

# Gertrude and Claudius: Reverse-engineering Shakespeare

Patrick Christopher Kavanagh BA, MA

English & Creative Writing Department Aberystwyth University

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This thesis is dedicated to memory of my grandmother Margaret Fogarty — my favourite storyteller and a continued source of inspiration.

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# Act I

## Scene i

[A WATCHING POST OUTSIDE ELSINORE CASTLE]

FIRST GUARD: (LOW) Wake! Wake! The moon's become a man and walks the earth.

SECOND GUARD: Christ! If a man can't sleep on night duty — when can he?

FIRST GUARD: (LOW) There — look! — something luminous moves. You see?

SECOND GUARD: I see that you're of that persuasion?

FIRST GUARD: 'Persuasion'?

SECOND GUARD: As I see it — and I've been soldiering nigh on thirty year — there's three types of man'll take up night duty: them that want to do that duty with valour! (ASIDE) Always the worst sort. (TO FIRST GUARD) Them that've been to war and, having seen that bald hell, prefer these idle hours. Then there's them that think every barn owl's a banshee! *You* are one such fellow: frittish and frog-headed!

FIRST GUARD: There's something out there, I say — something like a man!

SECOND GUARD: 'Something *like* a man'? (ASIDE) Did you ever hear the like of it? (TO FIRST GUARD) Until such time as it proves otherwise, why not simply say 'a man', which, it being *like*, it will likely prove to be? Why bandy about such rhubarb as 'something *like* a man'? For, in that fashion the sun (a thing's familiar as one's thumb) becomes, 'a strange light in the heavens!' Speak plain, man! — or, failing that, keep shtum!

FIRST GUARD: Whatever it is, its bent upon our watching place.

SECOND GUARD: Never mind *what* it is — *where* is it? All I can make out is the lick of light upon the stream and the dark smudge of forest there beyond.

FIRST GUARD: Can you not make out the ruined church?

SECOND GUARD: I can see where I think it should stand.

FIRST GUARD: There, see, moving now among the gravestones: a pale figure that looks to be lit from within.

SECOND GUARD: (ASIDE) What a lug to be lumbered with the whole night long.

[SECOND GUARD LIES DOWN]

FIRST GUARD: What are you doing?

SECOND GUARD: Well, this 'something like a man' is a good mile off yet — if he's there at all. (PAUSE) Wake me when he reaches the end of the road.

FIRST GUARD: You mean to sleep while the enemy's abroad? By the heavens, I stand amazed!

SECOND GUARD: Well, don't *stand* so there, consuming all the fire's warmth.

FIRST GUARD: I don't know how you can sleep?

SECOND GUARD: If you'd belt up, I might make a stab at sleeping!

[FIRST GUARD WATCHES IN SILENCE FOR SOME TIME. HE BEGINS TO LIMBER UP AS THOUGH IN PREPARATION FOR A FIGHT. HE PRACTICES UNSHEATHING HIS SWORD, WHICH CLAMOURS AGAINST HIS SHIELD BEFORE FALLING TO THE GROUND]

SECOND GUARD: Christ above and all belong to 'em! [RISES] If it's company you're after, say so. Arsing about in the dead of the night...

FIRST GUARD: See now where it comes?

SECOND GUARD: (ASIDE) You know, there *is* something out there! That, or skittishness is catching.

FIRST GUARD: We stand duty bound to challenge it — for King, for country!

SECOND GUARD: Alright, alright — relax. Wait till we get a gander at the fellow first before you go committing us to any affray. There's only the two of us in it!

FIRST GUARD: And only *one* approaching!

SECOND GUARD: Your right: two against one is cowardly — I'll stand watch and see you give 'em a fair fight.

FIRST GUARD: Who's there? Stand and unfold yourself!

[PAUSE. SILENCE]

FIRST GUARD: Who's there, I say?

[PAUSE. SILENCE]

FIRST GUARD: Are you a friend to this ground?

SECOND GUARD: (LOW) He's a quare-hawk! I'll say that for 'em!

FIRST GUARD: See how it opens its mouth — gawpingly — as if to cry out, but seems starved of sound.

SECOND GUARD: His outstretched hand. What's there? Look! He beckons us approach.

FIRST GUARD: I fear it's an accurséd thing, which these black hours regurgitate.

SECOND GUARD: Christ above! (ASIDE) This boob makes matters worse!

'Accurséd thing', 'black hours'? I ask ye! (TO FIRST GUARD) For the love of God, go down and see what he wants.

FIRST GUARD: I've often heard it said that speaking to an apparition such as this mangles the mind, corrupting all her alleyways, till, map-less, a man's left foreign even to himself.

SECOND GUARD: (ASIDE) He's very like a scholar at times: puts things eloquently — makes no sense. (PAUSE) I'll go. (ASIDE) My sanity's worse imperilled here with him.

[EXITS. RETURNS WITH A SCROLL]

SECOND GUARD: A missive. From Norway: 'Let none but Claudius, prince of Denmark, see what's writ within'. Come! We'll deliver it straight and fetch this lad along with us.

## Scene ii

[A ROOM IN THE CASTLE. GUARDS, MONK, CORAMBIS WAIT. ENTER PRINCE CLAUDIUS]

CLAUDIUS: Still night? What is the clock, Corambis?

CORAMBIS: The last and darkest hour, my Lord. These are

two men of the watch; and this lank fellow:

a Norwegian monk — silence incarnate.

CLAUDIUS: He's mute by ordinance of his order, then?

CORAMBIS: That, and the fact that his tongue's been cut out.

CLAUDIUS: Poor man, the violence done him screams

itself deaf, and wants fair hearing.

CORAMBIS: He bears a missive from Norway's king.

CLAUDIUS: Old Norway and I were schooled at Wittenberg...

(PAUSE) But, can it be right that he seeks *me* out?

CORAMBIS: You, my Lord, in preference to your brother,

which slaps the face of precedent. Treason's

claim may fall upon you even to receive it!

CLAUDIUS: You suspect malignancy in this?

CORAMBIS: We cannot know the current till we wade

into the waters deep...

CLAUDIUS: ...aye, up to our necks!

CORAMBIS: And this mute messenger will not betray

the contents of it. He's like a library at night —

his words locked up and black within him.

CLAUDIUS: Have a sentry read.

CORAMBIS: (TO SECOND GUARD) Cousin, you can read?

SECOND GUARD: Only the sky to say a storm might come.

CLAUDIUS: (ASIDE) Indeed, such augury is wanted here.

FIRST GUARD: He lies! On receiving the scroll, he read the address.

SECOND GUARD: (ASIDE) See, how I am partnered with a prat!

(TO PRINCE CLAUDIUS) Yes, my Lord, but I cannot read with such

facility as royal ears deserve;

I stutter and start like an old ass

upon the broken path.

CLAUDIUS: ...but still you reach

your destination. Come, sieve the thing;

we'll have the wheat. There's wisdom in your eyes.

[SECOND GUARD TAKES THE SCROLL. HE READS FOR A WHILE. THEN  
TURNS THE THING UP THE RIGHT WAY. HE READS ON]

SECOND GUARD: He goes the long way round to say a little,

as I can make it out.

CORAMBIS: ...what is the nub?

SECOND GUARD: The Norwegian King prefers the present placement

of his head — where it sits upon his shoulders —

and seeks to maintain it by diplomatic means.

Lands are offered, taxes, titles — a dowried

daughter is a few times talked of too.

CLAUDIUS: This diplomacy, it's tainted with treason?

SECOND GUARD: A passing suggestion that you might dispatch

with your brother, the king; but it is scarcely

a sentence proper.

CLAUDIUS: ...and yet it is a *sentence*.

(TO CORAMBIS. LOW)

Old Norway, stupefied with fear, offers

me to swig from this pollution. No.

I'll go directly to the Queen — expose it!

CORAMBIS: That's the safe and secure course, my Lord;

I will come along with you, bearing witness

to your ignorance— eh, *innocence* in this.

And thereby, keep you from collusion's charge.

[EXIT BOTH. WITH FIRST GUARD AND MONK THEREAFTER]

SECOND GUARD: They say a fool is cursed to talk too much,

the wise man knows when he's heard enough!

This mute (quiet as a cancer) comes

to infect the court. (PAUSE) I do not think

the little ration of my life will last  
much longer here. Rather than stay, and serve  
as loyal sentry in my grave, I'll be  
a country all myself; march to the drum  
beat of the heart! The order of the world's  
undone. What yesterday was whole and one  
has cracked and come apart! Adieu, adieu...

[EXIT SECOND GUARD]

## Scene iii

[THE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER. THE QUEEN AND FREYA (SHARING A BED)  
ARE AWAKENED BY NOISE WITHIN THE CASTLE]

GERTRUDE: Why this racket — what's the time?

FREYA: ...the sky is dark.

GERTRUDE: Some alarm is raised?

GERTRUDE: ...noise without.

FREYA: I will absent myself lest it is thought

I have usurped the rightful place of a king.

GERTRUDE: No, stay. Secrete yourself behind the arras

and record the general din within.

I'll desire your counsel once they've gone.

[FREYA HIDES. A KNOCK. GERTRUDE SPEAKS FROM INSIDE HER ROOM]

GERTRUDE: Who there avers some greater claim upon

our royal personage than sleep may vouch?

CORAMBIS: The Prince of Denmark and his loyal clerk,

Corambis, do, with multiplied apology,

upend the night to start the day so soon.

We come with certain cause and purpose urgent.

GERTRUDE: What? Has the moon split to spill

her silver gore into the sea? Or do

the graves regurgitate their maggoty meat,  
that the dead are seen to walk the earth?  
What chimera made corporeal warrants this  
hard, jarring syncopation now?

[SHE OPENS THE DOOR. ENTER CLAUDIUS & CORAMBIS]

GERTRUDE: What business can be done by this poor light?

CORAMBIS: Treason it seems...

GERTRUDE: ...then come no further in!

I have a blade here'll unpack the entrails  
of any man who envies me my life.

CORAMBIS: No. No. No such malice is meant  
the Queen. We come to weed out treason  
— not to sow the seed ourselves.

CLAUDIUS: ...we're friends.

Wild ramblings are delivered in  
the dread part of the night. Here, in these  
scant pages. Old Norway's fevered dreams!

[CORAMBIS HANDS HER THE MISSIVE]

GERTRUDE: (ASIDE) And now I feign to read anew what I  
have partly authored. (TO THE COMPANY) These are flimsy words,  
that weigh so light our dear King's life ...

CORAMBIS: We do not know the inked notation point  
for point; except to say it hums of foulness.

CLAUDIUS: Norway is your uncle. Though you're long  
lived here among the Danes, you'll know the hue  
and contour of his mind. These scribbles bear his character?

GERTRUDE: This is Norway as I have known him:  
olive branch in one hand, a blade hid  
in the other. Titles with such ease he gives—  
north-most lands are offered which it's doubtful  
any Dane may ever occupy.  
But, the careful computation of  
these taxes speaks of serious intent.

CLAUDIUS: How can he, for a second, suppose that I'd  
assassinate my brother – let alone a king?

GERTRUDE: (ASIDE) From that low-hanging branch, with serpentine  
seduction, I have bid Old Norway eat  
and so grow wise. Now is the index of the action...

(TO THE COMPANY) Some men by their absence better recommend  
themselves. Leave us then, Corambis; I alone  
with the Prince will contrive to unpick this puzzle.

[EXIT CORAMBIS]

CLAUDIUS: The night poor counterfeits the day; pale moonlight  
misremembers once-familiar forms,

the fowl of the air and cattle of the field  
appear to be transmogrified by gloom...

GERTRUDE: And here are we both fitfully awake!

(PAUSE)

There was a time when you would visit me  
at night, or perhaps it was a dream I had?

CLAUDIUS: Let's hear no more of that. For love  
was like an illness then and we, being young,  
were most susceptible.

GERTRUDE: ...I see that you've  
recovered well — while I am queasy still  
with that affliction.

CLAUDIUS: ...the King took you  
as his wife and hails you, 'Majesty'.  
There it lies: deaf and dumb and looking  
all agog.

GERTRUDE: ...what cool fish is this?  
Where's young Claudius: the boy who sang  
me foreign songs; ensnared me with soft kisses?

CLAUDIUS: Is this a time to speak of love — when Norway  
schemes against our King? And thinks I'd kill—

GERTRUDE: Now more than ever we must speak of love!  
The lands here all about — of German, Pole,  
Norwegian ground — cry to us for mercy.  
There, toddlers crawl who'll never say Papa;

panic-stricken mothers scant decipher  
daylight from the horror of their dreams;  
cattle wild-eyed stumble through the noisome din  
to wail their songs of lamentation.

There, houses, become kindling, smoulder still;  
and a wreck of mangled bodies, strewn, ungraven —  
have but the foetid stench of rot for funerary cense...

All is chaos! All calamity!  
For what? All's for a despot's glorying;  
all to excite his sycophantic train.

Insatiable pride – the pissing match writ large!  
If it weren't acutely venomous  
(this sickness of self-love, this very  
pestilence of pomp). Surely, we'd  
have laughed it out of existence long ago.

Is there any nicer idiocy than war?  
Where Mankind's nocence corrupts Nature's creed  
of beauty in abundance. Let's be done!

This tit-for-tat legitimated by  
our history books; as if 'history'  
(which is myth in academic garb)  
could coat the gory doings of an oligarch  
with the wet gleam of respectability.

The mud-eating worm, the fish in the pond,  
the insect and the elephant alike,

all love their tiny lives, and rightly fly  
from danger to prolong this little stay,  
this snatched at breath, this blinking brevity.  
Existence is the fabric we are clothed in!  
O, flimsy? Yes! Ill-fitting. And a skiffle  
job? No doubt. But who would be stripped?  
Who'd so keenly throw the garment off,  
or nake another for this flitter we call fame?  
O, say that you see: the King's a cancer  
to be cut away! This court wants surgery!

CLAUDIUS: (LOW) What you speak now is wild and wanton!

GERTRUDE: And yet, you will attend wild talk.

CLAUDIUS: What do you mean? I cannot help but hear!

GERTRUDE: You love the King?

CLAUDIUS: ...as well as any Dane!

GERTRUDE: Then, only as a subject must. That love's

a love mechanical, which buckles

at the wheel; stuttered by a loosened cog.

Can you say you love your brother? No!

He and you run weft to warp along.

Norway knows that you're the strategian here;

the King, like a boy who prods a termite mound,

delights in mayhem only.

CLAUDIUS: ...it's true, it's true

that I have often baulked at his brutality,

but Denmark loves him; hails him, Champion!

GERTRUDE: On what addition does that sum rely?

CLAUDIUS: The knowledge is banal beyond inquiry.

GERTRUDE: Travel just a little further than

the precincts of our court and you will spy

dissent: in the once-quiet market towns

where stationed soldiers nuisance now. Or, ask

the plebeian poor who offer up their sons

for certain slaughter. It's the king who trumps

of Danish loyalty, with boasts of filial love —

but beyond these walls that wail sounds shrill

and hallow in the smoking air. Our first

duty is the love we owe ourselves!

This king — who'd drown his lap dog on a dare —

is injurious to that decree. Can such

a king as this be ranked above the self?

CLAUDIUS: (LOW) We must not speak of treason here! These walls

are pocked with peepholes and the very air

has ears.

GERTRUDE: ...then let us speak of peace, which we

alone can safe secure — consider that at least.

Let's speak no more until we've slept, and bathe

and better know ourselves. Good night, my Lord.

[EXIT PRINCE CLAUDIUS. GERTRUDE SECURES THE DOOR ONCE HE HAS LEFT]

GERTRUDE: Come out, my little bird. If you're awake?

[ENTER FREYA]

FREYA: So wide awake; I'll never sleep again.

GERTRUDE: You're angry?

FREYA: No. Excited — by the action still to come.

GERTRUDE: No. Don't dissimulate with me. For we  
alone, of all the people on the earth,  
must traffic now in honesty. What stone  
is in your sandal, Freya?

FREYA: ...it's silly.

GERTRUDE: I command you: say what's on your mind.

FREYA: Ha! That the queen regards the Prince  
with such affection— vexes me.

GERTRUDE: ...Freya!

You read affection where affectation is  
transcribed! You know the stratagem as well  
as I; you wrote the piece, I play the part.

This 'affection' is a fiction — nothing more!

FREYA: But you and he were lovers in your youth!

GERTRUDE: What is 'young love'? With every other  
day another fancy! Impish! Impermanent.  
Don't allow the kink of jealousy  
corrupt the love that you and I both share.  
Without you I am zero when subtracted  
from itself; which, surely, is the larger part of naught!

FREYA: Forgive me. I want sleep, and I am flustered  
By seeing these things we've plotted come to pass.

GERTRUDE: Come back to the nest then little bird  
and rest awhile. We'll want our wits anon.

## Scene iv

[ENTER A FOOL, CARRYING A COCKEREL (A PUPPET)]

FOOL: (TO THE BIRD) Are you the bird that laid the hard-boiled egg?

(ANSWERING AS THE BIRD) I might be mister, I just might be! Sure, it all depends who's asking! (HIMSELF) Don't give me any of yer ole guff now! Ye don't know me from Adam! (BIRD) I didn't know Adam either! (HIMSELF) I could be anyone! Sure, mightn't I be the king himself? (BIRD) A half-ole-eejit like you, king? Cop yourself on! (HIMSELF) You're right, your right, of course. Sure, they'd never crown a half-eejit like me. (BIRD) No! Ye'd want to be an *out-n-out* eejit before they'd put a crown on your head round here! (HIMSELF) Christ above! Belt up will you! They'd have the head clean off your shoulders for that ole guff.

[ENTER CORIMBAS]

FOOL: Look who's in it now. (ASIDE) Here's a fellow very like a crab: a terrible crawler that always takes the sideways way around. (TO CORAMBIS) Good Morrow, fine Sir! Did juh wet the bed you're up this early?

CORAMBIS: Why keep a cock, sir, and crow yourself?

FOOL: This is not my cock, Sir. It's not my cock. In that you're very much mistaken! This is the King's cock, sir, I have in me hand! Do you not recognise it out of doors? (OFFERING THE BIRD) Will ye stroke 'em? Will ye stroke 'em? Ye will! He won't bite ye — if ye don't bite him!

CORAMBIS: Keep your tongue, Fool! To Insult me is to insult an officer of the King!  
Stand aside there!

FOOL: Tell me this now, sirrah, before you go: how would I recognise the King if I saw him about the place?

CORAMBIS: Can it be true, Fool, that you have never seen the king?

FOOL: Never, sir, in all me life! Nor ever any time before it!

CORAMBIS: The king, buffoon, is the one with the crown on his head!

FOOL: 'The king buffoon is the one with the crown on his head'. 'Crown on his head.' I'd write it down only I- (FUMBLES IN POCKETS) I can't read! Say it again to me now — till I memorialise it.

CORAMBIS: King, yes? Crown on head!

FOOL: (REFERRING TO THE COCKEREL) But, sure, this lad here has a crown on his head!

[ON HIS HANDS AND KNEES WITH THE COCKEREL HELD OUT BEFORE HIM]

FOOL: Your Majesty! Forgive me for my impotence!

[CORAMBIS STEPS OVER HIM AND EXITS]

FOOL: (ASIDE) Is he gone? Is he? I thought he'd never go! (TO THE BIRD) Didn't I say if ye're up early ye'd catch a worm?

