in a physical vision of nature overturned. This moment is described in Acts: “Now as he journeyed, it came to pass that as he was come near to Damascus, suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth” (9:3–4). Giovanni Pietro Bellori wrote in his *The Lives of the Artists* published in 1672 that Caravaggio’s painting was, “entirely without action,” an observation providing an eerie echo of the revelatory atmosphere of *Hamlet*. Caravaggio’s work sought to recapture the Pauline revolution for the Catholic Church.

Finally, another near-contemporary equivalent in literature echoes *Hamlet* in challenging the received traditions of classical dramatic convention. Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605) ridicules the commonplaces of Roman and Renaissance comedy:

“Tell me, have you not seen some comedy in which kings, emperors, pontiffs, knights, ladies, and numerous other characters are introduced? One plays the ruffian, another the cheat, this one a merchant, and that one a soldier, while yet another is the fool who is not so foolish as he appears, and still another the one of whom love has made a fool ...” “

It is a fine comparison,” Sancho admitted, “though not so new but that I have heard it many times before.”

(Part II, Bk. iii, 12)

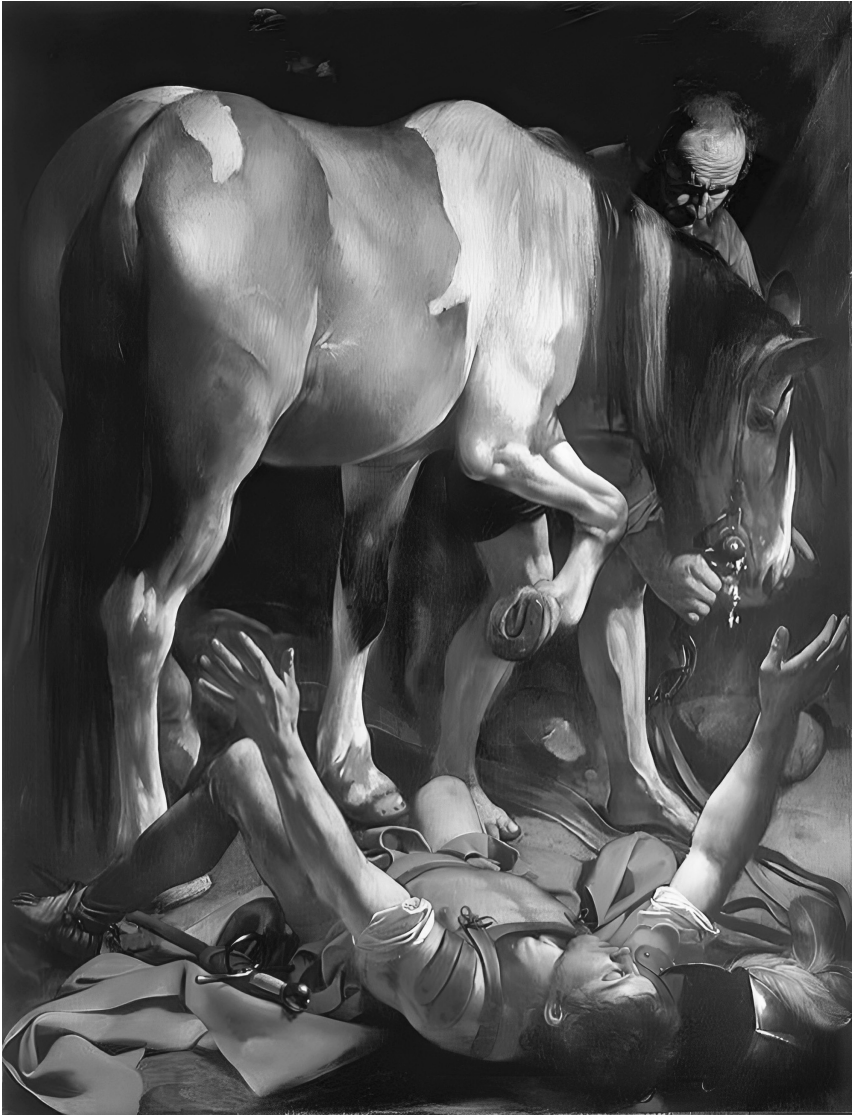


Figure 4.2 Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *The Conversion on the Way to Damascus* (1601). Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.

Illiterate Sancho argues that the conventional theatre of the world is an exhausted metaphor.¹⁰³ Ironically, Sancho is forced to maintain the fiction to sustain Quixote's metafictional fantasies.¹⁰⁴ Shakespeare and Cervantes were both responding to the outmoded Ciceronian theatre of the world.¹⁰⁵

Hamlet's mirror up to nature provides retrograde theological justification for overturning dramatic convention to represent conscience.