[EXIT FOOL]

## Scene v.

[BEFORE DAWN. THE BATTLEMENTS. A SOLDIER. ENTER CLAUDIUS]

SOLDIER: Halt. Who's there?

CLAUDIUS: A spirit, cursed to walk the night...

SOLDIER: Let me run my sword through you: to test you're not a mortal man!

CLAUDIUS: (LAUGHS) Hold off that course, brave sentry. I am the Prince —

Claudius. Brother to the King.

SOLDIER: Beg pardon, my Lord. I hardly recognised your royal person in the darkness of the night.

CLAUDIUS: (ASIDE) Nor do I fully know myself tonight. (TO SOLDIER) I will take your place on watch. Go hug the fire's heat awhile.

SOLDIER: My lord, I cannot leave my post. I'm bound by solemn oath!

CLAUDIUS: A prince relieves you of that duty — go!

[EXIT SOLDIER]

CLAUDIUS: How well she sees into the heart of me...

It's right that I despise the king! (I mean,  
a pig in its suit of muss out-royals him.)

He lacks that dignity deserves a crown.

There's no warmth in him, no soft and yielding

nature... Even the awesome crocodile

will permit a plover's dentistry; the bee-

hive's violence becomes soft as smoke;  
the fearsome lion, and deadly hippo-bull  
will, once sated, slumber like a suckling,  
but this King's a beast untame, untamable...  
What meat might satisfy, or soporal fume  
disarm? What spell entreat him to a peace?  
I do not know, nor can I find the answer  
out. For, can you smooth an ocean over,  
reason with the wind? It is impossible!  
I fear it's obvious, this hatred that  
I bear? I feel I am transparent; that  
my schemes shine black as onyx in the Garden;  
each sly look, each movement miniscule,  
the very slack of my shoulders and the crook  
of my smile... reveal in me a cesspool  
of baseness: the grubby little man beneath  
the robe. O, dress me in darkness then  
and make my heart obsidian — hard  
and cold — if ever I should contemplate  
the killing of a king. But soft! Who's there?

[ENTER CORAMBIS]

CORAMBIS: My Lord, are you somewhere here?

CLAUDIUS: Here!

CORAMBIS: Where? The way is blind.

CLAUDIUS: (ASIDE) It seems that I'm at home in darkness. (TO CORAMBIS)

Follow my voice.

CORAMBIS: Is this you, my Lord? I might easily have mistaken you for a common guard.

CLAUDIUS: All cats are grey by night, or so the adage goes.

CORAMBIS: You've come to see the sun return?

CLAUDIUS: Or, to will it never do so!

CORAMBIS: You are troubled—

CLAUDIUS: Come. Answer evenly. What do you make of our King?

CORAMBIS: Eh. The King— the King is *noble*— more than that, the King is *magisterial*! He is, eh, a man — mark you! A man! Among men! And, though it need hardly be stated, I will be so bold as to say that he's a man amongst women also — if you take my meaning. He's *renowned*! *Regal*! My lord, the man is *royal*! (PAUSE) I can go on, if you so wish, my Lord.

CLAUDIUS: You can, indeed, and often do.

CORAMBIS: You find my answer wanting, my Lord?

CLAUDIUS: Let me summarise this *honest* answer of yours. In short, sans dressing, is it your contention that, The King is, eh, the King?

CORAMBIS: I could not, my Lord, have condensed the matter so well. But you are angry. My Lord?

CLAUDIUS: If you will only say what you intuit gives the least offence, then you're as informative as an echo! Speak your truth man! It is easily found — frothing here below the surface. Let it boil over and be known!

CORAMBIS: My mind is (as my body) subject to supremacy. I cannot, as you do, speak freely. Such freedom of expression is the wealth that only power buys.

CLAUDIUS: Corambis, you have known me since I was a boy. And so, I break you off a portion of that freedom, which we princes take for granted. Speak your heart without trespass taken or threat perceived.

CORAMBIS: You give your word?

CLAUDIUS: It's chief among the treasures I am heir to.

CORAMBIS: The King, your brother, is a tyrant!

CLAUDIUS: There now. The truth wants less breath than a lie. (PAUSE) Are we loyal to our king, or to our country first?

CORAMBIS: Our country, my lord, is greater than our King? We will have many kings but only ever have one country.

CLAUDIUS: But, is it corrupt to kill corruption? Say I became king by the killing of a king — I make my future murder sure in saying: kings are made by murder?

CORAMBIS: That is the risk. That is the risk.

CLAUDIUS: Then, let nothing disturb the still pool of my mind; for I will not kill this king!

## ACT II

### Scene i

[FREYA and the FOOL]

FOOL: It's said, that the artificer that inscribed the lines of Elsinore had one eye much enamoured with the other!

[COCKS HIS EYES TO ILLUSTRATE HIS POINT]

FOOL (cont.): So that the whole construction lies entangled. The many-headed Hydra, looking every way at once, could not unpuzzle it. The only certain way to proceed is to set out intending to get lost!

[ENTER FREYA]

FOOL: (ASIDE) Here's the bull now that's come to show the way. (TO FREYA)  
Hallo, Cousin! May I say, you carry yourself with fine comportment — you'll know, I'm sure, the lie of the land?

FREYA: You have strayed, sirrah? This complex of corridors leads to the Queen's quarters only.

FOOL: I swear this castle shifts beneath one till a Fool is soon confused.

FREYA: You're not the first man to lose himself this way!

FOOL: A bluebottle enters easily, but finds escape a trial. You, I'll wager, suppose you know the way?

FREYA: The thin thread of purpose corrects me in the maze.

FOOL: Purpose is the poor-man's compass, only ever knowing North — take care you don't end like poor-ole Perdix, who (for the simple sin of intellect) fell off the edge of the world! Best, I find, to take the way before one, and end up always where one is!

FREYA: Here ends a reading from the bible of the blind!

FOOL: The blind man, too, may see the light... Answer me this then, Cousin — how could I tell the Queen from an asp?

FREYA: The Queen won't rattle as she sinks in her fangs.

FOOL: Are you not the Queen then, Cousin?

FREYA: No, Fool.

FOOL: No, though you've venom enough to kill!

FREYA: You insult a lady of the Queen's own chamber, Fool — I am as a limb to her majesty. How do you like your head, sirrah?

FOOL: I'm attached to it, so to speak.

FREYA: If you wish to go on so being — hold your tongue!

FOOL: I'll endeavour to hold on to both! Keep yer tongue in yer head, as me mother used say.

FREYA: Go your way, Fool... the time for comedy is past.

FOOL: O, they'll be laughter here anon. The birds aren't singing in the trees, but mock us with their saw.

[EXIT FOOL]

## Scene ii

[ENTER GERTRUDE]

GERTRUDE: To whom were you speaking?

FREYA: An empty wind that blew itself asunder. Are you rested?

GERTRUDE: A sleepless night is poison to the blood. I seem to see the world as though reflected in some murky pool.

FREYA: That is, rather, the world's true picture — your vision's uncorrupted.

GERTRUDE: Why did you leave me?

FREYA: The sun was a lemon in my mouth. The crows called blackly in their dawn administrations. I wanted the air to prick me; wanted wet grass to scold my feet. O, was I ever this awake? But you look troubled, Majesty?

GERTRUDE: How best to convince prince Claudius of our cause.

FREYA: Either by fixation or vexation are men moved to action. Let lust mislead him.

GERTRUDE: He is not some sweaty schoolboy — kissing chase won't catch him!

FREYA: Even great Odysseus was a man. He dared destruction just to hear the Sirens' song: their soft distortion of the air that's said would lure men to give up their very lives.

GERTRUDE: Are all your men mythologies? Uncomplicated fellows. Claudius is bound to the mast of moral rectitude and will not be so easily stirred.

FREYA: O, I've seen men in the living flesh as well: full of wicked longing, slaving where their eyes alight — is Claudius so different?

GERTRUDE: Don't mistake the many for the man. A dog without the pack's an animal apart. Claudius is as a continent unto himself: vast, oblique, unmappable.

FREYA: O, the moon disassembles to lay herself across the lapping water in suppliance to his more glamorous light. All hail Prince Claudius! That shines so like a star!

GERTRUDE: Make up your mind! One minute I'm to slut myself in vile distractions; the next, you nettle at each mention of his name. Letting jealousy — enemy within! — consume your precious wit. We cannot hope to upend tyranny if you'll give credence to each mistaken grief! We (who have scant weaponry but wit) must choose the path circuitous: I will with art and artifice convince Prince Claudius to love me. Lay a soft snare of such kisses; pour sweet intimacy in his ear; lie with him if needs be! All this I do to rid our little world of risk. So ask yourself, should I whisper soft untruths to him — a good man! — or better suffer the slobbering attentions of the king, whenever he next breaks with war? Let compromise be our compass, sister: where north is north enough, though out by small degree.

FREYA: Cowardice is our compass when we say south is northward facing!

GERTRUDE: O, Freya! Freya! It's me you rail against; me your venom stings!

Trust in me! For, I am true. Love is a bond of trust. You cannot claim to love me and mistrust me all at once!

[PAUSE]

FREYA: That man, Corambis, he has the prince's ear...

GERTRUDE: He does. Schooling him since boyhood. He is father proper to the Prince.

FREYA: Might not he unpick this stubborn lock?

## Scene iii

[CLAUDIUS ALONE]

CLAUDIUS: I think to clench my fist and find my fist  
is clenched, and so, suppose that *I* have done it,  
but wonder if some hand unseen moves mine.

I sense the forest path has made itself —  
under elk hoof, yes, (in their continual  
coming in: to graze, to uproot sapling shoots).

The brambles teeth dissuades them, too,  
from tracing other lines; as does the mud's  
wet tongue, in whispering its soft falsities.

And so they seek out firmer ground. And thus,  
the forest tolerates a path to come.

(PAUSE) The sea grows frustrate; but each useless  
undulation is a movement without  
motive, a facsimile of action.

It is the moon (luring it one way, now  
another) that excites whole oceans into  
action. But even the moon — glowering  
from the heavens down — glares by  
a borrowed light; the eyes know, and look  
on her unblinkingly. (PAUSE) The night succumbs,

by degree, to its own mode of obfuscation;  
for darkness is its nature. Owls try out  
air's emptiness; dogs howl  
out ancient loneliness; and all,  
it seems, by ordinance of some old decree.  
(PAUSE) Even the grumbling hedgehog is defensive  
by design: spines prickling on her rounded back.  
(PAUSE) Where's freedom to be found if we  
fall as easy as the bumble bee, seduced  
by nectar's dank intoxicating musk;  
bodies humming with their new-got gold.  
Where is the will? And where the agency?  
Nowhere! For, it's thought that follows action;  
we rationalise after the fact; say why  
we did what we did when what we did is done!  
Finding the clenched fist, and thinking, I have  
clenched it. I have *clenched* it. I have– I–

## Scene iv

[GERTRUDE ALONE. CORAMBIS ENTERS SHORTLY AFTER]

GERTRUDE: (ASIDE) Here is his man, Corambis; who's so brimming  
with ambition's swill I'm wary he  
will dribble it. (TO CORAMBIS) Welcome loyal Corambis.

CORAMBIS: Your majesty has sent for me and here  
I am supplied: suppliant as a sapling.

GERTRUDE: But not so green!

CORAMBIS: ...it's true that I've grown grey  
in loyal servitude; but grey looks green  
in a certain light. I'm yours to use.

GERTRUDE: You are a man, it's said, who can be counted  
on to bring things to completion? Yes?

CORAMBIS: I think a problem should be scrupled well;  
I am methodical; move by increment.

[PAUSE]

GERTRUDE: The good are rightly praised — but they're reward  
is rarely corporeal. For certain ends  
to be secured, here and now, we must  
crawl upon our stomachs; make a meal  
of dust.

CORAMBIS: ...a crow may roost above peacocks.

GERTRUDE: ...Indeed.

My dilemma's this: can trust be tested?

CORAMBIS: ...only in the very act

of trusting; that's why love is prized!

GERTRUDE: Tell me then (you who know him best)

can Corambis be relied upon?

CORAMBIS: The man who recommends himself is rarely

worthy of the praise, but humility

short changes to secure some future

profit too. (PAUSE) Corambis is a man,

and all men on occasion lie, so that

it stands: Corambis can't commend himself.

GERTRUDE: How can a bond of trust be tested then?

CORAMBIS: Love's secured in avoidance of a broken

heart; shame and scorn scaffold up law's litany;

embarrassment foremends libidinal liberty;

threat begets trust!

GERTRUDE: ...yours is a cynical creed.

CORAMBIS: The cynic and the soothsayer might lie

down in a single bed.

GERTRUDE: ...I must threaten you?

CORAMBIS: A fly likes honey also.

GERTRUDE: To that end:

I will promise you're preferred high counsellor.

CORAMBIS: The King's counsel's been with him since youth.

Their bond's unbreakable; tempered in the wars.

GERTRUDE: That might change if Claudius were king?

CORAMBIS: He is an heir potential...

GERTRUDE: ...waits in line.

CORAMBIS: But the present King is in no danger!

He likes his life too well to lose it on

Norwegian ground.

GERTRUDE: ...a man might die while soaking

his feet, or combing his beard; become estranged

from life in the soft confusion of his sleep;

in peeling an orange; in standing up too soon.

In bending down to fetch a coin he's dropped,

may find that *he* is spent. For death's

an opportunist, delighting in small ironies:

the man of action dying at his chair;

the sailor drowning in a shallow bath.

CORAMBIS: We live in dread-filled days when chaos may

undo a King. No one's immune to death.

GERTRUDE: The augur's skill is not required to see

the King is mortal and must die— eh, someday?

CORAMBIS: I feel, at once, the shock of plunging in  
(fully naked) to that sad, unwholesome fact:  
a king, of course, is perishable. If such a thing  
must come to pass (as the death of a king)  
then, why not marry favour to misfortune  
and seek profit in fatality. The vulture also eats.

[EXIT BOTH]

## Act III

### Scene i

[GERTRUDE & FREYA. ENTER A HERALD]

GERTRUDE: What news do you bring us?

HERALD: ...good tidings.

With pomp processional and trumpet blast,  
the King, (on stripping Norway clean of cowardice)  
is now, at last, embarked for Denmark's shores;  
his ships near sinking 'neath the spoils of war —  
so weighed, they seem to waddle in the swell  
intoxicated with our new-won fame.  
A glut with chapel golds and silver trink,  
which, tambourining on the swaying seas,  
ring out with our successes. And for a bounty:  
such silken finery in toppling heap  
would make a sultan green to gaze upon.  
Their snivelling wives sit cargoed in the hold.  
Their young sons, captive, slaving at our oars...  
Across the salary seas he makes, yearning  
to be home! As if the land were honey  
and he the hungry bear in spring awake.  
Our wearied King misses his blessed land,  
whose gentle rains are like a mother's kisses,

whose winds sound soft familiar songs...

Her glassy waters shine with glistening salmon,

her forests shy with speckled fawn, her lush

fields like a blanket to be wrapped in...

The King, I say, the King shall soon be home!

GERTRUDE: Your words are blessed as holy balm and we

rejoice with each and every syllable,

but his homecoming comes too soon, for we

are scarce prepared to meet with majesty.

HERALD: There's time! The King's return sits squintingly

in some far-distant place. For every isle

in this much-fractured land insists he visit

to receive their thanks... He'll set a bonfire

burning on the isle of Hleer, to say when he's a day

of sailing off — that you might know he's come.

GERTRUDE: Good, good... We're sated by this sustinent fare—

FREYA: (LOW) We've had all we can stomach. I feel stuffed!

GERTRUDE: We're sorrowed that he cannot sooner come

here where he is waited for with keenest appetite—

FREYA: (LOW) We're sharpening knives in sheer anticipation!

GERTRUDE: Still, we'll suffer each unhappy duty then

and sooth our griefs with preparations' making.

Leave us to digest this news. Farewell and thanks.

[EXIT HERALD]

FREYA: This is as milk atop meat with us, and sits  
to curdle in the belly of our plot,  
souring our unperfect plan. He comes?  
Now? Was he expected home so soon?

GERTRUDE: Tonight, and nights to follow, will be vexful,  
waiting for this bonfire to be seen...  
which flame will signal our last day of peace.

FREYA: If anxiety must wrest us from our sleep,  
let's use each careful second of the clock  
to lay our dark designs and stratagems...  
Let him come! Come! To be greeted by  
the toothless grinning of his open grave.

[ENTER CORAMBIS. EXIT FREYA]

CORAMBIS: Can this be true? That the King is all but home?

GERTRUDE: It's true! The news, though fresh, is stale to taste!  
We cannot say how soon he might be here.

CORAMBIS: I fear the prince will not be coaxed in time.  
That seed will want its season in the soil.

GERTRUDE: I'll have uneasy access to Claudius after  
the king has landed and momentum's lost.

CORAMBIS: Your Majesty, if an old man might prove wise:

I have kept my head these many years  
by avoiding the seat over which the sword of power  
dangles — held there by a flimsy strand.

I say, do likewise and live long.

GERTRUDE: There must be some way to win the prince;  
you've known him since he was a prattling babe —  
you must know what milk might suckle 'em now?

CORAMBIS: He has — as a flaw, I think — a moral bent.

The powerful hold morals as a curio:  
like gold — whose value must be bartered  
and agreed upon, or else is brassy junk —  
morals in the mind of a prince are as jewels  
in drought when drops of water are most wanted.  
He swears he won't be moved to murder. Yet,  
such passions are as inbred siblings: all alike  
in ugliness! Excite another passion —  
another aspect's seen. It's almost law:  
that head and heart run perpendicular.  
He who scrabbles up toward such high ideals  
is often felled by an ideal's likeness. Love's  
the honey that will catch this fickle fly!

GERTRUDE: Love? Ha! If this is the state of bearded wit,

I'll take my counsel from a pimpled girl!  
 Or, better from the desk-carving schoolboy  
 weighted down by his satchel and his broken heart —  
 Call him in! For old men are too fond!  
 Romance was a potent draft to offer  
 once, we'd time to brew, but time's run dry.

CORAMBIS: Forgive me, Majesty, I spoke unclearly:

Romantic love is not what I suggest;  
 For men have poured out love on a cool evening  
 that morning's heat soon vaporised.  
 But fathers love their sons eternally:  
 seeing in them the perfected picture of  
 themselves. Give the prince such a picture  
 and he'll dote and dote and be as mud  
 in the great one's hands: malleable...

GERTRUDE: One mad scheme invites another: worse!

That lie in being told is born abortive:  
 we have not lately coupled to beget a child?  
 Shall I say I am pregnant by his looks?  
 Or, like a silly wench'll think, she's full  
 by a filthy handshake? I'll tell our scholarly  
 prince such old wives' tales, as storks over marshes  
 have come bearing babies in their beaks?

CORAMBIS: It seems that, while we speak one tongue, it's strangled  
 in the ear, and utterings become meaningless.

I mean, you have a son, born soon after  
you were obliged to wed our king:  
who's brother to your true-heart's love. The ladies  
of your chamber, being want to whisper,  
let slip that you so stupefied the king  
with ale each night that he supposed he'd lain  
with you: he had the *lie* and didn't, it's said.  
Miraculously, a boy was born.  
You will know best how the boy was got.  
But— no! I will not risk offence in guessing.  
Yet, if the prince had occasion to father him,  
then we have a chance to foster in him  
the firm belief that he is Hamlet's father.  
What difference might we see in him if that  
were true; or, false, but lacquered with the sheen  
of truth. (PAUSE) I fear I *have* offended you...

GERTRUDE: Fear not. I go unscathed by gossip's lash;  
such ladies fill drear days with wild imagining.

(ASIDE)

Deep currents shift beneath this icy layer:  
this weasel-eyed clerk secretes mere dribblets  
of what he darks. His face's a smooth stone  
where hosts of crawling things lie hid beneath.

(TO CORAMBIS)

Truths are often dull when set beside

the lustre of such lies; and while there's nothing  
in this charge of infidelity,  
it may seem scintillating and so seduce  
the prince. Memory is not a perfect  
history book where each event is penned:  
I may be able to conjure in his memory  
an occasion where there was not one  
before. I'll *remember* the past imperfectly.

CORAMBIS: The time, perforce, wills us to act quickly.

Where we would have taken the high ground,  
now by the low way, venture we must.

[EXIT CORAMBIS]

GERTRUDE: O, let me prove a tiger in this swamp —

as sharp of tooth, as keenly clawed; with all  
the lusty instinct in the blood for blood  
required should I think to kill a king.

And lend me, too, the tiger's thoughtless cool  
to wait out opportunity; assured  
no clammy scruple may make gentle my  
design, or my intentions turn awry.

Camouflage my mal intent and let  
me study silence like a tiger in the long  
grass, panting; each blink renew my focus,

and each breathe my purpose fan. This pause —  
but contemplation of a movement still  
to come. I wait in sprung alertness till  
I strike like shrieking light: a stinging bolt  
to bring the black and wakeless dream of death.  
(PAUSE) I will not denigrate myself to say:  
make hard my woman's heart and sour my sweetness  
over; nor seek to play the male role;  
for there's strength beyond brutality.  
I'll match my method to my manner. Yes.  
I know the salamander from the snake;  
can lay down poison for the rat, yet nurse  
a weakling lamb upon my lap. No, I  
will not a changeling thing become through change.  
(PAUSE) I love mercy, yes. But who can tolerate  
a devil much beyond a year? But steady!  
Retract these claws, and smiling these fangs hide.  
I must — till time proves apt — the times abide.

## Scene ii

[CLAUDIUS'S QUARTERS. CLAUDIUS WITHIN. GERTRUDE CALLS TO HIM FROM WITHOUT]

GERTRUDE: Claudius — it's Gertrude — open up!

CLAUDIUS: Here is a beckoning I should ignore:

she's come to convince me to do this thing —

which is a simple thing to do: to kill.

In this we're, every one of us, practiced;

for who can say they're innocent of killing?

With a slap, you swat the suckling gnat,

whose little life you rate an irritation,

and what was seconds before animate

now nothing moves. Is the killing of a king

so different? A touch more difficult,

but no more glorious, nor honorific.

To heaven, just a speck of dust, which shifting

on the breeze, now comes to rest. A petty thing

a single life must seem from that high

vantage point. But still I pause...

GERTRUDE: Claudius! Open up. It's me.

CLAUDIUS: I swear, she has some power over me

so that it's painful to deny her.

[HE OPENS THE DOOR]

GERTRUDE: Were you asleep, my Lord? I called to you...

CLAUDIUS: I was asleep I think — for all of time,  
and now I'm wild-eyed with such wakefulness  
as seems to bar a moment's rest. What news?

GERTRUDE: Ah, nothing's new. All is as it was.

CLAUDIUS: (ASIDE) That's a pretty lie. I wish I could  
believe it though. (To GER.) Why do you seek me out?

GERTRUDE: There is something I must to tell you;  
Which I'm afraid you'll hate me for once told!

(ASIDE)

This is a well-worn trick: to say one fears  
rejection often wins respect. It was  
an ancient trick in Eden, back when Eve  
employed it; often these old tricks are old  
because they work so well. Well, work now trick.

CLAUDIUS: (ASIDE) I've already borne her marriage to the King

And many years of absence from her heart...

(TO GERTRUDE)

In all the repertoire of sounds there's nothing  
you could say would find discord in me.

GERTRUDE: I hope that that is true, my Lord.

For what I have to say I swallowed long  
ago in hopes to never speak again;  
although it many times resounded here,  
no soul alive a syllable's worth has heard.

CLAUDIUS: Speak Gertrude and confess yourself  
this thing you hold, it seems to have a firmer  
hold on you. Be freed from it in speaking...

GERTRUDE: How to say a simple thing simply?

You have a copy in the world; a life  
whose life I kept to keep you and keep him,  
the twin loves of my life, safe from the evil  
of this king. Who surely would have murdered  
you both, and by that ruin ruined me. I killed  
that life — with silence, just — to let it live.  
For I was young, alone and foreign here.  
I had no friend in the world but you,  
and that friendship: it was lost in having  
to marry your brother, the king. O, God.  
such a time I've kept this secret fast  
within, as though a phantom pregnancy  
which never could be born, or being born  
could not be named, or named go unanointed.  
When we were lovers, in the immaculate past,  
and lay together in this bed. And laughed

and whispered and fell in love; that love

was fruitful, but its fruit forbidden us!

To say a simple thing, simply: you've a son!

A son. These many years— You have a son.

CLAUDIUS: I thought I was awake, but I was dreaming.

But here the dawn has come at last. The sun

rises in her clear and brilliant sky. Yesterday

and yesterday and yesterday on end,

I was a man; with all of mankind's failings:

full of self-regard, and vain concern.

Now I am a father; instantly, these minor

cares I shed, as a skin, to be reborn;

not as a lowly man, counting coins

and cashing in his ever dwindling share

of days. But as a father. With a son!

Oh, Gertrude, it's a miracle to hear

those little words that seem to weigh so much.

I am a father, Gertrude, and have a son!

GERTRUDE: Be less lively in your celebrations;

these words are meat to an unfriendly mouth

that chews them up to spit out gristle.

CLAUDIUS: Yes. Whispering just. Where is our child?

What shepherd's hut has kept him hid away?

What wet nurse raised him? What slum

surrounds him in royal ignorance?

GERTRUDE: Wittenberg's his wet nurse. There he  
gurgles forth philosophy, arithmetic...

CLAUDIUS: Hamlet...

GERTRUDE: ...is the bastard most beloved by me!

CLAUDIUS: O, god! Prince Hamlet? Treason incarnate.

GERTRUDE: I hid him where he'd be suspected least.

CLAUDIUS: Hamlet... first a brother, now a son

Dear god! I'm haunted by that dreadful name!

GERTRUDE: A name is all the likeness those two share...

If you could see yourself as others see you

you'd know at once he's modelled after you.

More like you than you are like yourself!

Your very essence poured into another glass.

He has all of your proclivity

for soggy thought and snaking words.

CLAUDIUS: Ha! I admit that I am (sometimes) mired

in thought; I've seen the same trait in the boy.

As to 'snaking words', I fail to comprehend!

GERTRUDE: Indeed, that's the effect of 'snaking words'!

Was the king ever guilty of a moment's

meditation? That mind's a hornet's nest:

alive with single and small purpose just.

You understand *why* I kept my secret?

CLAUDIUS: The mouth would lose the head in owning it!

O, Gertrude! We have taken love and made it multiple.

GERTRUDE: 'Love', my Lord? Do you speak of love?

CLAUDIUS: Where is this intuition women claim?

Of course, I *love* you! I have always loved...

since first you came from Norway as a girl.

From that first day I met you in the orchard...

GERTRUDE: You were the only one in Elsinore

who smiled. I thought, I've come to a land

of melancholy, where every face was lemony

and laughter was a foreign song that only

migrant children sang. But you could smile!

CLAUDIUS: I swear I never smiled before my eyes

saw you, strange bloom, amongst the apple trees.

And suddenly you taught me how to smile.

[A KNOCK WITHOUT]

CLAUDIUS: O, go into the anteroom. You must

not be found here in my bed chamber.

[OPENS DOOR. ENTER CORAMBIS]

CORAMBIS: My Lord, the king is coming!

CLAUDIUS: The King? What, now?

CORAMBIS: No. No. But sooner than he's wanted

and too soon for these schemes of late.

The very air is stench'd with double-dealing  
and we must purge it, cancelling this plot!

CLAUDIUS: (ASIDE) Even a minute ago this plea might have  
found concord, but the world is other  
than it was in that now ancient time. The plot  
is meet; its aim more necessary than  
it ever was before. A king must die  
that a king might live. And a Queen.

CORAMBIS: For the shortness of the spell between  
his coming here and going 'hence' (POINTS TO HEAVEN) A hasty  
plan risks lengthy penance. I caution pause.

CLAUDIUS: My entire life has been a pause;  
waiting for propitious signs. But one  
must bend the times to suit one's ends.  
(PAUSE) I have thoughts that want attention. Leave  
me to them now. We'll speak of this again.

CORAMBIS: You know, my Lord, I'm ever your right hand.

CLAUDIUS: And so I'm *left*, and each knows nothing of  
the other's doings. I'll come find you presently.

[EXIT CORAMBIS. RE-ENTER GERTRUDE]

GERTRUDE: Corambis is a— *careful* man. Careful  
of himself, I mean. He's worthy of your trust?

CLAUDIUS: He has been my teacher, second father — mother

sometimes also... You know that he can sew?

And bake? He makes the sweetest little tarts?

I'm too close to him to see him clearly

but my gut (if that is worth a pip)

says, Yes. He's as trustworthy as any...

GERTRUDE: Better suffer a subtle doctor's cure,

than a dunce's fatal care. I see.

He certainly is useful. And he's sharp.

CLAUDIUS: There's news the King is due to land much sooner

than expected. And your news alters that.

GERTRUDE: How so? O, say you're for the cause?

CLAUDIUS: I am with you to the death! Which death

May come? I pray it will be his not ours.

If not for Denmark, nor her neighbouring lands...

to bring them peace at last. Hamlet must

die that Hamlet may, in safety, live.

GERTRUDE: And by that death our lives begin.

[EXIT ALL]

## Scene iii

[ENTER CORAMBIS & FREYA]

FREYA: But it's a lie?

CORAMBIS: It really doesn't matter.

It worked! I (feigned) dissuasion and he balked  
at any such suggestion. Half-truth or trick,  
whichever it may be, it's so swayed him  
that he's fallen in with your plot  
as though he held the equal-partner's share.

FREYA: (ASIDE) It matters to me. If this is true,  
then she has kept the secret from me also.

There is a smart much worse than any whip  
excites: a markless wound to bleed unseen.

(TO CORAMBIS)

I can't believe that he's so easily gulled.

CORAMBIS: That's seduction's neatest trick: like fools,  
we follow her map supposing that our path  
was freely chosen. He'll stick the knife in —  
believing, this is agency in action —  
but it'll be the queen who guides that hand.  
How did she seem on having told him?

FREYA: Happy! (PAUSE) Happy, having furthered our cause.

(ASIDE) Or, that is how it seemed to me, but now—  
but now a host of possibilities  
suggest themselves at once. Suspicions,  
like a plague of swarming locusts come;  
their buzzing din devours my good sense!

CORAMBIS: Good. Then, I'll go seek the Queen. Discuss  
what's left to do. Farewell, my Lady Freya.

FREYA: (ASIDE) I'll go seek her, too: to watch her closely.  
This new gambit may prove injurious  
to her. (ASIDE) Or, even more so, me. (TO COR.) Farewell.

[EXIT BOTH]

## Scene iv

[CORAMBIS & GERTRUDE]

GERTRUDE: The Prince is quite transformed and weighs in full  
the worth of this assassination.

Now's the hot part of the action. When  
fuller and swage block shape future days.

(PAUSE) But do not question him. Nor, wink at knowing.

CORAMBIS: (ASIDE) The snail dislikes his slimy flesh to be  
spied, so keeps it hidden in a shell.

(TO GERTRUDE)

Granted, you know Claudius intimately.  
But still, I trust he's known me long enough  
to know that I was always loyal to him.

GERTRUDE: Indeed, but in an age when brother's blood  
might cry out from the ground. This 'loyalty',  
like foreign coins, glisters worthlessly  
in the proffered hand that profits nothing by it.

CORAMBIS: The Prince's known me since childhood days—

GERTRUDE: The Prince?  
...has hardly any knowledge of himself  
and jabs at dancing shadows like the cat;

or whimpers like a sleeping dog. Take no  
offence if, now, when white looks black  
by our intrigue — so's one may well mistrust  
oneself — that he forgets his friends, finding  
enemies familiar. Patience...

[EXIT BOTH]

## ACT IV

## Scene i

GERTRUDE: I never saw you in the night, Freya.

It seems you kept yourself from me.

FREYA: ...no, no.

I could not risk the hazard of his train.

Our ladies of the chamber cannot move  
for being molested by this drunken soldiery,  
whose grinning says their gropes are compliment.

The Great Hall's rank with their rotten breath —  
product accrue of their flatulent meat and ale.

We're defeated when such armies eat at home:  
both vittles and civility they scoff.

GERTRUDE: In this they ape their principal. When he  
is put to sleep this present nightmare's put  
to bed as well. Such boisterous revelry  
will find an end in his.

[ENTER CLAUDIUS]

GERTRUDE: ...my Lord!

Have you crossed the careless river, Sleep,  
And bathed there in that murmuring brook?

CLAUDIUS: I slept like a man in a leviathan's belly:

damply, in fits, and startled by each noise.

I'm smutty still with the filth of yesterday.

FREYA: (ASIDE TO GERTRUDE) Poor soul. While we're thought shanks of meat

(mere rumps and shoulder joints to slaver at!),

the prince complains of unruffled pillows

and curtains sighing in the breeze! My, god!

GERTRUDE: There is time of silence still to come,

when sleep will have dominion over all.

We're thankful now to wink and nod. But then

no eye will see and no mouth make a sound.

Let's be active here where actions still

are realised. Here Corambis comes...

[ENTER CORAMBIS]

CORAMBIS: These men are such a nuisance to the court;

can no discipline be brought to bear?

CLAUDIUS: I'm just the King's kid brother — thin

and flimsy likeness to such majesty.

GERTRUDE: Take that wolf from the pack and these are pups.

CORAMBIS: Last night, belly full and brainless,

the king, in the madness of his revelry,

took up his heavy sword and hit a horse

in the face—

FREYA: ...O, good god. What?

CORAMBIS: This poor animal in a terror (blinded  
by streaming blood) ran itself to death,  
and bawling, such a woeful sound as tore  
the night asunder. (PAUSE) The horror of the deed  
did not go by unheeded — objection spoke.  
Several men suppressed the man whose horse  
it was; for, he was treasonous with rage.  
In war, they come to love their beasts  
as much any mother loves a child.

FREYA: (TO GERTRUDE) If this is what he'll do amongst his kin,  
what terror did the Dankster strew abroad.

CLAUDIUS: How strange. How very strange he's grown with power.

CORAMBIS: Power is a pill with potency unmeasurable.

GERTRUDE: These rites and rituals of court inflate him;  
without this throng, this throne, what is our king?

FREYA: An oldman's pizzle that wants praise to stand  
and perform its duty! That's our king!

CLAUDIUS: He was my father's favourite boy; indulgence  
turned his fancies into flaws. Now  
his entertainments vex whole nations and  
his tantrums become war. The foul egg floats.  
What might have blossomed in him as a charm  
was born abortive: love lacking, justice blind.  
Friendship? A show that feigns at popularity.

GERTRUDE: We will have to find the time and place

wherein he is alone, and is unarmed:  
slumbering in his mistresses bed; wallowing  
at bath; at soil; in one of these dark passageways...

FREYA: I could (disguised as your Majesty)

to bed with him, and slice him ear to ear.

CLAUDIUS: No! There cannot be a drop of blood.

Nor must there be so obvious a mark!

None of his train must sniff at this; his surgeon

must pronounce the death as natural

and non-suspect. Not a tinct of malice.

GERTRUDE: (TO FREYA) I wouldn't risk your life to rid us of his...

CORAMBIS: There is a poison, hebenon, I know

how to procure; that will adder him

as though he died in the very teeth of life.

FREYA: Poison wants plication; surely such

manoeuvre risks detection too?

GERTRUDE: ...agreed.

His food's prepared by private kitchen hands —

with him all these many years; they'll afford

no opportunity to sour what

he sups, or taint his tableware.

CORAMBIS: ...unless—

we kill him by day, under the all-seeing sun,

while he thinks himself encompassed by the guard.

He sometimes slumbers, late afternoons, below there:

in that orchard that's walled around; and thinks himself  
secure as Susanna did, bathing in her private pool.

FREYA: How will we get beyond the guarded gate?

CORAMBIS: The night before the deed, when the hedgehog  
and the badger are the only sentries  
stirring, you may freely enter and  
ensconce yourselves unseen.

GERTRUDE: ...it may well work.

FREYA: What? And wait until the afternoon?

Too long a spell to let a conscience stew.

CLAUDIUS: Wasn't there another gate? As children  
we played there all the time. Gertrude recalls.  
I'm sure there was a wooden door by which  
the gardener came and went about his work.

GERTRUDE: Corambis, where are the old drawings kept?

CORAMBIS: In the library, perhaps — I'll seek them there.

GERTRUDE: He's usually so drunk come the afternoon,  
that a bird might nest in his open mouth  
and he'd never wake, but gargle eggs.

CORAMBIS: His guard may be as sauced as him by then.

They stand outside the gate; the king alone  
within. I think this plan will work.

GERTRUDE: Good. Good. The poison?

CORAMBIS: ...I'll have tonight.

CLAUDIUS: Who knew assassination was so easy?

FREYA: A lofty king, a beetle: both make dung;

and both may be crushed under toe

and ground to dust.

CLAUDIUS: He is my brother!

FREYA: I am very sorry for your pains!

CLAUDIUS: Who is this scrawny whelp that thinks to bark

at dogs?

GERTRUDE: Freya! You speak out of turn!

CLAUDIUS: Do not think, pup, because we put the mad

dog down, this house will have no teeth! Insolence!

GERTRUDE: The tension of the time has made us all

uneasy; we spy enemies where friends are.

Let's break and take our rest and meet again.

Each of us know our part in the business to come.

[EXIT ALL]

## Scene ii

[THE WOMAN'S HOUSE. CORAMBIS OUTSIDE]

CORAMBIS: Here lies the nest of an infamous poisoner.

Or, she's a goodly physic, as some swear.

It all depends on why one calls: for curse

or cure! A hidden, peculiar haunt: this place,

where nature's occult secrets are unearthed.

Here is a garden where each gnarled weed

is prized: some bring forth a frothy spittle,

from some the sap is siphoned off, some have

poisonous barbs... for purposes she alone

perceives. You spy the odd pretty flower,

while she prehends a bed of base potential.

The newt in the pond, the muddy toad, the pink-

and fleshy worm provide such pus and bile

and blood as might be mingled in a cawl.

[ENTER WOMAN]

See where she comes now carefully along,

rapt in her Giftschränk mind — as one apart

from others. As dark, unknowable as

the crow. Her strange song is a dirge.