In this chapter, a reinterpretation of Hamlet's mirror up to nature as a metaphor for a Pauline conception of nature fundamentally enriches our understanding of the protagonist's role in actively shaping the drama in which he is trapped. Hamlet's madness is an evasive response to the demands placed upon him within the rationale of the anachronistic mores of Stoic revenge tragedy continuously reimagined in early modern drama. It is therefore not only a metaphysical rebellion against dramatic form but a metatheatrical critique of the classical rules that had an overbearing influence on Elizabethan dramatist's perception of the purpose of their work. Hamlet's revolution against dramatic norms did not need to be repeated, instead Shakespeare flipped his most famous protagonist's soul-searching to reestablish the superficiality, strife and authoritarian violence of theatrical worlds lacking conscience in the mirror metaphors of the plays that followed.

Notes

- 1 Shapiro, p.341.
- 2 John Alday's 1566 translation of Pierre Boaistuau's *Le Théâtre du Monde* considered man's moral understanding of himself, "as a pageant to begin, / Most like a theatre" which, "as with Tulley's work" presents, "a Glasse whereon to look" (p.726). Tulley is shorthand for Marcus Tullius Cicero.
- 3 Lewis, p.198.
- 4 Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and the English Renaissance*. Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.216.
- 5 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Arden Shakespeare*. Routledge, 1982, p.288. Maurice A. Hunt believes a superficial reading, "implies that the playwright [Shakespeare] ultimately had a didactic end" and that, "by doing so he would resemble Ben Jonson," encouraging a substantial reappraisal of Hamlet's mirror metaphor, p.51.
- 6 Maurice A. Hunt, *Shakespeare's Speculative Art*. Palgrave, 2011. Print, p.50.
- 7 Claudius uses it in his first speech before listing oxymorons: "Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy, / With an auspicious and a dropping eye / With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage" (1.2.10–2). Polonius uses it to recommend Reynaldo dissemble when spying on Laertes, "Take you, as 'twere, some distant knowledge of him" (2.1.13) and, "You laying these slight sullies on my son, / As 'twere a thing a little soil'd i' the working" (2.1.40–1). Claudius plots the meeting of Hamlet and Ophelia: "For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither, / That he, as 'twere by accident" (3.1.29–30).
- 8 The College of Physicians was given limited permission to undertake dissections on the corpses of executed criminals in 1565. This followed the great advances in medicine made by Flemish scientist Andreas Vesalius and his influential book on human anatomy, *De humanis corporis fabrica*, published in 1543, that overturned the classical anatomical theories of Galen. However, the artistic tradition referred to the dissections of Leonardo da Vinci and

- Michelangelo Buonarroti in their attempts to understand human anatomy for a more realistic depiction.
- 9 George T. Wright counted 66 examples of this figure of speech, known as hendiadys, in *Hamlet*, considerably more than in Shakespeare's other plays (p.173). James Shapiro explains, “part of the problem is that the words themselves bleed into each other” (p.321).
 - 10 Written in approximately 1580 and published posthumously in 1595, *Defence of Poesy* was out of date by the time it reached an audience, having missed the innovations of Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd and Shakespeare.
 - 11 Aristotle, p.11. Pincombe argued the unities, “had been set out by Italian critics, notably Ludovico Castelvetro, in the name of Aristotle,” and that “Seneca's plays were undoubtedly highly influential as a model, [so] was ‘Aristotle’” (p.9). *Hamlet* can be interpreted as a critique of Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* since, “the bankruptcy of English drama, dwelling especially upon the defects of those very themes and techniques that Shakespeare was destined to glorify” (Harbage, p.316).
 - 12 *Ibid.*, p.8. T.S. Eliot noted that in Jonson's plays, “the life of the character is inseparable from the life of the drama” (Essays, pp.132–3). This followed the neoclassical tradition championed by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defense of Poesy* that T.S. Eliot called “simplified” personages (*Ibid.*, p.132).
 - 13 It recalls Fluellen's sentiment, “praised be God, so long as your majesty is an honest man” (4.7.112–3), in *King Henry V*. The number ten thousand repeats in Rosencrantz's neoclassical speech on Claudius's role as king based on the turning of pagan fortune's wheel: “The cess of majesty / Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw / What's near it with it. Or it is a massy wheel, / Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount, / To whose huge spokes *ten thousand* lesser things / Are mortis'd and adjoin'd, which when it falls, / Each small annexment, petty consequence, / Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone / Did the king sigh, but with a general groan” [my italics] (3.3.15–23).
 - 14 Hamlet seems to accept the “mystery” of nature, ironically foreshadowing Francis Bacon's scientific scepticism in 1605: “For the mind of man is far from the *nature* of a clear and equal glass, wherein the beams of things should reflect according to their true incidence; nay it is rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture” [my italics] (*The Advancement of Learning*).
 - 15 As the players arrive for “Lenten entertainment” (2.2.318), a Christian ritual, melancholy Hamlet finds purpose: “There did seem in him a kind of joy” (3.1.18).
 - 16 “An internal reflection or inner truth.” Ben Crystal and David Crystal, *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion*. Penguin, 2004.
 - 17 Murray Roston defined the central quandary of the play, as evidenced in Hamlet's “to be or not to be” soliloquy, as the vacillation between Christian endurance as derived from St. Paul's view of Christ's example and the Stoic tradition of honourable suicide in the face of “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (3.1.58). This neatly summarizes the central conundrum of the play, the dynamic between the Pauline and Senecan worldviews and their overlap. Roston labels Hamlet's vacillation “coherent duality” (p.84).
 - 18 Paul S. Fiddes finds an alternative Pauline source from Philipians 1:23-24, “on the necessity of living ‘in the flesh,’ but ‘desiring to be loosed and to be with Christ’” (p.156). However, staying within Romans provides stronger metahistorical resonances.