Her meal is carrion meat. Some visit here  
in vengeful mood for venom'd anodynes;  
others come to beg her, Please revive  
this child! She's drugs to heal one or to hurt  
one; to take the taste for pleasure and the love  
of life away, leaving the body sound, but utterly  
corrupting all the mind's neat-ordered ways.

WOMAN: Who's there? I'm blinded in one eye and can't  
see well by twilight

CORAMBIS: ...you need not know me;  
the clank of my coin is name enough for you!  
You sell complex solutions, so I'm told.  
I have a pressing need of your most potent  
toxin. Which is your fastest-acting bane?

WOMAN: Away with you! I sell no poisons here;  
these essences that I decoct are healthful.  
The cool brown clod of the earth is more  
harmful to the fleshy worm, whose element it is,  
than the worst of my inventions affect man.

CORAMBIS: O, come now! Let's speak truth to one another...  
for you are held in high regard and famed  
among your cohort as the devil's equal!

WOMAN: It's you, I think, that know the devil best,  
that greet him every morning in the glass.  
Let me see, let me see, what is obvious:

your wife's grown misshapen in her old age  
and so despised of you in recent years.

You'd spoon foul soup into her toothless head  
to nurse her so the world should say, There goes  
a husband worth a hundred men! – whilst you,  
like the ever-smiling crocodile, killed her  
out of sight? Away! You'll have no poisons here!

CORAMBIS: If commerce cannot guide you, then, I must,  
perforce, impress upon you that you will  
yield to the State and deliver what I want!

[SHOWS A ROYAL SEAL ETC.]

CORAMBIS: Even a one-eyed witch sees well enough.

WOMAN: What is the cause, ha? Some enemy  
of the State will drink a dram of sour grapes,  
to raise a health most fatal? An old pastime  
of princes and of thieves. I need no sight to see...

CORAMBIS: Guess not at the inner workings of the court  
but furnish me with such concoctions as  
might end a life with bloodless, blameless ease.

WOMAN: Having little choice but choose 'obey',  
I will give you such a tincture as may  
incapacitate a horse should you place but  
a single drop upon her tongue. Beware!

If even the fumes of this I give you now  
are inhaled, the victim will fall ill at once!  
Here is a liquid preparation with such enmity  
to man, that it's recipe is known to me alone  
in all the living world. My late mother teaching  
it to me, hers to her, and so before;  
in a line that stretches back to Eve...  
Though it's come down by ancient line, it's been  
employed by few, so deadly is its action...  
The one who handles this must wear thick-leathered,  
well-seemed gloves. If any portion touches skin,  
bathe that limb in a pail of milk (and boil  
the soiled milk once done, being sure to pour it  
on the ash heap of a long exhausted fire).  
Keep the vial inside this wooden case,  
the case within this wallet...

## Scene iii

[ENTER CLAUDIUS WITH A CHART. GERTRUDE AFTER]

CLAUDIUS: Somewhere along this wall the doorway's hid,  
which, once uncovered, will transform our talk  
of his assassination into action absolute.

GERTRUDE: Soft!

The sleepy sentries of the watch have stirred.  
Let's be as shadows and obscure ourselves.

[ENTER TWO MEN: THIRD & FOURTH GUARD]

THIRD GUARD: ...this witch ate a baby — bones and all.

FOURTH GUARD: ...how could she?

THIRD GUARD: ...well, she slow boiled it  
in a pot with scallions, so I'm told.

FOURTH GUARD: What you speak of has upset my supper,  
which, growing legs within me, would be out.

THIRD GUARD: If I had to eat a baby, was pressed to it,  
my choice would be: eat a little girl.

FOURTH GUARD: I grow sicker by the minute, as though  
pawed by an abomination here within...

THIRD GUARD: I used be a little boy myself  
and know what mess and mischief they get into.

Plate me up a little girl — with mustard, mind!

FOURTH GUARD: Come to another subject, will you!

THIRD GUARD: There was a mad King of England, one time,

And he ate dog dirt like 'twas caviar.

That's the trouble with wealth:

when you can have anything you like,

you like what's neither good nor godly.

FOURTH GUARD: Come to a subject fit for consumption!

THIRD GUARD: Have you ever known a man produce a white

stool; and yet a dog can do it!

A unicorn will make no dung at all...

FOURTH GUARD: You're like the heap at Babel — a tower of noise!

There's better sense in a sack of drowning cats!

THIRD GUARD: You've no appreciation of intelligence.

Manys a fellow on nights with me would say

I'd schooled 'em. A lot went on to better things!

[EXIT GUARDS]

CLAUDIUS: Wait. Wait. What will happen if he wakes?

GERTRUDE: Then, likely, we (instead of him) will die;

and won't be subject to his tyranny—

but look, he's porridge brained with beer. He sleeps.

CLAUDIUS: I could not bear to look him in the eyes

should he wake to find us 'bout this bloody deed.

It can't be right to murder a sleeping man;  
His gentle sighs will slander us for cowards!

GERTRUDE: Every day is punishment under a tyrant's rule.

What worse can come than consists with us as is?  
Better to take a man's life while he sleeps:  
ignorant of that wrong we do him.

[CLAUDIUS HOLDS UP THE VIAL]

CLAUDIUS: Here's the essence of our greatest fear:

annihilation's greasy balm. But  
I do the thing disservice. It should  
be coloured most abysmal black, and seem  
repugnant to the senses. But look how it  
shines, like some semi-precious stone,  
shot through with chance impurities, to catch  
the light in brilliant flecks; how sweet it smells  
— as inviting as nostalgia.

GERTRUDE: Come, the hinge of history lies in  
the action of an elbow.

CLAUDIUS: Would I'd Cain's assured haste, how easy in that  
History-less time the killing of a brother was.

GERTRUDE: Come, pour our future out, or fortune dies.

CLAUDIUS: It's not so easy as all that! An action  
infinitesimally small, has consequence!

What's easily slayed by the sword in the mouth,  
wants Herculean labour in the hand.

[THEY GO THROUGH THE WOODEN DOOR]

## ACT V

## Scene i

[GERTRUDE'S CHAMBER. GERTRUDE, FREYA]

FREYA: How long has he lain undiscovered there?

GERTRUDE: Just after noon — the sun eyeing us  
from on high — we set about the business.

FREYA: The light is all but lost to us, and still  
no word of his demise has come. Can  
a King lay rotting on that scrubby  
ground and the world not smell fresh decay?

GERTRUDE: He keeps a careless guard who, doubtless, slumber  
(from flagon and from feasting) still. Patience!

[PAUSE]

FREYA: This pause is a kind of torture. You are *sure*?

GERTRUDE: 'Sure'? Of what?

FREYA: Sure the king is dead!

GERTRUDE: I poured the poison, each deadly drop,  
into his heedless ear.

FREYA: ...*you* poured the poison?  
Better the King had lived than you should suffer  
any stain of accusation. Better  
his brother — after ancient precedent

— had done the deed than you were marred

by it. What occasioned such a change?

GERTRUDE: We went, as planned, into the garden at night,

and there, at the darkest hour, bestowed ourselves

behind the compost heap — where, like the field

mouse or the fox, we stole its heat and suffered

its perfumes. I think I may have slept

a while — so oddly calm was I. The prince

was not so careless of his duties and

all into the blue, up-rising dawn

he whispered prohibitions 'gainst our plot.

The morning seemed an age in coming on.

I heard the worms eat the earth. The crows

regarded us with black-eyed curiosity

— strange sentinels afforded us.

I feared they would reveal us where we lay.

There was an age of waiting while we listened

to the waking day. (PAUSE) Near noon, at last,

we heard the King — so wet tongued with wassailing,

he slobbered at old ballads and he bored

the general soldiery in telling each

how highly he did rate him. Finally,

he entered the orchard. The prince seemed agitated.

As if he meant to end the business straight

and, like a good boy-soldier, confess himself

to heaven as he fell upon his sword.  
I pierced him with a look to say, This murder  
must be done! I could have killed a thousand  
kings just then, so pressing was my purpose.  
Soon, the time correct, we crept, hyena  
like, toward our sleeping prey. Hush, hush.  
And there, like a sated bull, he lay:  
a glistening line of dribblings in his beard,  
his belt undone, his belly loose with luxury,  
each inward breath abused the gentle air.  
I could have sunk a dagger in his jowly  
neck and bled him like a turkey, so eager  
then was I for his destruction, but  
a strange song distracted me — the Prince:  
sobbing like an infant (so I feared  
he might alert the Dane). Do it! I urged,  
before his sweaty dreaming will release  
him from this spell. But still he stood there, uselessly.  
What could I do but fumble in his pocket  
for the vial. From which point on, my actions  
seemed to do themselves. Desire was all  
the motive I required. (PAUSE) He woke, the king,  
and, in the sickness of his poisoning,  
he saw his brother stood before him.  
He never did spy me, but went to hell

with falsehoods to say there.

FREYA: ...good! Good!

May he be doubly damned on that account!

GERTRUDE: O, but Freya — such discoveries

I made in those dreadful moments after.

FREYA: What? Announce them and be free of them.

GERTRUDE: I found, there is no balm in blood!

FREYA: ...what?

GERTRUDE: I thought that I'd be free of my torment

when my tormentor was no more, but he

grins at me from the grave to mock naivety.

FREYA: This is the vexation of a sleepless night.

A month from now, I warrant, that the weight  
of what's been done today, and lightness of  
a world new-made, will (when measured  
with unbiased scales) seem balanced and correct.

GERTRUDE: O, I pray it may be so. For in

that wilderness of murder I did think:

His tyranny's infected us: brutality's

become our mode. I could not see that truth

until I'd poured the poison in his ear.

FREYA: A mad dog has been put down! And for

a spell the streets sound odd being bare of his

incessant bark. But soon you'll hear the cricket

and the bumble bee: a host

of tiny motifs once drowned out. I pray  
you, sleep, and I will wake you when this stale  
news comes seeking our feigned sympathies.

## Scene ii

[FREYA DISCOVERS CLAUDIUS PASSING IN A PASSAGEWAY]

FREYA: (ASIDE) This lord, looks nothing like a newly-minted King: skulking about these servant corridors. Like some naive kitchen-hand sent, on a prank, to fetch the morning mist... Where is the pomp that majesty supposes? Where's the swaggering gate of regal power? Why does he hide, in gloomy passageways, instead of sitting brazen-faced upon the throne he lately won? (PAUSE) How long has he knelt at the keyhole to peep his brother's doings? To watch him sport and wish himself the jockey there instead? But what, from the coolness of the corridor, seemed most excellent exercise, he finds is sweaty effort once within. Too late all men discover that pleasure's just a duller sort of pain. Nor is envy thirst ever satisfied — to drink from it's to drown.

[EXIT FREYA]

[CLAUDIUS ALONE]

CLAUDIUS: The last face that my brother saw was mine.

These eyes so like our father's eyes, but empty  
of that soft regard a father owes a son. This mouth  
(that could not cry out: Mercy! God protect him!)  
gaping like my mother's mouth when silence  
had consumed her. These hands my brother saw

as they hung idle witness; where, instead,  
(with blood in boiling riot!) a brother might  
have rushed to brother's aid. O, god! God!  
What is this thing I've done? What is this thing?  
He lay, with murder all around him, lost:  
a child surprised; an honest animal in sleep,  
untouched by life's corruptions. Horrible to see  
his anxious smirk, grimaced in confusion;  
a stare that seemed to say, Can this be you,  
my brother, come to loose me of my life?  
O, devil! Devil! That I am: low and snivelling;  
full of self-regard, of pride and petty keening;  
and look, at how I've killed my mother's babe  
whom often she would bless with gentle kisses,  
with smiles, with laughter like a joy-filled song.  
I've killed my father's pride; the first and chief  
among his children. The boy with the wooden sword  
(I see him still in some lost game of youth).  
The boy who would be king! The boy I murdered!  
That I once thought the best of men;  
that I lay many nights beside: to whisper  
our mad schemes into the heedless air;  
he that fished me from the icy waters  
of yon wild-running river when, fooling, fell  
and almost drown. Him I have forsaken here.

Him betrayed for scant reward. For a crown!  
For a flimsy trinket! For a piece of junk — a crown!  
I feel so sick. My mind's an ocean, churning.  
I wish I could escape myself. Released  
from every filthy motive of the self....  
but hush hush hush — what's done is done.  
See how the world still functions and goes on!

## Scene iii

[ENTER FOOL & CORAMBIS, FROM OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS]

FOOL: You've heard the news? The king is dead.

CORAMBIS: (ASIDE) Here is flavourless meat that must be swallowed

without relish. (To FOOL) What? Can this be so?

I saw him just this morning. (ASIDE) Ha! How often

have you heard this thesis proffered: that

a man out of bed of a morning must live

the whole day through. But Death's a tardy

fellow, who keeps unholy hours. (To FOOL) How?

FOOL: He fell into a double sleep of death,

and made his way to Heaven drowsily.

He'll wake, by god, and he hears the jangle

of Saint Peter's keys. (BEGINS TO WAIL)

CORAMBIS: Do not cry for the King, poor Fool. Stop up

these useless tears. There'll be other kings.

FOOL: O, kings are like codpieces, they should

be changed with regularity. But no!

It's not for the king I cry, sir, but myself.

CORAMBIS: (ASIDE) That's an honest quip: what quantity

of grief is apprehension of one's own

demise? (TO FOOL) Why for yourself, poor wretch?

FOOL: Why, I'll have piddling employment now!

CORAMBIS: Shed no tears on that account — the world  
will still want fools!

FOOL: ...the king that's coming, it's said,  
he has a fool of his own — beyond compare!  
He's such a fawning fellow, this fool,  
as will crawl and nod and crease his face  
with a graceless kinda gurning. What  
will honest fools do when flattery's fashion?

CORAMBIS: Has Claudius a fool? I know him not.

FOOL: I couldn't pick him out of a crowd, Cousin,  
but I hear he's called Corambis. Was there  
ever more apt a name to clep a clown?

CORAMBIS: I have the new-King's ear, sirrah! Take care  
where you mock!

FOOL: ...I've the old-King's teeth  
and keep them in this pocket here. They rattle  
as I walk. Rattle with strange rumours:  
'Did I die in my sleep?' they say. You did,  
says I. 'Was no one watching over me?'  
One was watching, King — one that went  
to pilfer apples, and saw two figures by,  
and you lay gasping your last breath!

CORAMBIS: (ASIDE) What's this? The blind, it's said, have keener hearing;  
a fool's sometimes savant? (To FOOL) What do you mean?  
The king's always under an armoured watch!

FOOL: Aye, but other eyes were on him also.

CORAMBIS: (ASIDE) This is dangerous idiocy... (To FOOL) Come, Sirrah,  
we'll straight to the king and tell him what you know.

FOOL: What I know, sir, will make a short report.

I knew sod all yesterday, and hope to know  
a little less tomorrow! And nothing  
much thereafter!

CORAMBIS: ...come, Sir. This information will  
pay handsomely (You'll want for nothing after).  
You hesitate. Do you fear silver, gold?

FOOL: As when the subtle serpent caused poor Eve  
to eat fine apples, I'm afraid I'll be  
chastised for stealing all this royal fruit.

CORAMBIS: Fear not. This is a trifle, nothing more...

FOOL: They never saw a trifle, sir, I ate them raw.

CORAMBIS: You mistake me: you will not be  
persecuted for poaching apples only.

FOOL: I never poached them neither, but  
ate them where they fell.

CORAMBIS: Come, take drink for courage and we'll  
report the thing together. The King will thank  
you for your pains. You'll have a slug of Rhenish?

FOOL: I won't say no. I've a spongy thirst on me  
from eating sour apples.

[CORAMBIS, USING DROPS FROM THE VIAL, TAINTS THE DRINK. OFFERS IT TO THE FOOL]

CORAMBIS: ...to your health, sir!

FOOL: To the King that's gone, and the Kingdom still to come!

CORAMBIS: (ASIDE) It will come presently.

FOOL: ...will you sup, Sir?

CORAMBIS: I'm not thirsty — but you, have more.

FOOL: *More* is my favourite portion!

[HE FEELS THE POISON'S DEADLY EFFECTS]

FOOL: A potent brew. These legs feel foreign to me.

CORAMBIS: Sit down here before you fall, dear sir.

FOOL: They say a haughty *spirit* will precede  
a fall — how right they are.

[THE FOOL DIES]

CORAMBIS: ...farewell, poor fool.

The glutton and the drunkard come to poverty.

## Scene iv

[ENTER FREYA. CORAMBIS SHORTLY AFTER]

CORAMBIS: Do *you* still haunt these halls? You whose use  
is spent?

FREYA: ...what's meant by this assault, Sir?

CORAMBIS: You have the owl's yellow eyes, that look  
with light on darkness. And yet, what's plain  
to common sight seems occult to you.  
The king and queen must marry. Their love  
(a seed lain long in icy soil) will bud  
in the warmth of new romance. Then your  
(once novel) love will seem a girlish folly.  
Even now that love's like coins kept  
in a frayed pocket: it spills away,  
And is spent without your knowledge.  
Here they come together. They're in love.  
Even the blind who cannot see the burning  
sun will feel its heat. You feel that heat?

[ENTER GERTRUDE & CLAUDIUS IN CONFERENCE THEY CROSS THE  
STAGE. CORAMBIS & FREYA FOLLOW THEM. EXIT ALL]

## Scene v

[ENTER CLAUDIUS & CORAMBIS]

CLAUDIUS: This is a dreadful thing you've done, Corambis!

CORAMBIS: His traffic was in mangled truths, whispered  
at suggestively; how long before  
the murder might've populated a ballad;  
been winked at by the common throng? Do not  
mourn fools! The world is not long short of them.

CLAUDIUS: It seems murder is fecund: in being  
scarce new-born itself, it soon begets  
another. Was he the only witness?

[CORAMBIS NODS]

CLAUDIUS: Then, at least, there's safety by that death.

CORAMBIS: But he is not the only tripping place—  
I do love my Lord, but more, I love  
that duty which I owe my Lord — for  
the latter must contain the first.

CLAUDIUS: ...the point!

CORAMBIS: The Queen is also loved most dearly — a lady

of her chamber: Freya.

CLAUDIUS: ...yes, they are  
as sisters. Arrived from Norway together — a pair  
inseparable.

CORAMBIS: The love with which that lady  
serves her majesty is not, I think, wholesome.  
It's raw and unadulterated love.  
And potent, when mingled with base matter:  
with jealousy and with black moods.  
It will cause you future harms, I fear.  
Harms as can be scarce imagined now.

CLAUDIUS: Are we to murder everyone and rule  
over a graveyard?

CORAMBIS: ...it will look  
like she has done it in some passion wild.

[PAUSE]

CLAUDIUS: Do it! Do whatever must be done.

[EXIT BOTH]

## Scene vi

GERTRUDE: Hamlet is come home!

CLAUDIUS: Hamlet? Hamlet is dead!

GERTRUDE: The Prince, my Lord? From Wittenberg? For his father's— for the late-king's funeral.

CLAUDIUS: Yes, yes. How is the Prince?

GERTRUDE: He wades through a river of grief; in which Lethean waters, he forgets his office and is often found to weep at court, embarrassing the Guard, who, defenceless in their sympathy, grow dewy eyed to see him so distraught.

CLAUDIUS: But these tears, like Onan's seed, fall fruitlessly to earth. His father lives — I saw him in the mirror not an hour ago. I should tell him so! The news will cheer him instantly.