- 19 A.R. Braunmuller described Christian philosophy as "a faint and morally pregnant anticipation of eternal life where we will all see face to face, not through the dark glass—the mirror, reflection, or stage-play—of what St Paul calls 'imperfect knowledge'" (p.88). Samuel Johnson commended Shakespeare's plays for "exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, intermingled." For a discussion on the problems of translating *syneidesis*, see Claude A. Pierce, "Conscience in the New Testament: A Study of Syneidesis in the New Testament; in the Light of its Sources, and with Particular Reference to St. Paul: With Some Observations Regarding its Pastoral Relevance Today," *Studies in Biblical Theology* 69 (1955) (p.1-10). From Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *The Harvard Theological Review* 56.3 (1963): 205: "In that connection we remember that Augustine has often been called 'the first modern man.' While this is an obvious generalization, it may contain a fair amount of truth. His *Confessiones* are the first great document in the history of the introspective conscience. The Augustinian line leads into the Middle Ages and reaches its climax in the penitential struggle of an Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, and his interpretation of Paul." Kinney noted, "Paul refers to man's knowledge of God as partial, given His brilliance so that at best he could only hope to see 'through a glass darkly' (*per speculum in aenigmate*)" (p.11).
- 20 Rhodri Lewis concludes, "Hamlet is not ... a model of nascent subjectivity," nor "the first modern man, a dramatic laboratory for the invention of the human" (p.39). Margreta de Grazia argued in "*Hamlet*" *without Hamlet* (p.7), "Early allusions to *Hamlet* suggest that in its own time the play was considered behind the times rather than ahead of them." Shakespeare's mirrors showed the way to enacting conscience but not what Debora Shuger termed a "modern, reflexive self-consciousness" (p.31).
- 21 Early modern conceptions of the self emerged from Renaissance ideas on the human capacity for self-knowledge, typified by Renaissance humanist Pico della Mirandola's late fifteenth-century work *Oration on the Dignity of Man* and exemplified by Shakespeare's humanist contemporary Michel de Montaigne.
- 22 Stephen Greenblatt remarked this, "shift of emphasis from vengeance to remembrance is nothing less than the whole play" (p.208).
- 23 Translated from Latin by Curtius, 139. Foreshadowing and upending Sir Philip Sidney's criticism of English drama as a "mongrel tragi-comedy."
- 24 The reasons Iago says, "I hate the Moor" (1.3.384) is likewise unsatisfactory. As Marjorie Garber notes, "the motives he brings forth are sexual jealousy, political envy, and reputation. Yet none of these seems convincing ... in fact his motivations seem deliberately crafted, another Iagoan artifice ... this is what English poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously called Iago's 'motiveless malignity' ... indeed here is a better place for T.S. Eliot's phrase 'emotion in excess of the facts as they appear' than *Hamlet*" (p.605). We are given nothing more substantial than Iago's diabolical, "But for my sport and profit" (1.3.384) that fails as a moral explanation.
- 25 "Many commentators, utterly baffled by the play, have used it as a vehicle for expressing their own views on man and the world without being aware they are doing so" (Cox, p.xiv). In reciting some examples of the reasons for Hamlet's delay, Roston indicates the projection of the critic's own bias: "Ernest Jones follows Freud in attributing Hamlet's problem to an Oedipal complex – a theory persuasively argued until one recalls that in the play