GERTRUDE: Are you mad?

CLAUDIUS: Mad? No, madam. Not mad. Not I. Save murdering my brother in the innocence of his sleep, which death soon caused another. Save grappling for this sceptre wrought of smoke, to rule over a hive of buzzing malcontents. Save staining my spotless soul, damning myself eternally... Save all these trifles! I'm as jolly as a cow bell! And you, my Queen? How are you? You mislaid a husband, I hear, and got yourself another by the hour. How goes the world with you? You who were a widow hardly long enough to damp a handkerchief. Must have seemed an age, that mass of seconds!

GERTRUDE: Ha. Your memory's flawed — it was me, not you, killed the king! You stood idly by while I won all those torments still to come.

CLAUDIUS: You suppose that I'll be pardoned? Claudius was but close by with evil being done — blame can't touch him! The heavens will think it trivial that I stood and watched my brother die. (PAUSE) How often did I kill him in my thoughts? You think I can keep it secret, from those all-seeing eyes, this havoc in the mind, this hatred in my wicked heart?

[A KNOCK]

CLAUDIUS: What? What? What devil's there?

[ENTER CORAMBIS]

CORAMBIS: Pardon! But, the news I bring warrants my intrusion.

GERTRUDE: What news, Sir? Speak!

CORAMBIS: One of the ladies of your chamber— eh, Freda?

GERTRUDE: Freya?

CORAMBIS: Forgive me, I knew her only vaguely.

GERTRUDE: What news, man?

CORAMBIS: She's dead, your Majesty.

GERTRUDE: What? How?

CORAMBIS: In following Ahithophel's example—

CLAUDIUS: Speak plainly, man! These obfuscations are as tiny cuts where stabbing were more merciful.

CORAMBIS: She's been found in the orchard.

GERTRUDE: Found? Why found?

CORAMBIS: She was found to have hanged herself.

GERTRUDE: But this cannot be true! I must go to her! And try if love might resurrect her.

[EXIT GERTRUDE]

CORAMBIS: This may do well I think.

CLAUDIUS: What?

CORAMBIS: This grief at her lady's passing. It will be scanned as remorse for the king.

CLAUDIUS: Her death? It was humane?

CORAMBIS: Yes, yes. There was a kind of mercy in it: she would have die a death each time you and the queen held hands, or kissed, or lay down in one... You must speak at the late King's service. To do so will assure the mass, that a new king now rules them.

CLAUDIUS: Even now he has this power over me: to open my mouth, to wag my tongue.

[EXIT BOTH]

## Scene vii

[ENTER CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, PRINCE HAMLET, CORAMBIS, PRIEST, ATTENDANTS, ETC.]

PRIEST: Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,

et lux perpetua luceat eis.

In memoria aeterna erit iustus,

ab auditione mala non timebit.

[PAUSE. CLAUDIUS TAKES TO THE ALTAR TO DELIVER A EULOGY]

CLAUDIUS: The king's a thing immortal; death cannot

enter the office of a king; though

the door were open, the threshold can't be crossed.

The king is a spirit housed in this body,

and now this. Death cannot find it

though he seek it out. What is lost rather

is a man, a man who was once king.

Shed no tears for your king; your king

lives still. Rather cry at the loss

of a man: for a man is a unique

constellation (of joys, pains, loves

and losses) that will not come again,

except as a phantom of memory, except  
as a soft voice in the ear to whisper  
(having been released from all contingency)  
how we might be better than we are.  
He was my brother...

GERTRUDE: No, no, no...

[GERTRUDE HAS STOOD AND MADE HER WAY ONTO THE ALTAR]

CLAUDIUS: Gertrude?

GERTRUDE: I must speak—

CLAUDIUS: Do you think that's wise, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE: My heart will burst if I do not speak!

CORAMBIS: (ASIDE TO CLAUDIUS) I'm wary what she'll say, my Lord. The  
queen

is wild with grief...Her mouth is full of splintered  
words; words she would spit out.

CLAUDIUS: ...please Gertrude!

GERTRUDE: The heart screams to be heard.

[CLAUDIUS MOVES ASIDE. GERTRUDE ALONE BEFORE THE CROWD]

GERTRUDE: (PAUSE) ...forgive me,

For grief has suddenly made me mute...

I cannot speak for your loss, for yours

is yours alone. Can only say what I  
have lost; in saying that, I may well speak  
for you. I have lost a thing most precious,  
which gold and silver dull beside. I have  
lost the sun: her light, her heat. O,  
moonlight offers consolation; but  
still, I seem to walk in darkness now.  
I have lost that voice I loved: who'll  
speak such sweetness now? I have lost  
that smile I loved: who'll share that  
devilish smile with me? I have lost  
that loving touch: who'll hold these empty hands?  
I have lost those eyes I loved: the eyes  
that looked on me with love. I have lost  
the sudden turning round to find that you  
were there. I have lost the waking up,  
have lost the laying down. I have lost  
that world apart, which only you and I  
have known. I have lost— I am lost.  
I am lost. I am...

[PRINCE HAMLET COMES TO COMFORT HIS MOTHER. THEY EXIT  
TOGETHER. EXIT ALL THERE AFTER]

*The End*

## NOTES ON TEXT

As a prequel to *Hamlet* must, perforce, contain many of the character names found in the source play, where needed (to avoid confusion) I employ a superscript demarcation indicating authorship as follows:

Gertrude<sup>S</sup> (Shakespeare), Gertrude<sup>K</sup> (Kavanagh).

Prince Hamlet appears in my play but never speaks, nor does King Hamlet speak (and he is typically referred to throughout the following commentary as ‘the king’).

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For all references to Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* I use the following text:

Shakespeare, W., Harold Jenkins, *Hamlet (Arden Shakespeare)* (London: Methuen, 1982) — which I refer to by the editor’s surname: Jenkins.

All other references to Shakespeare’s plays are from:

Shakespeare, W., ed. By Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan, *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works: Revised Edition* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2011).

Note, when quoting from this text I modernise the spelling of ‘murther/er’ (to murder/er) for ease of reading.

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## GERTRUDE & CLAUDIUS: REVERSE ENGINEERING SHAKESPEARE

Reverse engineer: ‘to examine (a product) in order to determine its construction, composition, or operation, typically with a view to manufacturing a similar product.’ (*OED*)

In the main, the project undertaken for this doctoral thesis is best described as ‘practice-based research’: as Estelle Barrett describes it, practice-based is a studio-based process wherein ‘knowledge is derived from doing and the senses’ such practical and active research offers an alternative to more passive forms of learning, because it is ‘[s]ituated and personally motivated’ (Barrett, p.2).<sup>1</sup> Research ‘[g]rounded in actual practices, experiences, or interactions; dependent on or determined by circumstances or social context’ (*OED*).

In my own practice, I wrote *creatively* in order to explore my subject. Alongside this practised-based mode, I undertook more *traditionally* academic research. And the two modes informed one another.

As Barrett suggests, practice-based research is a process whereby ‘innovation is derived from methods that cannot always be pre-determined, and [that] “outcomes” of artistic research are *necessarily* unpredictable’; such research is an ‘emergent process’ where ‘method unfolds through practice’ (Barrett, p.3; p.5; p.9). I will have more to say on the difficulty of charting the origins of creative output anon, but here it will suffice to cite Bourdieu’s contention that ‘the *opus operatum* conceals the *modus operandi*’ (Barrett, p.4): in essence, once mixed, it is impossible unmix the paint.

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<sup>1</sup> Estelle Barrett & Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London & New York: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2010), p.1.

During the research process for this thesis, then, I set about gaining a practical knowledge of Shakespeare's craft; and in so doing, I attempted to translate that knowledge into a creative artefact. However, it is important to note from the outset that the opposite process — wherein I wrote *creatively* in a bid to uncover his craft (via 'practical experimentation') — also took place. Moreover, neither mode of inquiry is, to my mind, more important than the other. And I achieved my ends through a combination of analysis, appropriation, and innovation.

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Before I proceed with any analysis of what I have (and have not) achieved, it is incumbent upon me to justify my subject. Why have I chosen Shakespeare as the site of this practice-based/academic investigation? Frankly, in spite of his continued popularity and the somewhat holy institution that surrounds his name, I think of Shakespeare as a *modern* writer and one we have still to come to fully know. As Peter Brook maintains:

Shakespeare is the model of a theatre that contains Brecht and Beckett, but goes beyond both. Our need in the post-Brecht theatre is to find a way forwards, back to Shakespeare. [...] Obviously, we can't whistle up a second Shakespeare. But the more clearly we see in what the power of Shakespearian theatre lies, the more we prepare the way.<sup>2</sup>

I, too, feel that what Brook recognises in Shakespeare's writing — its modernity — poses a challenge to all writers, demanding they stretch themselves to the limit of their

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), p.96

abilities. Not, so as to produce a ‘master work’, but that such a challenge (in and of itself) becomes for the writer a crucible.

I chose Shakespeare because he seems to have as many of the qualities one might hope to find in a good writer. But, as Brook warns, ‘a neo-Elizabethan theatre based on verse and pageantry would be a monstrosity’ (Brook, p.41). Instead, Brook recommends that we look to examine the qualities that Shakespeare possessed more closely. He outlines these qualities as follows: a lively use of stage time (into which a good deal of material is put), a variety of levels, a mastery of technical features (metre, verse, prose), a clear social aim (Shakespeare’s plays are about being human). And in order for the modern writer to aspire to these heights he must ‘discover what he believes theatre to be’ (Brook, p.41).

Of course, Shakespeare has his detractors too, and I must address perceived objections, too, in justifying my choice of literary model, and, indeed, the poetic mode more generally.

Antonin Artaud not only blames Shakespeare (and those who follow him) for engendering a rift between audience and play, but he questions what he sees as a predominance of the ‘word’ in theatre. It is never clear how well Artaud knows Shakespeare’s work (if at all); for instance, are his impressions formed in response to French translations, say? If so, I cannot imagine that it is possible in French to capture the full gamut of Shakespeare expressive power — indeed, it might be argued that it is the very *mongrel* quality of English (its richness of contributory sources) that fosters a writer such as Shakespeare: one adept at moving from the simplistic to the complex.

Either way, Artaud offers only a summary dismissal of Shakespeare.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, Artaud's attack on the primacy of written text in theatre must be addressed.

On this subject, Artaud makes the inflammatory claim that 'our theatre [...] exists under the exclusive *dictatorship* of the words' (emphasis mine), and one might be forgiven for finding his conjecture superficially sound at first, but as Brook reminds us, '[a] word does not start as a word — it is an end product which starts with an impulse stimulated by attitude and behaviour' (Brook, p.15), which contention I want to extend in the following way, countering Artaud: Yes, while I agree that that is how it appears; after all, one goes to a bookshop/library to avail of a play text and often that text is the most tangible, permanent evidence of a play. Even so, there does not exist a tyranny of the text over the other parts of production. Rather, the text is often the only part of the production that has come down to us, which was especially the case when Artaud was making this complaint. But (in the case of Shakespeare) those same texts have encapsulated evidence of the repertoire of characters, and of playing styles, which the production company (the Lord Chamberlain's Men/King's Men) had at their disposal.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from the fact that a play text offers only a glimpse, revealing that part of a production which breaches the surface, those who work in the theatre know that the writer, too, works *in* the theatre — often developing their work as part of its premiere production — and that writers rarely, if ever, stand aloof from, or in *dominion* over theatre.

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<sup>3</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Victor Corti, (London, Calder Publications, 1999), pp.57-58.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the character of the fool matures along with the alteration of the actor who played that part: from Will Kempe to Robert Armin.

That objection laid to one side, then, I must still countenance Artaud and Brook's caution against *poetry* of a certain bent: 'Do away with dead poetry,' demands Artaud (Artaud, p.59);<sup>5</sup> while Brook warns:

Attempts to revive poetic drama have too often led to something wishy-washy or obscure. Poetry has become a meaningless term, and its association with word-music, with sweet sounds, is a hangover of a Tennysonian tradition that has somehow wrapped itself round Shakespeare, so that we are conditioned by the idea that a verse play is halfway between prose and the opera, neither spoken nor sung, yet with a higher charge than prose. (Brook, p.54)

I agree with Brook that any writer attempting to revive poetic drama must avoid the obvious pitfalls of *pretty* prose, and placatory gestures; my own interest is not in either of these possibilities. On the contrary, Shakespeare is not pretty; nor has he ever been accessible enough, or full of hokey sentiment, to merely 'please' an audience.

Those who appreciate Shakespeare likely do so because Shakespeare does not seduce or patronise. However, as Fred Sedgwick posits, there exists a largely unexamined ideal of Shakespeare (and I must outline why I am not of their camp): 'In 1989, Prince Charles attacked modern teaching of English and compared the way young people speak now with the glories of Shakespeare's English'; in response, Sedgwick notes that Nigel Wheale 'identifies the politics of this kind of talk as an English "nationalist agenda"'.<sup>6</sup> Sedgwick goes on to rebut Prince Charles's castigation of the 'modern use of "casual obscenity"' as though he [Prince Charles] had never read

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<sup>5</sup> It is somewhat ironic that in calling on us to do away with written plays Artaud has recourse only to a written text (in order to delineate and fully develop this thesis). He did not, for example, trust that said ideas might be impressed upon us by way of a series of yelps, accompanied by a bout of spirited flailing. Words, it would seem, have their uses after all.

<sup>6</sup> Sedgwick, Fred, *Shakespeare and the Young Writer* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), online at, <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aber/detail.action?docID=179906>> [accessed, 27,08, 2019], p.6.

Malvolio's reading of Maria's letter in *Twelfth Night*, or the first scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, or Mercutio's speech at II:1:7–41'. In this way, 'Shakespeare is [...] "a cliché of everything English"' (Sedgwick, p.6; quoting Morag Styles).

This conception of Shakespeare as a sort of demigod, who has gifted us a collection of sacrosanct texts, is dispelled when we learn to see his craft in human terms; and when we subsequently realise that we ourselves are full of this same miraculous-seeming potential to produce a *vital* poetry. The present thesis seeks to contribute to such an enterprise; to explore the craft of a writer like Shakespeare in order to discover how modern writers might benefit from the exposure of such an apprenticeship.

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I originally conceived this project while completing my Bachelor's degree (intending to pursue the work as part of a Master's dissertation). At that time, I had become particularly interested in the sonnet form, and planned to explore the Gertrude-Claudius love affair via a sonnet cycle. The strictures of the sonnet form excited me and I found its technical limitations liberating.<sup>7</sup> As part of a natural progression, an initial interest in formal poetry evolved into a fascination with the form and function of Shakespeare's soliloquies and speeches. This foundational interest in formal poetry, and the original conception of this work as a poetry collection, still informs the scope of my analysis.

When I came at last to pursue the idea I found that the play form (and not a sonnet cycle or poetry collection) was the best receptacle within which to place the

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<sup>7</sup> For, attending to these formal limitations — iambic pentameter, volta, rhyming scheme, the fourteen-line limit, enjambment — had the (somewhat unexpected) effect of freeing up my creative intuition.

creative element; not only because the play text happens to be the form from which I am drawing my inspiration, but because I did not believe my original conception of a poetry collection afforded me the kind of variability — in terms of mode (prose to verse), and phrasing (simple to complex) — that I ultimately came to require of the medium.

Even so, that the medium now takes the form of a play text is a matter of *best fit*, and I want to be it clear, from the outset, that the play form is *not* adopted because I am *especially* interested in that form. To this end, the creative element might just as easily have been expressed as a novel. It is only because I became particularly interested in soliloquy and verse the latter option was not taken.

So the play, then, is primarily an experiment in ‘verse drama’ because I did not want only and always to write discrete poems, which might cohere only in so far as they were placed together in a collection; instead, I wanted to provide the linking material; to create a narrative line.

Both play and essay examine the structure and purpose of rhetorical figuration. And both are ways of experimenting with and comprehending soliloquies and speeches — their function and form. Those areas of focus delimit this thesis. Note, for example, I do not expressly concern myself with the meta-structure of the play: its narrative arch, the interplay of scene divisions, the balance of light and dark. Certainly, those elements are brought to an acceptable level of completion (in which regard, I have trusted my intuitive sense of proportion).

It is important to note that another writer, apprenticing themselves to Shakespeare, might have opted to focus on those areas that I have *not* pursued. It is for this reason that I can make the claim that *Gertrude & Claudius* (herein *Ger.*) operates

primarily as a method of ‘practice-based research’, and only latterly (and unintentionally) a work to be performed.<sup>8</sup>

So, the play and essay — rather than the one *commenting* on the other, or the one *leading* to the other — operate in concert; they are two complementary ways in which to interrogate Shakespeare’s methods.

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In particular, both the play and this exegetic essay are attempts to better understand Shakespeare’s use of verse: of his particular admixture of simple (plain) and complex (dense) phrasing, and how these elements combine to produce a polyvocal meta-structure.

Contrary to Artaud’s image of poetry as a *fossilising* constituent of theatre (Artaud, p.59), I believe that heightened, figurative language (poetry) can have an effect akin to the ‘alienation’ Brecht was after:

It was out of respect for the audience that Brecht introduced the idea of alienation, for alienation is a call to halt: alienation is cutting, interrupting, holding something up to the light, making us look again. Alienation is above all an appeal to the spectator to work for himself, so to become more and more responsible for accepting what he sees only if it is convincing to him in an adult way. Brecht rejects the romantic notion that in the theatre we all become children again. (Brook, p.81)

Likewise, verse drama demands active audition — it produces the same kind of halting effect that Brook ascribes to Brecht’s ‘alienation’; why should art not be demanding?

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, any writer who sets out to create work — even experimentally — will naturally seek to bring that work into a state of completion, or near completion. That has been the case here, but I suspect the areas still wanting development (were *Ger.* ever to be staged) would be those of scene length and scene interplay, the balance of light and dark, and the overarching narrative line.

Demanding art better reflects the true nature of reality; anything less is false and patronising.

In contrast, Artaud's notion of affecting the audience (like music affects a snake; Artaud, p.61) strikes me as a dangerous, autocratic desire, which seeks to bypass reason and agency in order to elicit a purely *reflexive* reaction. A sudden, loud crash may startle, but one ultimately rejects being moved in this way, and we are rightly frustrated by art forms full of cheap tricks of this kind. To my mind, what Artaud describes is nearer to the fun fare than the theatre. I am also wary of his exoticism in response to the Balinese troupe he describes and his desire to recapture 'ancient magic powers' (Artaud, p.66). These notions seem as 'wishy-washy' as the poetry Brook warns against. I am reminded of Bill Evans' conjecture (about too much freedom in avant garde music), when he remarked that a baby's wail has an undeniable expressive quality, but that it lacks artistic merit;<sup>9</sup> I think Artaud is in danger, too, of mistaking the raw energy of expression with that which is intelligible, artistic. I understand that in some way he wishes to bypass the intellect; that he values the senses more, and that he wishes to *sensitize* his audience. But I would question his view of the mind as separate from the senses, (Artaud, p. 27) when surely the mind is their storehouse, their auditor?