- Hamlet expresses only affection and admiration for the father he supposedly hates. Jacques Lacan, only too predictably, sees Hamlet’s crisis in phallic terms, the result of a castration phobia; while Janet Adelman, in a feminist reading, views him as threatened by a maternal figure who problematizes the distinction between his two ‘fathers’” (p.42). Hamlet seems to be able to be whoever you want him to be. Margreta de Grazia states: “the question of his delay has driven critical inquiry deep into Hamlet’s psyche where it has discovered an inexhaustible hermeneutic resource from which some of the most brilliant readings in the entire critical tradition have been fashioned” (p.5).
- 26 Plato, *Republic*, Book X. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm>
 - 27 Cicero elaborated on four roles a man might play in *De Officiis*: the universal role of human, the role that individual nature bestows, the role in the social hierarchy bestowed at birth, and the role that can be chosen through learning and moral advancement.
 - 28 Shuger argues Hamlet sets up, “the exemplary miniatures of her dead husband” (p.34). In Elizabethan England, Nicholas Hilliard had become the pre-eminent limner, or miniaturist, producing portraits of the Earl of Essex and Queen Elizabeth, among others.
 - 29 “And the Cherubims shall stretch their wings on high, covering the Mercy seat with their wings and their faces one to another” (Exodus 25:20)
 - 30 Alison A. Chapman, “Ophelia’s ‘Old Lauds’: Madness and Hagiography in Hamlet,” *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 20 (2007): 111–35.
 - 31 “Ekstasis” in Greek means to stand beyond. Hamlet’s madness is described as his ecstasy by Gertrude and Ophelia.
 - 32 Hamlet, played by Richard Burbage, is made to metatheatrically recognize Shakespeare on stage as First Player, calling him, “old friend” (2.2.423–4).
 - 33 T.S. Eliot archly noted, “the King of Denmark, in sending Hamlet to England, was attempting to violate the Unity of Action: a crime far worse, for a man in his position, than attempted murder.”
 - 34 Pincombe argued the unities “had been set out by Italian critics, notably Ludovico Castelvetro, in the name of Aristotle” and that “Seneca’s plays were undoubtedly highly influential as a model” (p.9).
 - 35 Harold Bloom locates the lines in the Player King’s lengthy speech (3.2.183–209) (*Invention*, p.425).
 - 36 According to Thomas Platter, a Swiss tourist who visited in 1599, food and drink were made available, possibly included in the price of admission. Bubonic plague, or pestilence, had shut down the theatres at the beginning of Shakespeare’s writing career in 1593. It is likely his son Hamnet died of the plague as well as three of his sisters, Joan, Margaret and Anne, and his brother, Edmund. It is interesting that the audience is turned to pestilent vapours, diseased and ghostlike. In 1600, John Marston described his preference for private theatres since, “a man shall not be choked / With the stench of garlic, nor be pasted / To the barmy jacket of a beer brewer.” Thomas Middleton wrote in 1604 of “a dull audience of stinkards sitting in the penny galleries of a theatre and yawning on the players” (Wells, pp.17–18).
 - 37 Recalling Jaques’ muddled “All the world’s a stage” speech from *As You Like It*. Shakespeare and Jonson shared a creative environment where, as Ronald Bedford put it, “the common play on the familiar stage-world, world-stage analogy ... Erasmus, Montaigne and a host of others indicate, lies at the heart of early modern theatrical theology” (p.55).

- 38 Rosencrantz metatheatrically refers to the flag: “Hercules and his load too” (2.2.362–3).
- 39 A black flag indicated a performance of tragedy derived from the Senecan tradition: bloody plot, overblown rhetoric, shallow characterization. Margreta de Grazia summarized the Senecan “formula” as “murder, madness, and revenge” peppered by a “grab-bag of sententiae” (p.7). “The ghost of Hamlet’s father derives from the ghosts in Seneca’s *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* ... unlike them, Hamlet’s father modifies the call for revenge; ‘not let thy soul contrive / against thy mother ought’” (Miola, pp.29–44).
- 40 The dumb-show had potentially been a feature of Senecan-era theatre. Suetonius records: “the accompanist, however – who played a flute and made the necessary dumbshow to illustrate the words” (p.24). The native Christian inheritance, the Mystery cycles had technical and philosophical elements that helped, along with Saints plays such as *The Conversion of St. Paul*.
- 41 T.S. Eliot argued for Kyd’s authorship of the earlier *Hamlet*. Harold Bloom considered it an early work by Shakespeare (*Invention* p.383). As for the influence of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Eliot remarks that “there are verbal parallels so close ... as to leave us in no doubt that in places Shakespeare was merely revising the text of Kyd” (*Essays*, pp.122–3).
- 42 *Hamlet* is Senecan because “by the time that *The Spanish Tragedy* and the old *Hamlet* had made their success, the English playwright was under the influence of Seneca by being under the influence of his own predecessors” (*Essay*, p.63).
- 43 Induction to Robert Greene’s *Menaphon* (1589).
- 44 Paul Cantor argued, “at the fountainhead of the English revenge play tradition, the issue of active pursuit of revenge versus the passive renunciation of revenge is articulated in terms of the classical versus the Christian traditions” (pp.26–7). An instructive description of the structural similarity between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet* can be found in Maquerlot’s *Shakespeare and the Mannerist Tradition* (pp.88–9), notably what Gregory Semenza called “The Spanish Tragedy’s replacement of the declamatory style of Senecan tragedy with a more open-ended dramatic one... its radical rejection of the Aristotelian aesthetic of mimesis in favour of one emphasising an indeterminate relationship between representation and reality” (p.159).
- 45 Shakespeare deploys Kyd’s neo-Senecan technique in *Hamlet*, particularly the “antic disposition.” Yet, *Hamlet* also inherits “another element, not always sufficiently distinguished from the Senecan... something more indigenous” (*Essays*, p.65) that we see most clearly reflected in the graveyard scene. Shakespeare previously challenged the neo-Senecan tradition. *Titus Andronicus* is an overwrought, Senecan-styled tragedy. Titus doubts the classical tradition: “Rome is but a wilderness of tigers” (3.1.54). The rape and mutilation of Lavinia is compared to the myth of Philomel from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: “This is the tragic tale of Philomel” (4.1.47).
- 46 Aristotle, pp.11–12.
- 47 Frank Lucas described Senecan tragedy as having “no action on the stage, [they] employ rhetorical devices, detailed descriptions, hyperboles, aphorisms, epigrams, abundant maxims and sententious utterances” (p.57). Seneca’s tragedies had been based on Athenian plays. *Phaedra*, for instance, was based on Euripides’ *Hippolytus* and, to neoclassicists, this made Senecan drama synonymous with the Athenian precedent that was itself multifaceted. Jonson’s neoclassicism imagined itself both Senecan and Aristotelian.

- 48 “Composed, not for stage performance, but for private declamation” (Essays, p.53).
- 49 Alfred Harbage noted: “unless we are ready to believe that Shakespeare was submitting this sample of the unaffected style ... quite without guile, we must yield to the suggestion of parody. That he should choose as target the one coterie play by Marlowe, whom he admired, need not seem surprising” (p.293).
- 50 The bawdy pun is on the first syllable of the word “country.”
- 51 *Hamlet* critiques Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy* since, “the bankruptcy of English drama, dwelling especially upon the defects of those very themes and techniques that Shakespeare was destined to glorify” (Harbage p.316). Hamlet scolds clowns like William Kemp, who had left the Lord Chamberlain’s Men to be replaced by Robert Armin: “And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is 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 mean time, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered” (3.2.39–44). This critique of Sidney’s distaste for “mingling kings and clowns” that had “neither decency nor discretion” should be taken at face value.
- 52 “Bodleian First Folio Online.” Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. <https://firstfolio.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>
- 53 T. W. F. Baldwin, *Debunked Jonson’s Claim in William Shakespeare’s Small Latin and Less Greek Urbana*. University of Illinois Press, 1944.
- 54 Pope, pp.10–11.
- 55 Johnson, p.59. It is difficult to read the metatheatrical Prologue to *Henry V* as a work “of happy ignorance.”
- 56 Neoclassicists continued to miscategorize Shakespeare. Voltaire wrote to Bernard Joseph Saurin in 1765 that Shakespeare: “c’était un sauvage qui avait de l’imagination” – “he was a savage who had some imagination.” The intricate unravelling of neoclassicism in *Hamlet* was not forgiven by neoclassicists. This is part of the reason that Hamlet’s “mirror up to nature” has been missed as a parody. Regarding *Hamlet*, Voltaire described, “a vulgar and barbarous drama, which would not be tolerated by the vilest populace of France, or Italy ... one would imagine this piece to be the work of a drunken savage.” Voltaire continues in ‘Dissertation sur la Tragédie’: “But amidst all these vulgar irregularities, which to this day make the English drama so absurd and so barbarous, there are to be found in Hamlet, by a bizarrerie still greater, some sublime passages, worthy of the greatest genius. It seems as though nature had mingled in the brain of Shakespeare the greatest conceivable strength and grandeur with whatsoever witless vulgarity can devise that is lowest and most detestable.”
- 57 In Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published in 1776, St. Paul was identified as the harbinger of the “age of superstition and incredulity.” Responding to eighteenth-century neoclassicism, the Romantic poet John Keats conceived Hamlet’s “negative capability.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge glimpsed Hamlet “through a glass darkly”— “the superfluous activities of Hamlet’s mind ... is constantly occupied with the world within, and abstracted from the world without, – giving substance to shadows” (p.344). Coleridge describes Hamlet’s Pauline conscience, “giving substance to shadows.” Two centuries earlier, Jonson’s strident neoclassicism provoked a wary Shakespeare into revealing both the purpose and method of a Pauline conception of drama with Hamlet’s “mirror up to nature” parody. However, despite the Romantic reading of Hamlet’s “nature,” neoclassical ideologues successfully buried the irony of Hamlet’s speech. Setting Jonson’s revisionist eulogy

aside, Hamlet's "mirror up to nature," read as parody, overturned the strict conventions of Elizabethan neoclassical drama.