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Like Tom Stoppard's seminal play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, my play seeks to be 'a unique deviation from the parent work' while 'work[ing] collaboratively

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<sup>9</sup> See, 'Bill Evans Trio At Helsinki, Finland 1970, interview excerpts': online video recording, YouTube, 21 Feb 2009, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=xix9KVnPxPY>> [accessed: 27/08/2019]

with the patterns set down by Shakespeare'.<sup>10</sup> And while Michael Dean complains that, 'the fact that Shakespeare is an inscrutable, multifaceted phenomenon of English drama has not stopped the critical world from attempting to distil the quintessential spirit of his literary work' (Dean, p.169), I, too, found it necessary to make certain *assumptions* about what that 'quintessential spirit of his literary work' might consist in in order to 'reverse engineer' his work.

In terms of plot, the new play offers a prequel to the events of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Of course, other authors have undertaken similar engagements with *Hamlet*. John Updike's novel, *Gertrude and Claudius*, covers much of the same period — the time leading up to the assassination — dealt with in my play; therefore, I cannot claim that chronicling the affair (and/or the pre-assassination period) is uniquely mine.<sup>11</sup> That said, it is fitting that a writer apprenticed to Shakespeare *not* be overly concerned with the originality of their plot. Shakespeare rarely originated the plots that underlie his own works; nor did he seem (in *Hamlet*) to be unduly concerned by the inconsistencies in that plot — inconsistencies many have been troubled by.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, Updike's response differs from my own in two important ways: his text is a prose exploration, and he makes no attempt to adopt a Shakespearean methodology. Therefore, it is the *apprenticeship* nature of my project that differentiates it from the approaches taken by Updike and others.

Still, there exists other points of similarity with those works that speak back to *Hamlet*. For instance, my play *foregrounds* Gertrude; such foregrounding has also been

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Dean, 'Stoppard's Shakespeare: Collaboration and Revision', ed. by William Baker, "*The Real Thing*": *Essays on Tom Stoppard in Celebration of his 75th Birthday* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2013), p.172.

<sup>11</sup> John Updike, *Gertrude And Claudius* (New York: Penguin, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> For a full discussion of which, see Jenkins pp.122-28.

undertaken in Howard Barker's play *Gertrude – The Cry*, and by Margaret Atwood in her short story 'Gertrude Talks Back'.<sup>13</sup> These literary engagements differ from my own project in the following ways: Howard Barker's play bears little relation — stylistically or narratively, I mean — to *Hamlet* (nor does Barker attempt to appropriate a Shakespearean methodology).

That said, early exposure to Barker's play helped because I found his lack of reverence for the source material emboldening.

Atwood's text, too — though witty and irreverent — is not a *sustained* meditation on the source material. While I agree with many of its apparent aims, 'a desacralization of Hamlet through both humour and re-contextualization in the quotidian, the dismissal of guilt, and correspondingly, a rejection of his (male) construction of [Gertrude]', this is not a Feminist reading without problems of its own.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to the writers discussed above, then, I set out to observe how Shakespeare achieves certain ends, such as: the use of speeches/soliloquies to reify character; the deployment of rhetorical figures to render speech acts as art objects; the underscoring of mood and extension of theme through the application of poetic techniques.

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<sup>13</sup> Howard Barker, *Plays: Two* (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2006). And, Margaret Atwood, *Good Bones* (London: Virago, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> For instance, Hamlet becomes 'a student of uncleanly habits who lives in a "slum pigpen" and does not bring laundry home often enough' (why should he bring it home, and to whom should he bring it?); and, an even greater cause for concern, 'Ophelia is erased in Atwood's story; whereas Hamlet is re-named, Ophelia is de-named: she is simply referred to as "that pasty-faced whats-her-name."' (Cuder Dominguez, n. p.).

Pilar Cuder Dominguez, 'Rewriting Canonical Portrayals of Women: Margaret Atwood's "Gertrude Talks Back"', online article (no pagination), <<https://www.lsj.org/web/literature/atwood-gertrude.php>> [accessed 10/09/2018].

At this juncture, it will help to articulate the main areas explored in the new play and this exegetic essay.

In terms of theme, *Ger.* chiefly concerns itself with the following questions: Can the assassination of a tyrant ever be justified? (a question that I conceive as a subcategory of *casus belli*);<sup>15</sup> How are people persuaded to commit violent acts? The latter question led me to an appreciation of rhetoric, which I conceive of as the chief means available to those who (while remaining relatively powerless) must convince others to either aid and abet them, or to do their bidding.

The play *Hamlet* seems to invite inquiry about the events that must have preceded the play's action; indeed, it is part of that play's success as a work of fiction that it creates such a vivid impression of its own past, of a world beyond its staged events.<sup>16</sup> In essence, this thesis merely attempts to do in writing what actors in the rehearsal room tend to: I am filling out the 'gaps' in order to construct a backstory.

In his characterisation of Claudius<sup>S</sup>, I was struck that Shakespeare did not simply create a character possessed of the same unadulterated villainy of an Iago, say, or a Richard III. Instead, there were intriguing hints of a more recognisably human sensibility. And that intrigued me.

Like Prince Hamlet (but for entirely different reasons), I was bothered by that 'little month' wherein romance (or, expedience) had seemingly cheered the weeping

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<sup>15</sup> 'An act justifying, or regarded as a reason for, war' (*OED*)

<sup>16</sup> As Dean notes of Stoppard's responses to Shakespeare: '[it] demonstrates how an authentic expression of authorial intent is illusory and remains just beyond the stage and screen. But in providing those gaps, the writer entices future authors into successive acts of innovation and reinterpretation' (Dean, p169), and '[i]n terms of Stoppard's relationship with Shakespeare, the narrative gaps in *R & GAD* furnish Stoppard with an opportunity to explore what unknowable mysteries have played out in *Hamlet*' (Dean, p.173)

Gertrude well enough that she could ‘post | With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!’ (Ham., I.ii.156-57). These features of the ‘parent play’ suggested an alternative backstory to the one offered by the Ghost (Ham., I.v), or Prince Hamlet (throughout).

But more than these suspicions, I was interested in exploring how the supposed facts of this case — or any case — might be altered, or even overturned. Thus, the prequel text, *Ger.*, attempts to illustrate just how entirely misleading and misplaced our passions — such as Hamlet’s instinct for revenge — may be.

Due to the Elizabethan prohibition against women acting on the stage, Shakespeare’s female characters were always performed by men (or, boys); this technical fact may account for the paucity of prominent female roles. Certainly, there are memorable female characters: Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra, Gertrude, Goneril & Regan, the Weird Sisters, to name a few; but the main protagonists of any play — the characters that drive the action — tend not to be female. Of course, women’s lack of real-world power and agency might well account for Shakespeare’s exclusion of females from those power positions within his own plays. A modern writer, however, can present a different picture.

I wanted to create female characters who — though they utilize what scant means they have available to them — effect real change; characters on the same level as Hamlet, Macbeth, Brutus: characters who pursue certain ends and shape the play’s action.

## DRAMATURGICAL RATIONALE

My main reason for undertaking this thesis — both its creative and exegetic elements — was one of personal development. Personal development as an artist and academic is, to my mind, at the core of why one pursues a course of doctoral training in the first instance.

But not only is personal development chief among my own aims, I also conceive of the artist/academic practitioner as the *site* of their contribution to the body of knowledge. The work they produce, be it creative or academic, only acts as *evidence* of engagement. It is the *future* practice of an artist/academic — enriched by the research and creative output undertaking during training — that contains the true potential for their contribution to knowledge.<sup>17</sup> I agree with Harley Granville Barker's assertion that, "[t]he true theatre," [...] "was a place for the study and development of the dramatic art" [...] an apprentice actor's opportunity for study and experiment was *more important* than performance *per se*'.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Barker's insistence on the 'study and development of one's dramatic art' is key to my defence: that the play text *Ger.* is *less important* than the *process* of its production.

However, while it is my firm contention that *Ger.* is primarily a practice-based method for researching Shakespeare's craft, there remains scope within this essay to

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<sup>17</sup> In my own case, as I now go on to train as a secondary-school teacher, and as I doubtless continue my career as an artist (writer, performer, director, dramaturg) I will draw on my progress in terms of creative practice, and use the research accrued over the course of my PhD to inform my teaching/professional practice.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Luckhurst, and David Bradby, *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.89; emphasis added.

outline the chief dramaturgical ideas underpinning my approach, and, further, to suggest where such a project is situated within contemporary practice.

Shakespeare is often the victim of what Peter Brook terms ‘the Deadly Theatre’:

Of course nowhere does the Deadly Theatre install itself so securely, so comfortably and so slyly as in the works of William Shakespeare. The Deadly Theatre takes easily to Shakespeare. We see his plays done by good actors in what seems like the proper way — they look lively and colourful, there is music and everyone is all dressed up, just as they are supposed to be in the best of classical theatres. Yet secretly we find it excruciatingly boring — and in our hearts we either blame Shakespeare, or theatre as such, or even our-selves. (Brook, p.12)

I suspect that one cause of this *deaden*ing effect is that, instead of finding out what each play means for the particular company producing it at any one time, *inherited* notions of how to stage and perform Shakespeare corrupt all possibility of innovation. Thus, the weight of theatre history leans oppressively on would-be interpretation. The temptation is to defer to history’s supposed authority, and as a result, Shakespeare becomes institutionalised. Again, I believe that the exercise of discovering how to, in effect, write like Shakespeare offers the possibility of freeing ourselves from history’s yoke.

In terms of seeing Shakespeare’s text anew, Peter Brook describes an experiment wherein he erases the verse elements, leaving only the plainer lines:

Once this crude separation had been made, it was then possible to do the reverse: to play the erased passages with full recognition that they had nothing whatsoever to do with normal speech. Then it was possible to explore them in many different ways — turning them into sounds or movements — until the actor saw more and more vividly how a single line of speech can have certain pegs of natural speech round which twist unspoken thoughts and feelings

rendered apparent by words of another order. This change of style from the apparently colloquial to the evidently stylized is so subtle that it cannot be observed by any crude attitudes. (Brook, p.136)

I, too, found that very simple exercises of this type often proved revelatory. Indeed, we do well to remember when handling Shakespeare that our own findings are just as valid as those which have become institutionalised through performance history and academia.

My own thought is that too often productions forget to *serve* the text.

Shakespeare's text is particularly rich matter and does not generally require (nor greatly benefit) from having more material layered atop it; simplicity and clarity of design elsewhere (acting, setting, costuming etc.) tends to better foreground the text.

That is not to say that I am one of those whom Brook admonishes when he reminds us:

Inevitably, someone calls for tragedy to be played once again "the way it is written". This is fair enough, but unfortunately all the printed word can tell us is what was written on paper, not how it was once brought to life. There are no records, no tapes — only experts, but not one of them, of course, has firsthand knowledge.' (Brook, p.14)

Nor do I go so far as Mamet who claims that 'every aspect of the production should reflect the idea of the play'.<sup>19</sup> Rather, I am suggesting that modern productions of Shakespeare often seem overtly and unnecessarily concerned with making the plays 'relevant'. In doing so, however, there is a tendency to present the work as though it were a corpse in need of resuscitation and not a *living* art work. I am thinking here,

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<sup>19</sup> David Mamet, *Writing in Restaurants* (London, New York: Faber & Faber, 1988), p.x.

say, of the recent RSC production of *As You Like It* (Kimberley Sykes, dir., 2019), which had all the bells and whistles one has come to expect of a modern production of Shakespeare, but lacked real evidence of a deep engagement with the text.<sup>20</sup> Sykes's rationale for what she terms this 'mingle-mangle' approach (more mangle than mingle, perhaps) is that the 'all the world's a stage speech' suggests meta-theatricality. A cogent rationale, if a touch expedient; however, because of this meta-theatricality the production often felt like *some ideas in search of a play*. And there seemed to me to be a lack of trust in Shakespeare's original material.

This trend of kitchen-sinkery in response to Shakespeare probably did not begin with Baz Luhrmann's film version of *Romeo + Juliet*,<sup>21</sup> but I do remember him making a similar case to Syke's. In Luhrmann's view Shakespeare is a master storyteller and this fact alone licences all and any means of relaying those stories now; the design ethos being, What would Shakespeare do if he were making a film?<sup>22</sup>

The mistake (as far as I am concerned, for I acknowledge such choices are largely subjective) is to suppose that because Shakespeare has been a prominent feature in the theatre landscape for some four-hundred years that his work is inherently 'theatrical'; but this approach forgets that the plays were once *new* and by an *unknown* playwright.

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<sup>20</sup> I am thinking also of Es Devlin's design for *Hamlet*, (Hamlet, dir. Lyndsey Turner, National Theatre, 2015) of which Ben Bradley of the New York Times wrote: 'When the audience returns after intermission, the stage is covered in ash and rubble, as if Denmark had been bombed by its enemy, Norway. | All of this looks pretty fabulous, but it doesn't always correspond to what's happening. And some of the interpolations are seriously irritating.'

Ben Brantley, 'Review: Benedict Cumberbatch in "Hamlet"', New York Times Aug. 25, 2015, online at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/26/theater/review-benedict-cumberbatch-in-hamlet-cocooned-in-an-aura-on-a-london-stage.html>> [Accessed: 30.08.2019]

<sup>21</sup> Baz Luhrmann, William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> 'Romeo + Juliet: Baz Luhrmann Interview', online video recording, YouTube, 26 Mar 2015, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jah0YGBD6qo>> [accessed 30/08/2019].

In order to discover what those new plays by an unknown playwright might have felt like, the creative element of this thesis responds to Brook's requirement of seeing the work anew. It is thus an experiment in the 'rebirth' that Brook implicitly alerts us to when he warns against the imitation of a style, stating that '[n]othing [is] reborn' when we *assume* we know how a play ought to be performed; this problem is not reserved to Shakespeare, of course, and Brook goes on to describe productions of Stanislavsky's work that held only 'antiquarian interest' but lacked the 'vitality of new invention' (Brook, p.17; p.18).

My thesis, then, is an attempt to re-discover *Hamlet* by taking its modalities apart and reforming them. I go at the text in an atomising way, seeking to unearth its fundamental constituents. More generally, the play text *Ger.* offers the following outcomes: I believe it to be a coherent piece of creative writing that acts as a proof of concept, affirming that one can indeed detect certain of Shakespeare's methods, and utilise them in the creation of a new work.

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A play text of this nature — a verse drama modelled after Shakespeare — might be objected to as *outmoded*, or, *anachronistic*; and its reader/audience may feel that it is incumbent upon me to offer a defence as to why verse drama might be considered a viable *modern* medium. However, this kind of reasoning may be taken to its nth degree, asking:

Why theatre at all? What for? | Is it an anachronism, a superannuated oddity, surviving like an old monument or a quaint custom? Why do we applaud, and what? Has the stage a real place in our lives? What function can it have? What

could it serve? What could it explore? What are its special properties? (Brook, pp. 45-46)

This series of *searingly* pragmatic questions is vital if one is to do something more with the medium than merely continue to worship at the altar of a long defunct church.

How does one answer them?

There is some truth, I suspect, in Artaud's distrust of established theatre. Of course, the theatre (like any art form) should always seek to push beyond its current dogma, and present practice. That desire to reinvigorate theatre is what seems to have driven Brook's own experiments; and appears to be the force which compelled Artaud also.

But we can move backwards to move forward.

Shakespeare has kept abreast of us as we in the theatre have progressed.

Indeed, it can be argued that his work has never fallen into desuetude, and, as a result, that these charges of 'outmoded', 'anachronistic' do not apply to him, or to verse drama as a medium.

What was Pinter, or Beckett, but the heightening of language? In their case, it was the stripping back, the paring down; an exhaustion through repetition of seemingly mundane, idiomatic speech; through which treatment language was transformed. Then we see, as in poetry, language as an *oddity*, and we discover (like the child repeating a word soon discovers) 'alienation'. 'The Theatre of the Absurd [...] used the unreal [...] because it sensed the absence of truth in our everyday exchanges' (Brook, p.59)

The verse play, too, has this potential to arrest our attention so that we do not — because we cannot — skirt over the surface of language. Verse can — as we

discovered earlier in Brook's experiment of 'erasure and reintroduction' — represent both, what I. A. Richards terms, the 'uttered and unuttered'.<sup>23</sup>

When humans interact, accompanying that which they *say* to one another is each speaker's *internal monologue*. Verse drama makes manifest this mind-speak. A theatrical form that allows a writer a way in which to reveal this interior world affords the viewer a fuller picture — often revealing our contrary nature. Indeed, there is a delicious irony to be had in allowing an audience access to a character's inner workings and then contrasting that knowledge with how the character is often compelled to act in opposition to their heart's desire.

Another possible objection to 'verse drama' as a medium may simply be the charge that it is 'unrealistic'; but such a charge is less troublesome to deal with than the first. One need only point out that *all* theatre is 'unrealistic'; yes, even the so-called kitchen-sink realism of the 50s and 60s. For, drama, perforce, *selects* those moments of tension in the lives it presents on stage; and it omits the moments in between. For this reason alone all drama is, technically speaking, 'unrealistic'. I know of no kitchen-sink drama that has passed the 'two-hour traffic of the stage' in moments of mundane domesticity.

'The *sine qua non* of both the dream and the drama is the suspension of rational restrictions in aid of happiness' (Mamet, p.9). I agree with Mamet that this poetic (or, non-rational) mind-set goes to the heart of drama. Seeing a play is akin to having a dream, and a play should affect one in that same *undetectable* manner dreams do. For, a play is a place where we watch murderers scheme, but dare not intervene; a place

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<sup>23</sup> I. A. Richards, *The philosophy of rhetoric* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p.10.

where we overhear intimate conversations, and, more strangely, private thoughts. There can be nothing ‘real’ or ‘rational’ about such an experience.

Brook reminds us that the theatre that proceeded Brecht was either ‘Naturalism’ or ‘Total Theatre’; both of which demanded passivity from the audience (Brook, pp.80-81). In contrast, Shakespeare’s oscillation between complex and simple language extends an invitation to us: we are invited to unpick metaphors. We are called to engage in ‘active audition’; to decipher the dream.

Brook asserts, also, that ‘when new plays set out to imitate reality we are more conscious of what is imitative than what is real’ (Brook, p.39). Indeed, a style of theatre that seeks (partially, at least) to set itself apart from such *memetic* concerns may be welcome; for, if every attempt at documentary is ultimately a process of *selection* and *deletion*, why not give up all pretence of capturing reality?

Therefore, in *Ger.* I have not set out to capture a *real* medieval Danish Elsinore (indeed, how could I have hoped to), nor have I attempted to produce an Elizabethan text. Rather, I have sought to capture elements of both, while allowing myself the imaginative freedom to introduce modern terms, *et cetera*. As Michael Dean observes of Stoppard’s play, ‘Ros and Guil exhibit strange anachronisms, a knowledge of concepts far beyond their schooling in Wittenberg. They are as displaced in Stoppard’s story as they are from Shakespeare’s.’ (Dean, p.173)

The materials from which *Ger.* is built are an eclectic mix, but the method of interweaving said materials follows Shakespeare’s example — as much as I deemed that to be necessary; after all, I have still to judge the finished product as it aligns with my one aesthetic sensibility.

The verse drama, then, allows us to move fluidly through a multidimensional space; from direct speech, to the mind's interior. It is a space constituted of both familiar elements and strange elements, which induce us to sift language, ever alert to its equivalency. Verse drama is ancient, yet timeless — like dreaming, we feel we should surely have grown immune to it by now, and yet, it glammers us anew.

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Another achievement of the creative element of this thesis is that the play operates as a site of personal expression.

By adopting a dialogic mode, I was able to explore the ethical dilemma often posed between self-preservation and right action. The play brings into question the notion that violence is *sometimes* justified.

My own moral instinct (if the term 'instinct' can be appended to the field of morals, a field which might demand something more rational than 'instinct' as a guiding rubric) inclines me toward the opinion that violence is *never* justified (it may be questioned if acting in self-defence can be considered an act of violence). However, in the play I explore the dialogic interactions of a group who feel themselves to be under such terrible duress that they see the use of violence (contained and measured though they hope it will be) as their only means to contest tyranny.

Even an experimental, practice-based research project must seek to address some genuine problem. A tragedy such as *Ger.* offers its audience an exaggerated version of the moral dilemmas they themselves will face. After all, all of us are, on occasion, called on to choose between 'self-interest' and 'right action'.

‘Like the plague, theatre is a powerful appeal through illustration to those powers which return the mind to the origins of its inner struggles.’ (Artaud, p.20) This conception of theatre marries with Mamet’s idea that the play is a dream, in that, a dream impels us to experience that which we know on some level is unreal, but which we are engaged by nonetheless. Tragedy acts on us like a nightmare: its tension demands resolution. A ‘real stage play upsets tranquillity’ (Artaud, p.19).

Indeed, theatre does its audience a disservice when it aims merely to entertain. Surely the utility of a tragedy such as *Hamlet* is to illustrate that even someone intelligent, thoughtful, and careful can be drawn into violence. In both Artaud and Mamet’s conceptions of theatre one realises that we must never take it literally: *Hamlet* is not about its action/s (indeed, Hamlet is famously inactive); rather, *Hamlet* is about the prince’s interior struggle to best serve his own conception of the good son; to understand and instantiate ‘right action’.

Ethical considerations of this calibre are of particular interest to me as a writer, and are a large part of the attraction Shakespeare holds for me. As a writer brought up in a somewhat stifling Catholic tradition, I am interested in examining whether an ethical heuristic can be discovered via creative expression (as opposed to one merely inherited via culture; arrived at actively rather than passively). It is my suspicion that our story-telling tradition is partly concerned with interrogating notions of ‘right action’ and conceptions of the ‘good life’.

Of course, storytelling also acts as a means to inculcate cultural norms and societal mores. The former function, as far as I am concerned, offers an interesting potentiality: we do better as artists when we expose the *contingent* nature of such rules (thus calling them into question). When art is used merely to solidify norms, it serves to propagandise and not to *actively* engage. The ability to engage the critical mind (and

emotions) is, perhaps, Shakespeare's paramount achievement as an artist. *It is the reason we return again and again to his work; for, were he merely a technically superb writer, he would surely have fallen out of fashion (like some much rococo art, or baroque music). After all, technical genius is only ever superficially interesting.*

Artaud makes the point that theatre should impel 'us to see ourselves as we are'. In this way, theatre becomes the place we air our dirty laundry; the public nature of which lends theatre its force, for in that public forum we all 'see ourselves as we are'; and, of course, we see others 'seeing themselves as they are'; the result of which is the realization that we are all just as cretinous as one another. Thus, catharsis.

For, as Artaud assures us, 'there are living powers in what is called poetry, and that the picture of a crime presented in the right stage conditions is something infinitely more dangerous to the mind than if the same crime were committed in life.' (Artaud, p.65)

Surely the purpose of tragedy is to say to an audience, Look at this expedient act, which you suppose will deliver wealth, position, power. See how petty, how pointless all such acts are! See how in the end they amount to nothing.

Or, in the case of a character such as John Proctor, tragedy says, Look how this simple farmer refuses to be coerced, but answers: 'Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!'.<sup>24</sup> In bearing witness to his anguish, tragedy seems to tell us, You too might summon such strength and resist corruption.

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<sup>24</sup> Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (Act 4).

In terms of academic enquiry, I have sought to better understand the following subjects: rhetoric as a means of persuasion; figurative language; and the form and function of speeches in Shakespeare, especially soliloquy.

I justify these points of enquiry as follows: an understanding of rhetoric (as a means of persuasion) is of particular utility in the present epoch when one cannot always be confident in the impartiality, or legitimacy of an information source. In such circumstances, the ability to assess the tenor of the message, and thus expose the rhetorical gambits employed, offers a means with which to weigh the relative worth of *suspect* information. Indeed, we may still be able to glean a wealth of useful data from communications we deem otherwise untrustworthy: for example, the mode of address adopted will often betray underlying biases, and reveal how the communicator wishes us to receive the information.

An understanding of how to deploy figurative language creatively has aided my own attempt to detect the underlying structure (the richness and variability) of Shakespeare's craft. So doing offers a finding pertinent to poetry writing more generally — which are in line with this thesis' origins as a would-be poetry collection.

An examination of the form a function of Shakespeare's speech writing — with a particular focus on soliloquy — suggests ways in which the accumulation and combination of figures and tropes may be contextualised. Again, a more general aim was to glean *generalisable* tenets of construction.

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In terms of how the play might be staged, it will suffice to say that I have purposely set out *not* to offer an exhaustive series of scene descriptions and/or suggestions about performance, or characterisation. My instinct in this matter chimes with Brook's

advice, ‘Some writers attempt to nail down their meaning and intentions in stage directions and explanations, yet we cannot help being struck by the fact that the best dramatists explain themselves the least.’ (Brook, p.15)

This decision not to append stage directions, or embed performance directions, is in part a response to the scant amount of information we have about how Shakespeare’s plays were staged. Moreover, I have always thought it a great advantage that we know so little about Shakespeare the person. For, as interpreters of literary art, we too often simply reduce texts to a series of cryptic clues that, once cracked, will lead ineluctably back to some biographical factoid about their author — Silvia Plath’s work, for example, has suffered much second-guessing of this type.

Rather, it is the reader/actor/director/producer/dramaturg who must be trusted to play their role as interpreter. I have no particular conception of how a production company *ought* to stage *Ger.*, aside from the ‘dream’ that plays out in my mind when I re-read it (which no company could be reasonably expected to extract!). Moreover, it is for whatever company produces the play to discover the *best* manner in which to do so.

In short, the writer is responsible *only* for the text.

Now, having established my Pliate-esque approach to the question of staging, I will say that I rationalise the worth of a ‘verse drama’ text in so far as it marries with my conception of a ‘Theatre of Poverty’, which I will delineate below.

In response to Brook’s notion that the theatre has become so expensive that audiences/companies cannot risk commercial/popular failure, and so ‘steadily the deadly theatre digs its own grave’ (Brook, p.24), my own play is intended to present a

*poor* company with a *rich* text. The dramaturgical notion underpinning this conception of *Ger.*, and ‘neo-classical’ texts like it, is one I am calling a ‘Theatre of Poverty’.

In imagining such a company, I envisage an ensemble group with an ethos of *development* at its core: development of creative writers, performers, production technicians — because of, or in spite of its lack of resources. For such a company still has at its disposal the full richness of language (by which I mean all the many communicative possibilities of word, sound, gesture), and the full potential of imagination (their own and, importantly, that of their audience).

As I have already stated, big-budget productions often engender imaginative *disengagement*. We forget that an audience can conjure Elsinore out of an ‘empty space’, a dark space. The parquet floor of a parish hall is transformed into the rippling waves of the North Sea. A bentwood chair becomes a throne. A broom-handle a sceptre. The imagination thrives in spite of (often because of) *poverty*.

Brook commenting on Craig’s use of shadow in place of a painted forest perfectly captures my point, before this the use of elaborate stage scenery meant that ‘useless information absorbed our attention at the expense of something more important’ (Brook, p.84). The *transitory* suggestion of an object (and not the thing in and of itself) is enough. In this way the whole mechanism of production is poetic, figurative.

Thus, *Ger.* is an attempt to create a poetically dense text, with which a company (so described) can make high art (or ‘complex’, ‘rich’ art, if *high* is too easily misapprehended as a value judgement).

In closing out this section, I want to consider whom might the audience be for such a project.

A project like *Ger.* offers a novel engagement with the source text, and might appeal to students of that text, and of Shakespeare's work more generally. The nature of the appeal is that *Ger.* presents an alternative narrative with which to re-evaluate the source material: the rationale behind the assassination conjectured in my work illustrates how little we know about the temporal space either side of the *Hamlet*.

This conjecture serves the broader function of warning the audience that often our knowledge of events and their causes is, at best, partial and that we do well to proceed with caution. Such a play, then, offers a caution against our all-too-human desire for certainty and expediency.

The play is of use to students, too, in that it stands to *demystify* the craft of Shakespeare and to illustrate that, while his talent is, in many respects, unique, it can, in part, be reverse engineered. I believe that students, first introduced to Shakespeare, would greatly benefit from practical exercises that expose his craft and offer the student mastery over certain aspects of Shakespeare's methodology.

Obviously, were the play to be staged, it demands a certain theatrical literacy of its audience. That is not to say the play cannot be enjoyed without prior knowledge of the parent text, but a full appreciation of the plot alterations suggested in *Ger.* will not be available to those without any knowledge of *Hamlet*.

So, the *ideal* audience, then, for a production of *Ger.* are those who enjoy active, intellectual engagement at the theatre.

Theatre is an art form that — more than all the others, perhaps — carries its past with it, and (when it does not merely attempt to relive past glories) operates by a

constant process of reimagining and restaging. For this reason, above all others, there is little to be gained in attempting to justify a place for *Ger.* in terms of contemporary play-writing practice: for plays, like music, are so diverse and variable that genre considerations serve only those in the critical or commercial field. Moreover, the artist does well to avoid both considerations during the period of creation, which, in my case, has been the period of doctoral training. If *Ger.* must be categorised, then it is ultimately an experiment, the object of which is engagement with Shakespeare and, thus, offers a process of development through praxis. That there now exists a simulacra of a play text is merely a happy accident of the practice undertaken.

For, theatre practice in general, and the writer's practice in particular, must allow for *failure*; as Luckhurst notes in quoting Steve Waters' response to Bond's *Saved* and Kane's *Blasted*:

New play development is often inherently reactionary. If it's about making plays 'work' then it can too often result in conversations about the 'well-made play'. But Edward Bond's *Saved* and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* broke with convention and didn't 'work' – in ways that turned out to be revolutionary. (Luckhurst, p.214)

To my mind, the chief benefit of a doctoral thesis is the developmental space it affords a candidate, wherein commercial concerns are suspended and one practices one's art purely for its own sake.

## RHETORIC

To begin, it will be useful to define ‘rhetoric’ and ‘rhetorical figures’; Nancy S.

Struever offers the following overview of the subject’s origins:

the essential *strategy* of rhetorical training was to infuse the prosaic genres — forensic, deliberative, celebratory — with the strengths of poetry: rhetoric stipulated the mastery of intonation and rhythm, of visual and aural figuration.<sup>25</sup>

In essence, the art of rhetoric is primarily concerned with the theory and praxis of persuasive speech making. The art is shaped by its origins: ‘the flood of litigation in Magna Graecia after the fall of the tyrants’ (Struever, p. 137). Right from its inception, then, rhetoricians sought out the most effective strategies for advocacy. Moreover,

rhetoric must be concerned with all possible subject matters, with the arguments, planning, style and delivery of a speech, but also with the different circumstances in which speeches are made and the different kinds of audience, with voice projection and self-presentation, with emotional manipulation, humour and charm.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Nancy S. Struever, ‘Shakespeare and Rhetoric’, in *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 6.2 (1988), pp.137-44 (p. 137).

<sup>26</sup> Peter Mack, ‘Rhetoric, Ethics and Reading in the Renaissance’, in *Renaissance Studies*, 19.1 (2005), pp. 1-21 (p. 2). It may be supposed that a concern with ‘delivery’ and/or ‘voice projection’ does not apply to Shakespeare’s craft as a writer (concerning instead those actors who latterly come to perform his works), but what else, if not the manner of delivery, is Prince Hamlet preoccupied with in his advice to

It may be noted that the playwright's art and the art of rhetoric are consonant in several points. However, I do not mean to suggest that Shakespeare *knowingly* utilised the rhetorical figures I identify in his work — certainly, he need not have been familiar with the terms used below.<sup>27</sup>

However, as Jennifer Richards contends, there is a 'literary dimension' to rhetoric, of which Shakespeare's work offers a prime example.<sup>28</sup> But, we must take care when parsing, for 'it is not always easy to distinguish between the knowing and unprompted use of linguistic devices' (Richards, p. 55). Such devices (as suggested), doubtless, originate in ordinary, untutored communication.

Still, Peter Mack argues 'that the ethical originality of [...] Shakespeare is a product of both reading materials and techniques of reading and writing promoted by humanist rhetorical education' (Mack, p.20).

A tentative case may be made that Shakespeare's grammar-school education inculcated in him a working knowledge of rhetorical devices — even if only by imitation. For, as Mack explains, Renaissance students would have been encouraged to

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the players, when he bids them: 'Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature' (Ham., III.ii.17-19)? As we shall see, Shakespeare's writing often suggests modes of delivery and gesture, which his deployment of rhetoric, in part, guides.

<sup>27</sup> As Struever warns,

[o]n the one hand, we have an extraordinary aural/oral skill which is both diagnostic and generative; on the other, we have a tropological industry, a vested academic interest in historical continuities in doctrine. The industry claims symmetry: Shakespeare's competence is an academic one; he is, not to put too fine a point upon it, a scholar.'

(Struever, p. 141)

While I concede the point that we must not retrospectively mould Shakespeare to fit with our conception of a literary figure, ascribing to him competencies and knowledge he may not have possessed, it is, nonetheless, possible that Struever is in danger of underestimating Shakespeare's actual competencies.

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Richards, *Rhetoric* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.14.

keep a ‘commonplace book’ for the transcription of idioms and fragments of Greek and Roman texts.<sup>29</sup> Such an education was sufficient to provide models of rhetorical figuration. Struever concedes:

[i]t is, perhaps, naive of me to point out that dramatic talent is an aural talent; dramatic production, after all, is an aural achievement. (It is serendipitous, and confusing, that Shakespeare reads well in the study.)

(Struever, p. 138)

A playwright must understand how to utilise language in order to move an audience by those hallmarks of rhetoric: *ethos*, *logos* or *pathos*. In this regard Shakespeare was a writer *par excellence*.

In summation, it is reasonable to analyse Shakespeare’s work in terms of rhetoric; to do so is not to suggest that Shakespeare was ‘a scholar’ of rhetoric, and nor is the application of this frame simply an anachronistic fancy. As we have seen, a ‘humanist rhetorical education’ must have informed the structure and style of Shakespeare’s writing craft.

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As is evident in Shakespeare’s plays, characters without material force may achieve their ends by way of persuasion, subterfuge, or coercion — think of Iago’s falsehoods, or of Lady Macbeth’s goading. Thus, the prequel — as with my apprenticeship more generally — centres round the uses (and abuses) of words.

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<sup>29</sup> For example, Mack notes that King Lear’s prophetic line, ‘nothing will come of nothing’ (*K. Lear*, I.i.90) is a version of the Latin proverb ‘Ex nihilo nihil fit’ (Mack, p. 18) — indeed, there are many such borrowings peppered throughout Shakespeare’s work.

My focus on rhetoric as a means of analysing Shakespeare's composition may be further justified as follows. Any agent intent on influencing others through language engages (knowingly or no) in rhetoric. In *Hamlet* (and Shakespeare's plays more generally) agents seek to influence one another (and themselves: Hamlet wills himself to act). While rhetoric proper is the purposeful manipulation of oratory style and rhetorical figuration, all speakers (be they plaintives, coaxers, beggars, or outright liars) adopt the strategies identified in the formal subject. Indeed, what Greek, Roman and Renaissance scholars codified into the formal art must have, in part at least, originated in effective (and affective) native practice; from those strategies worked out in everyday transactions, and passed on (mimetically) generation to generation.

Moreover, rhetoric as an art is not merely concerned with ornament and style (though aesthetic quality is sometimes a consideration).<sup>30</sup> Nor need the rhetor aspire to anything like the demands of poetry espoused by Coleridge, who stated: "I wish our clever young poets would remember my homely definitions of prose and poetry; that is, prose — words in their best order; poetry — *the best words* in their best order" (emphasis added).<sup>31</sup> A rhetorical strategy may be as uncomplicated as that repetition with which Hamlet replies to Polonius's inquiry ('What do you read, my Lord?'): 'Words, words, words' (*Ham.*, II.ii.192).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For example, in the case of a rhetorical figure such as *aposiopesis*, speech is (temporarily) halted — and silence, through a manipulation of context, takes on a particular significance (which the phrase 'a pregnant pause' captures well). Here the absence of words is utilised, and the auditor is led to supply the missing detail. If the silence can be said to have an aesthetic quality at all, it gains said quality from the preceding context: from the words surrounding the silence.

<sup>31</sup> Billy Mills, 'Finding the Right Words to Define Poetry', *Guardian* 25 January 2008 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2008/jan/25/findingtherightwordstodef>> [accessed 20/07/2018].

<sup>32</sup> He does so either to drive Polonius away, or, to bolster the impression he wishes to foster of an 'antic disposition' (*Ham.*, I.v.180). Whichever the case may be, the *tricolon* figure is highly efficient and (judging by the various ways in which actors deliver that line) can suffer all manner of interpretation.

To say of a speaker, then, that they are an effective rhetor, need not imply that they are clever, or possessed of an impressive vocabulary: ‘the best words’.<sup>33</sup> A rhetor need only *seek* to persuade through oration — an aim more easily accomplished in some arenas than others.

For the reasons cited above, my initial analysis of Shakespeare’s texts has been through the lens of rhetorical figuration. Thereby, I sought to understand the strategies of persuasion adopted by the characters in *Hamlet* (and the other plays). More specifically, my approach entails the identification of rhetorical figures so as to expose the structural framework upon which Shakespeare’s speeches/soliloquies/dialogues are likely formed. I say ‘likely’ here because these are, of course, suppositions; ultimately, my analysis is subjective. For that reason, I am often liberal in terms of interpretation, affording the rhetorical figures a flexibility the Ancient Greeks may not have recognised. The figures and tropes offer a way of dissecting Shakespeare’s texts, and, while such cuts may be imprecise at times, they may be deemed constructive so long as they aid understanding and offer creative potential.

In the following section, then, I demonstrate some of the practical advantages of a rhetorical approach to Shakespeare. For convenience sake, I focus on this one

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<sup>33</sup> I realise that by ‘best’ Coleridge may simply have meant ‘most apt’, ‘best suited’, ‘fitting’, and that there is a danger here of producing a misapprehension similar to the one commonly applied to the idiom ‘survival of the fittest’, where ‘fittest’ is taken to mean something like ‘athletic prowess’, say, when it simply means ‘aptness’ in relation to a set of selective pressures. Likewise, Coleridge may simply have meant, pick those words best suited to your subject, and order them so as to achieve your desired effect. If so, his advice to poets chimes with rhetoric’s adjacent objective: to produce the best effect — to persuade.

particular soliloquy, but branch out to other speech acts (dialogue, speeches, soliloquies) where appropriate. While the list of figures identified here is by no means exhaustive, this initial analysis offers an illustration of rhetoric's expressive and emotive potential. This section prepares us for the later sections of the commentary where I broaden my focus to explore larger textual structures, such as the soliloquies and speeches in their entirety.