- 58 Bednarz, p.3.
- 59 Stanley Wells notes William Kemp and two other members of The Lord Chamberlain's Men spent three months performing in the Danish court at Elsinore in 1586 (p.32). Now that Robert Armin had taken over as principal comic, the skull of Yorick, lamentably held by Hamlet as he remembers his old friend, is perhaps a *memento mori* for Kemp, the old-school tumbler whose, "gambols ... songs ... flashes of merriment," had once set "the table on a roar" at Elsinore (5.1.187-9).
- 60 Ben Jonson wrote, "gentle Shakespeare" in the Preface to the First Folio (1623).
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Stanley Wells argued in *Shakespeare and Co.: Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, John Fletcher and the Other Players in His Story*, "Jonson was thought to be satirized in the bragging and doltish figure of Ajax in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*," (p.139).
- 63 The back and forth between Shakespeare and Jonson is described by Guildenstern: "O there has been much throwing about of brains" (2.2.359-60).
- 64 Jonson referred to a character from *Henry IV, Part Two* in *Every Man Out of His Humour*: "This is a kinsman to Justice Silence" (5.2.16).
- 65 The Latinate language of court was exemplified by John Lyly's *Euphues* (1578). The tradition, however, predates its exemplar. In *Art of Rhetoric* (1553), Thomas Wilson parodies the burden of erudition: "Pondering, expending, and revolting with myself your ingent affability and ingenious capacity for mundane affairs, I cannot but celebrate and extol your magnificent dexterity above all other. For how could you have adepted such illustrate prerogative and dominical superiority if the fecundity of your ingeny had not been so fertile and wonderfully pregnant?" (*Sixteenth Century English Literature*, p.14).
- 66 Hunt warns of the effect of this flummery: "[what] must replace the mirror of drama when an age's diction, the language that makes up the dialogue of drama, is so artificial that it cannot reliably perform language's role in making drama 'reflect the form and pressure of the age'" (p.56).
- 67 Jonson's notebooks, published posthumously in 1640, included this reference to Shakespeare: "I remember that the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare that in his writing he never blotted a line. My answer hath been, 'Would he had blotted a thousand.'"
- 68 In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare mocked the glass of language with a reference to his father, John, the Stratford glover: "A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turn'd outward!" (3.1.11-12). T.S. Eliot emphasized, "the versification is variable," putting "both workmanship and thought in an unstable position" (*Hamlet*, pp.143-4). Smith remarked, "in Shakespeare's *Richard II* even the Gardener talks in a sustained and elegant blank verse, as if the playworld at all levels is steeped in the tragic idiom" (p.143).
- 69 Durant, *Caesar and Christ*: "Luther made Paul the Apostle of the Reformation" (p.592).
- 70 *Luther's Works*, Volume 1, p. 147.
- 71 "... but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well" (Martin Luther, "Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans,"

- 1522). Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus* is also set in Wittenberg for a diabolic purpose: “Of riper years, to Wertenberg he went, / Whereas his kinsmen chiefly brought him up / So soon he profits in divinity, / The fruitful plot of scholarism grac’d, / That shortly he was grac’d with doctor’s name, / Excelling all whose sweet delight disputes / In heavenly matters of theology” (1.1.13–9).
- 72 Roland Mushat Frye, *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine*. Princeton University Press, 2015, p.138.
- 73 From Luther’s Wittenberg lectures: “for God certainly did not give us our reason and the advice and aid which it supplies in order to have us contemptuously disregard them” (*Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine*, p.162).
- 74 Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals*, xv, 44. On the execution of St. Paul, evidence comes from Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* ii, 25; and iii, 1 where Tertullian is quoted as describing the beheading and Origen is said to have written, “Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome under Nero.” In *The Acts of Paul*, a second-century work of New Testament apocrypha, St. Paul was said to have been decapitated on the orders of Nero.
- 75 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VI.
- 76 Suetonius, p.38.
- 77 T. S. Eliot remarked this is “not the attitude of Seneca, but is derived from Seneca [...] the attitude of self-dramatization assumed by some of Shakespeare’s heroes at moments of tragic intensity” (*Essays*, p.110). *Felicitas* was what Stoics hoped for in death: freedom from earthly concerns.
- 78 It is plausible that Shakespeare associated Hamlet with Saint Patrick, a young Briton surviving capture by pirates to bring Christianity to Ireland. Hamlet survived his sea voyage to England by escaping Rosencrantz and Guildenstern into the hands of “a pirate of very warlike appointment” (4.6.16), before returning to Denmark. Hamlet’s capture by pirates is related to Horatio in a letter, recalling St. Paul’s epistolary ministry.
- 79 Shakespeare helped name his company’s new home the Globe Theatre, only to write the play *Hamlet*, for it, which relentlessly mocks Jonson’s *theatrum mundi* conceit.
- 80 “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14)
- 81 The Gravediggers’ banter reaffirms the Christian worldview of a typical Elizabethan Englishman in contrast to Jonson’s urbane neoclassicism.
- 82 Similar to a passage from Calvin (*Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine*, p.204).
- 83 “O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do: / They pray: grant thou, lest faith turn to despair” (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.5.103–4).
- 84 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book IX.
- 85 Cox, p.57.
- 86 Debora Shuger argues, “what Renaissance persons do see in the mirror are instead saints, skulls, friends, offspring, spouses, magistrates, Christ” (p.37); in other words, ideals rather than the inner self. Therefore, although the “pervasive fascination with mirroring would seem to suggest that the mirror both registered and elicited a new awareness of individual identity” (p.22), Shuger argues that the literature does not support this assumption. Philippa Kelly’s Early Modern Literary Studies 8.1 paper (May 2002), “Surpassing Glass: Shakespeare’s Mirrors,” agrees with Shuger’s premise: “Debora Shuger argues that mirrors in early modern English artistic practice - writings, paintings, woodcuts and the like - describe not a reflexive self-consciousness that might be seen to herald the birth of modern subjectivity, but, in fact, the reverse: she suggests that while representations of mirrors reflected many things, they

almost never revealed, or even purported to display, an individuated self. They were instruments of correction; platonically-angled, upward-tilted mirrors intended to reflect paradigms of virtue; remembrances of mortality; and cruel reminders that sins like that of vanity must be punished. On this basis Shuger argues convincingly that the early modern mirror was not a Burkhardtian exemplar of the birth of an individuated self, but the mark of a culture that did not yet have a place, or a vocabulary for, the kind of 'I' with which we are now so familiar" (p.10). "Debora Shuger concludes that while people four centuries ago wouldn't have hesitated to use an available mirror to remove spinach from their teeth, the mirror as trope had a special function. Rather than a pre-emptive sign of our own contemporary, post-industrial individuality, it was the opposite. It designated a self that lacked 'reflexivity, self-consciousness, and individuation, and hence differed fundamentally from what we usually think of as the modern self'" (p.14). Kelly quotes Melchior-Bonnet's view that the early modern mirror was, "not yet an instrument of individual rights even if it allowed the possibility of a solitary interaction with the self. The feeling of selfhood that the mirror awakened was a conflictual one of modesty or shame, consciousness of the body and of one's appearance under the watchful eye of another" (p.15). Hunt responds to Grabes' assertion that there is "nothing extraordinary" in Hamlet's advice to the First Player with the concern that it, "implies that the playwright ultimately had a didactic end ... by doing so he would resemble Ben Jonson" (p.51). Hunt also argues, "The precise image of Richard's face thus develops his self-consciousness, his subjective idea of an identity that still needs ripening" (p.7), and "The complex process occasioned by seeing one's face reflected in a mirror in this poem [sonnet 3] begets self-consciousness, an early modern prototype of modern subjectivity" (p.7).

- 87 Montaigne's *Essais* were available in French from 1580 and proved highly influential philosophical examinations of human nature. The first English translation of Montaigne's *Essays* by John Florio was published in 1603, titled "The Essayes, or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo. Michaell de Montaigne, Knight of the Noble Order of St. Michael, and one of the Gentlemen in Ordinary of the French King, Henry the Third his Chamber." Hamlet's soliloquies are "designed to *look like* they have some share in the Montaigne moment" (Lewis, p.36).
- 88 Patterson argued economic forces reformed the notion of self since, "the needs of capitalism required an ideology that would define [a person] as an individual free to sell his labour" (p.96). George Lukacs connected this, "to the second flowering of tragedy during the Renaissance. This time the world-historical collision between dying feudalism and the birth pangs of the final class society." Taking on "inherently formalist" metadramatic critics, Jean Howard argued, "drama's incessant preoccupation with dramatic practices did not so much indicate theatrical narcissism as the widespread emergence of a 'dramatic sense of life' resulting from both the secularization of Renaissance culture and from the social changes, including heightened social mobility, attendant upon the prolonged and uneven transition from feudalism to capitalism." (p.10). Caroline Belsey believed that "this crisis of subjectivity" was caused by "a major change in economic practice" (p.88), producing what Terry Eagleton would call "the banalities of bourgeois subjectivity" (Katz, p.172).
- 89 Shuger argues, "only in Montaigne does one find selfhood imagined as a recessed space (*arrière-boutique*) where one goes to be alone" (p.38). "The world as a stage, action as performance" (Graham, p.248). Hamlet rejects the Ciceronian idea that, "no one can have a substantial personality, but always

- only ‘craft fresh roles’ in the never-ending power struggles of human sociality” (Vangshardt, p.273), but also demonstrates that Montaigne’s “optimistically circuitous individualism offers no viable alternative” (Lewis, p.36).
- 90 Referring to Cicero’s *De Finibus*, Montaigne wrote, “We may make an exit from our life which doth not please, as from a stage” (*Essais*).
- 91 Paul S. Fiddes argues the whole passage resonates with Psalm 8:4-6 (p.156).
- 92 “So completely and unconsciously Pauline is the Western idea of man we long failed to identify the source of Shakespeare’s anthropology” (Cox, p.50).
- 93 Reminiscent of Asper’s “anatomised.”
- 94 Hamlet enacts the theological idea of the Christian soul and not the neoclassical role or John Stuart Mill’s *homo economicus*.
- 95 If the *hamartia* in Sophocles’ “I am Oedipus” defines what we might call Aristotelian tragedy, “Who’s there?” intimates the Shakespearean revolution. Lee Patterson described the moment: “when that individualist concept of the self will enter into crisis ... we recognize Hamlet as a kindred spirit: he expresses our modernity” (Patterson, p.98).
- 96 “The revived meditative tradition out of which religious mannerism grew had developed in large part as an attempt to nullify or circumvent the chilling authenticity of the new science, whose positing a mechanistic universe in the sixteenth century had seemed to make God’s continued presence superfluous and man himself miserably insignificant” (*Renaissance perspectives in literature and the visual arts*, p.340).
- 97 Conceptually, Hamlet’s Pauline response to the dogma of neoclassicism found precedent in late antiquity when Christianity changed the rigid order of the Augustan plastic arts into the fluid mannerism of Constantine’s Rome. Jas Elsner and John Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100–450*. Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.16–18. A similar contrast will be made between Caesar’s Rome and Cleopatra’s Egypt in *Antony and Cleopatra*.
- 98 Jean-Pierre Maquerlot wrote in the Preface to *Shakespeare and the Mannerist Tradition*, “these artists cultivated structural ambiguity or dissonance in reaction to the classical canons of the High Renaissance ... close readings of Shakespeare’s plays, from the period 1599 to 1604, reveal intriguing analogies with Mannerist art, while illuminating the dramatist’s response to the rhetorical formalism of his Elizabethan predecessors.” Madness and revelatory visions feed the counter-reformation art of Tintoretto, while El Greco was said to have used an inmate from the lunatic asylum in Toledo for his dreamlike image of St. Paul.
- 99 The shift from the stability of Michelangelo’s David (1504) to the dynamic movement of Bernini’s David (1624) illustrates the shift from static, geocentric and anthropocentric order to movement, uncertainty, psychological intensity, instability and doubt.
- 100 Shakespeare’s response was Pauline and neo-Platonic. Hamlet reclaims for the artist, by way of Pauline Christianity, that representation of the Platonic Idea stolen from poets in *Republic*.
- 101 “And the Sun abode, and the moon stood still, until the people avenged themselves upon their enemies: so the Sun abode in the midst of the heaven, and hasted not to go down for a whole day” (Joshua 10:13).
- 102 Martin Luther wrote in *Tischreden*: “There is talk of a new astrologer who wants to prove that the earth moves and goes around instead of the sky, the sun, the moon, just as if somebody were moving in a carriage or ship might hold that he was sitting still and at rest while the earth and the trees walked

and moved. But that is how things are nowadays: when a man wishes to be clever he must needs invent something special, and the way he does it must needs be the best! The fool wants to turn the whole art of astronomy upside-down. However, as Holy Scripture tells us, so did Joshua bid the sun to stand still and not the earth.”

- 103 *Cardenio*, a lost play possibly written by Shakespeare in collaboration with John Fletcher and performed by King’s Men in 1613, took its title from Part One of *Don Quixote*, in which a madman called Cardenio lives in a tree raging against the man that stole his betrothed. *Cardenio* was written a year after the publication of Thomas Shelton’s translation of *Don Quixote* (1612). Lewis Theobald claimed to have adapted the lost play into *Double Falsehood*, performed in 1727, which is included in the *Arden Shakespeare, Complete Works*.
- 104 Bloom said of Quixote: “Crazed by reading, the knight is in quest of a new self ... [his] madness is deliberate, self-inflicted, a traditional poetic strategy ... I cannot think of any other work where the relations between words and deeds are as ambiguous as in Don Quixote, except ... for Hamlet” (*The Knight*). William Worden, “Sancho Panza, Illiterate Literary Critic, and the Unmasking of Generic Conventions in Don Quixote,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 43 (4) (2006): 498–514.
- 105 In the Translator’s Note, Edith Grossman wrote that *Don Quixote* is, “the book that crystallized forever the making of literature out of life and literature, that explored in typically ironic fashion, and for the first time, the blurred and shifting frontiers between fact and fiction, imagination and history, perception and physical reality” (p.xix). Daniel Eisenberg argued that Cervantes thought of Quixote as a converso Christian with Jewish Sephardi ancestry and Sancho as a Catholic peasant. *La actitud de Cervantes hacia sus antepasados judaicos*. Cervantes y las religiones. Actas Del Coloquio Internacional de la Asociación de Cervantistas. pp.55–78.