The soliloquy examined here affords a particularly fine example of the variety of figuration employed by Shakespeare, and of its utility. Throughout the present commentary, I suggest ways in which I have attempted similar applications. The soliloquy in question — *Ham.*, I.ii.129-59 — comes directly after the Prince's testy exchange with Gertrude and Claudius, wherein the question of 'unmanly grief' is contested. Having railed against the (unintended?) accusation he detects in the verb 'seems' (supposing it to suggest his grief is superficial), we find him alone. Here, at last, he reveals his true depth of feeling — 'that within which passeth show' (*Ham.*, I.ii.85).

By offering a close reading of this particular soliloquy, I mean to illustrate the ways in which Shakespeare employs rhetorical figures to construct a convincing facsimile of the grief-stricken mind (in this instance); and, more generally, to show how the thoughtful deployment of figures helps to reify character.

In this opening soliloquy a general pattern, or cycle, is discernible: progressing from outburst, to rationalisation, through rising tension, and returning once more to exclamation. I identify seven such sections (See Appendix 1, p.198).

## I. APOSTROPHE & EXCLAMATION

Modal flexibility is characteristic of Prince Hamlet's speech; Hamlet's dialogues, speeches and, particularly, his soliloquies evince an ability to shift between varying levels of speech. In contrast, the play's other *soliloquising* characters — Ophelia, Claudius — tend to display less modal variety. Indeed, Claudius's<sup>S</sup> 'O, my offence is rank' soliloquy (*Ham.*, III.iii.36-73; which, like Hamlet's 'Too, too sullied flesh' soliloquy, portrays inner turmoil) remains much more controlled throughout; its high-poetic mode precludes our engagement. Ultimately, Claudius<sup>S</sup> will suppress his guilt and learn to live with past deeds.

In Hamlet's soliloquies, a facsimile of true introspection is enlivened by extending an invitation to the audience. They are asked to engage with the 'question' under consideration. In contrast, Ophelia's soliloquy (*Ham.*, III.i.152-63) consists of observation only, and no such invitation is extended. And while Claudius's<sup>S</sup> soliloquy is peppered with questions, he immediately provides an authoritative answer to each — further barring our involvement in his dilemma.

The difference in the soliloquy type and complexity afforded each character makes technical sense: we *should* be more directly involved with a play's protagonist; other characters — though we have access to their introspection — should not engage us so completely as the central character. Let us examine by what means such engagement is elicited.

Hamlet's first soliloquy begins with an instance of *apostrophe*.<sup>34</sup> Later (in the section 'Soliloquy and Speeches'), I consider the question of to whom characters *turn* ('*strephein* "to turn"') in such instances of *apostrophe*.<sup>35</sup> For now, I am more interested in the emotive power of *apostrophe*, and the practical/technical value of that exclamatory O.

Immediately preceding this soliloquy, we have witnessed Hamlet's somewhat petulant exchange with the King and Queen. Therein, Hamlet's performance may have seemed mannered: here is a scholar whose apprehension of words strikes us as pedantic. We have yet to get the measure of this brooding figure. The sighing O offers us our first real glimpse beneath that courtly, scholarly veneer.

Shakespeare employs the exclamatory O to establish Hamlet's *ethos*: his 'character [...] as revealed in action or its representation'. Here, I consider the exclamatory O to be a form of *verbal* gesture; it is closer to an 'action' than a word; something akin to the power latent in words (as raw sound) that Artaud alludes to (Artaud, p.35: para. 1).<sup>36</sup>

In my play I drop the pronouns 'thou' and 'thee' as antiquated; for this reason, too, I make sparing use of the exclamatory O. But I do use it, because (unlike 'thou' and 'thee') O still has currency (typically as, Oh).

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<sup>34</sup> '[a] figure of speech, by which a speaker or writer suddenly stops in his discourse, and turns to address pointedly some person or thing, either present or absent; an exclamatory address'; and the figure is 'marked by the presence of O'.

Katie Wales, 'An A-Z of Rhetorical Terms', in *Reading Shakespeare's Dramatic Language: A Guide*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Lynette Hunter, Lynne Magnusson, Ann Thompson and Katie Wales (Methuen Drama: London, 2001) pp. 271-301 (p. 281).

<sup>35</sup> Taken from: 'Ethos', *Online Etymology Dictionary*, < <https://www.etymonline.com/word/ethos> > [accessed 10/09/2018].

<sup>36</sup> An O, or similar exclamatory sound, introduces each of the seven sections into which I divide the soliloquy (Appendix 1, p.198); these outcries mark the points at which Hamlet's distress reaches a peak.

O is, therefore, a practical expulsion, allowing for a range of expressive possibilities: a sigh (as here), frustration, wry irony, surprise. In performance, then, it proves an incredibly flexible vowel, and modern actors need no longer treat it merely as a *melodramatic* expletive.

In this particular instance, the O marks out the entire soliloquy as an *apostrophic* gesture: for in it Hamlet *turns* away from the dialogic arena of the court, and towards the interior world of his own psyche (or, theatrically, Hamlet addresses the play's audience directly). There are modal shifts within the soliloquy, which further examples of *apostrophe* signal.

With the line, 'That it should come to this!' (l. 137) Hamlet moves from an abstracted form of introspection to address his own conscience (the audience) more directly. The shift is further highlighted by the variation in style: we move from the high poetic to a plainer form. This latter mode sounds more personal, more conversational.

In my own play, titular characters have the greatest number of soliloquies/speeches; thus, revealing more of their introspection. In the soliloquies of both characters, I employ *apostrophic* exclamation for the same reasons that I suggest Shakespeare deploys the device.

For example, when Gertrude<sup>K</sup> is alone, her introspection is revealed in the soliloquy, beginning, 'O, let me prove a tiger in this swamp' (Kavanagh, p. 40); likewise, Claudius<sup>K</sup> asks to be transformed should he ever think to murder his brother: 'O, dress me in darkness then | and make my heart obsidian — hard | and cool — if ever I should contemplate | the killing of a king' (Kavanagh, p. 21). In each case, the O

marks out a special kind of evocation, or private wish. And we encounter another instance of *apostrophe* with the phrase ‘Frailty, thy name is woman!’.<sup>37</sup>

As we have seen, exclamatory expletives typically signal a modal shift; in this soliloquy we see several such shifts: initially the shift from a dialogic mode to an intrapersonal mode, then from abstraction to plain address, and again, back (briefly) to an attempt at the dialogic mode when Hamlet ineffectually rails against womankind.

In my own play I utilise *apostrophe* and exclamation in much the same way: characters typically ‘turn away’ to address their own psyche more directly; they do so to engage their true voice, countering the choric voice of the court. This self-talk is undertaken to marshal strength: to resist temptation in the case of Claudius<sup>K</sup>, or to boost resolve in the case of Gertrude<sup>K</sup>. *Apostrophe* (usually marked out by exclamation) alerts the audience to this movement from exterior to interior.

## II. REPETITION

There are many types of rhetorical repetition, ranging from those at the micro level of letters, to those at the macro level of words and phrases. Repetition may be the most basic rhetorical strategy available to a speaker: even before infants are fully able to speak, they try out sounds through repetition (babbling); later in their development,

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<sup>37</sup> We encounter another instance of *apostrophe* with the phrase ‘Frailty, thy name is woman!’, which can be read as a general complaint against women, or a specific attack on Gertrude<sup>S</sup>; the typical punctuation (where the comma follows the word ‘frailty’) renders the insult a universal tenet: a plaint against womankind. However, an actor need not adhere to that reading. It is possible to deliver the line thus: Frailty *thy* name is, woman! The latter rendition makes for a much more pointed, personal attack on the queen. Of course, the standard reading, perforce, contains the latter: Gertrude, being a woman, is included in Hamlet’s generalised attack on women.

they deploy repetition in its crudest (but arguably most effective) rhetorical form: nagging.<sup>38</sup> Doubtless, repetition holds particular appeal for humans because so much of our skill acquisition and learning rests on pattern-recognition — we are primed to detect repetitions.

More generally, repetition may indicate a kind of momentary *paralysis*, where a character becomes halted by some present predicament. I adopt Mari Anne Kyllsdal's usage of 'paralysis' here; in her interrogation of repetition (in Harold Pinter's work) she asks, 'whether these patterns can tell us something about the inability to, or difficulties in, changing the patterns of the characters' lives, which is ultimately linked to the theme of paralysis versus progress'.<sup>39</sup> While Kyllsdal examines the power-play implicit in Pinter's dialogue (where terms, or phrases, are taken up and variously used, or abused), I was struck by the notion that even a word/phrase repeated by a single character (one speaking alone) may offer an audience similar insights. Stuttering over words, or emphatically repeating them, may be indicative of a character's inability to 'progress'.

As we will examine in this section — for such a surprisingly basic set of figures — repetitions offer a powerful accumulative effect. They supply emphasis, indicate mood, aid comprehension, manipulate apprehension, betray 'paralysis' (an inability to 'progress'), and they provide an almost musical underscoring, which an attuned actor

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<sup>38</sup> So effective is nagging (also known as 'The Nag Factor', or 'Pester Power') that it is harnessed by corporations wanting to pitch their wares to parents via their un-incomed children (typically in the 4-6 age range). For more see: Eileen Bridges, Richard A. Briesch, 'The 'Nag Factor' and Children's Product Categories', *International Journal of Advertising*, 25.2 (January, 2006), pp.157-187 <<http://web.a.ebscohost.com>> [accessed 10/09/2018].

<sup>39</sup> Mari Anne Kyllsdal, 'The Power of Repetition: An Analysis of Repetition Patterns in *The Hothouse* and *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter', pp. 1-109 (p.57) <[https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/25332/kylsdal\\_master.pdf](https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/25332/kylsdal_master.pdf)> [accessed 11/07/2018].

may use to guide delivery, and upon which audiences can rely to orient them through especially dense material.

The first repetition we meet in Hamlet's first soliloquy is the phrase 'too too' — an instance of *Epizeuxis* (or, *Geminatio*): 'a figure by which a word is repeated with vehemence or emphasis.' 'Too, too' was 'a common duplication in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, especially to intensify the expression of regret' (Jenkins, footnote 129, p.187). Thus, here, the naturally emphatic quality of repetition is employed to indicate distress.

In *Ger.*, Claudius's <sup>K</sup> repetitions of 'O God! God!' and 'O, devil! Devil!' (Kavanagh, pp. 73-74) fulfil a similar role, underscoring the character's feelings of self-loathing and guilt.

At the micro level — of consonants and vowels — we find those familiar poetic devices *consonance* and *assonance*: which indicate artistic and/or stylised language use (as in poetry, verse drama, advertisement).

That the tenor of Hamlet's opening remarks is primarily sorrowful, Shakespeare reveals through a subtle combination of atomic repetitions: the sibilance, assonance and consonance used here indicate the mood. At the syllabic level we find further instances of repetition: the recurring syllable 'sol' ('solid', 'resolve', which transmutes into the 'sel' of 'self') suggests a sulking tonality. This effect is further amplified by the 'awe' sounds contained in the words 'solid', 'resolve' and 'thaw', which may suggest self-comforting.

I employ consonance to a similar end in the opening lines of Gertrude's <sup>K</sup> 'tiger in this swamp' soliloquy:

O, let me prove a tiger in this swamp —  
 as sharp of tooth, as keenly clawed; with all  
 the lusty instinct in the blood for blood  
 required should I think to kill a king.

(Kavanagh, p. 40; emphasis added)

In these lines, a combination of plosives and hard Ks (augmented by the Ts) accent Gertrude's <sup>K</sup> attempt to muster courage. These percussive consonants provide a steady drum-beat as she conjures the determination needed to act.

Aural effects may be likened to any other theatrical effect (such as lighting, sound, costume, scenography): for they heighten aspects latent in the material and colour apprehension. Like technical effects in the theatre, the use of consonance and assonance must have a justification beyond mere aesthetics if we are to avoid Artaud's charge: 'the concept of unworldly art, charm poetry existing solely to charm away the hours is a decadent notion, an unmistakable symptom of the emasculatory force within us' (Artaud, p.58). Rather, these devices help to emphasise a speech's purpose, or to reveal a character's mood.

At the aural level, a combination of sibilance and plosives underline the disdain that Gertrude <sup>K</sup> feels for the king (and the culture he enables): 'this sickness of self-love, this pestilence of pomp' (Kavanagh, p. 13; emphasis added). Such effects afford an actor the option of spitting Ps, or hissing Ss — clear gestures of disdain.<sup>40</sup> As we have already seen (above), the K and F sounds, too, add to a general din.

Thus, a writer's use of alliteration has a twofold effect: it suggests modes of articulation and expression the actor may take up, and it aids the auditor's

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<sup>40</sup> By the term 'gesture' here I mean: '(a) In early use: the employment of bodily movements, attitudes, expression of countenance, etc., as a means of giving effect to oratory. Obs. (b) Now in narrower sense [...]: movement of the body or limbs as an expression of feeling' (*OED*).

comprehension by providing an informative sonic texture.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the underscoring effect of emotionally suggestive sounds is precisely how Shakespeare avoids what Ann Thompson warns is the problem of dramatic language, ‘which has after all to make sense to auditors and cannot afford to be too obscure if it is going to keep them following what is going on’.<sup>42</sup>

In my own practice, I eventually developed an instinct for employing such poetic devices: I discovered by trial and error that it was unwise to set about inserting such ornamentation as a show of technical skill. As an undergraduate student, new to poetry, I was sometimes guilty of such overzealous application. With proper appreciation, though, a writer following Shakespeare’s example learns to delight in repetition’s expressive power while remaining mindful not to overburden their text.

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<sup>41</sup> We experience further phonic repetition with the occurrence of the hard K and G sounds of the third and fourth lines of Hamlet’s soliloquy: ‘fixed [...] canon ‘gainst’ and the repetition of ‘God’ before the line break (emphasis added) (ll. 131-32). As with the percussive quality identified in the opening lines of Gertrude’s <sup>K</sup> ‘tiger in this swamp’ soliloquy, these sounds also underscore the emotional content. This musical quality in the texture of Shakespeare’s writing — its ability to underscore the sense — is what I alluded to earlier when I suggested that Shakespeare’s mode offers the performer hints about delivery. His is certainly an art as much about ‘pronouncement’ (‘Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounc’d it to you, trippingly on the tongue’ (*Ham.*, III.ii.1-2)) as it is about meaning. The consonance is subtle here: the medial hard K sound in ‘fixed’ becomes apparent through recital (as opposed to quiet reading). Indeed, the fact that these are works to be performed aloud informs their texture.

<sup>42</sup> Even the under/un-educated groundlings of Shakespeare’s first audiences would surely have been able to glean the emotional content of a speech due to these sonic cues. For example, a particularly effective instance of emotional underscoring occurs during Hamlet’s ‘rouge and peasant slave’ soliloquy (*Ham.*, II.ii.543-601); in the lines, ‘And all for nothing! | For Hecuba! | What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, | That he should weep for her?’ (ll. 52-3 — F and Q1 version). That incredible collection of sounds that make up the name ‘Hecuba’ (which need not mean anything to the audience)<sup>42</sup> provide the actor with a useful projectile with which to mark contempt (the ‘heh’ sound of Hecuba resonating with the Hs of the words ‘him’, ‘he’ and ‘her’); the hard C, and the ‘bah’ sound at the end, all contribute to its aptness as a would-be expletive.

Ann Thompson, ‘Heightened Language’, in *Reading Shakespeare’s Dramatic Language: A Guide*, ed. by Sylvia Adamson, Lynette Hunter, Lynne Magnusson, Ann Thompson and Katie Wales (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), pp. 5-17 (p. 7).

The next notable form of repetition in Hamlet's first soliloquy is the *tricolon* that bridges the enjambed lines: 'melt, | Thaw and resolve' (ll. 129-30). Lists of three, and tri-part structures are a common folkloric feature. It is my own contention that a list of three items contains the minimum number required to suggest abundance: two items need only suggest coincidence, whereas citing four (or above) wants efficiency. Here the *tricolon* — as with the repetition preceding it — serves an emphatic function, revealing the magnitude of Hamlet's feeling.

The phrase might also be considered an example of as *pleonasm* (plenty), or *synonymia*.<sup>43</sup> Such an instance of *synonymia* highlights the inherent inadequacy of language. While elsewhere we will appreciate Shakespeare's polysemy, here the littering of words illustrates the metaphysical impossibility of Hamlet's desire to become immaterial. It is interesting to note that suicide is only suggested after Hamlet has proposed this initial (impossible) desire: to 'melt, | Thaw and resolve' (ll. 129-30). Of this desire for immateriality, Alex Newell observes, 'Hamlet's unrealistic yearning to "resolve into a dew" is couched in gentle terms that imply not death in any literal sense but the ultimate evaporation of dew as a form of sublime spiritual release from coarse corporeal existence'.<sup>44</sup> If Newell is right, portrayals of Hamlet as suicidal may want revision. Even so, the point is generally useful: the writer's choice of vocabulary indicates the mood of a given speech; here 'dew' may allude to tears; such is Hamlet's grief that he would *dissolve* into tears.

The phrase 'Fie on't, ah fie' (l. 135) is another exclamatory expression, marking a modal shift from distress to disgust. It also offers an instance of *chiasmus*: '[a]

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<sup>43</sup> A form of *amplificatio* used to decorate and/or expand an argument or narrative (Wales, p. 276)

<sup>44</sup> Alex Newell, *The Soliloquies in Hamlet: The Structural Design* (London & Toronto: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992) p. 32.

grammatical figure by which the order of words in one of two parallel clauses is inverted in the other'. At this juncture, the exclamation's *chiasmatic* structure makes pacey articulation difficult. The phrase (may) indicate to the actor that a break should follow. After all, Hamlet is about to introduce the second major metaphoric image of the soliloquy: the 'unweeded garden'. Approaching such a metaphor may require the actor to appear as though they have just coined the image. Unless a metaphoric image is a well-known idiom, it would seem natural to precede a novel image with a (slight) pause indicating cognition.<sup>45</sup> Thus, a pause after the difficult *chiasmatic* phrase facilitates the illusion of improvised invention (mirroring natural delivery).<sup>46</sup>

At the macro level, when the soliloquy is taken as a complete unit, we find that certain terms repeated throughout (month, beast, heaven, married, tears). These repetitions serve to unify the whole, and are *anaphoric* in nature.<sup>47</sup>

In the lines 'Within a month, | Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears | Had left the flushing in her galled eyes, | She married' (ll. 153-56) the recurrent habit of Hamlet's thought process (his obsessive tendency to reiterate points already made) is revealed to us through the repetitions used. Even in a seemingly throw away remark the case against Gertrude is summarised and reinforced.

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<sup>45</sup> To my mind, those Herculean actors of the mid-twentieth century (the likes of Gielgud and Olivier, say) tended, perhaps, to have a little too much reverence for Shakespeare and were at times guilty of reciting the 'great speeches' as though they were as well known to the character as the Lord's Prayer, say, and not the product of a mind in mid flow. Of course, acting styles follow fashions; modern actors are sometimes guilty of sacrificing nuance to emotional authenticity.

<sup>46</sup> I think this is (in part) what is meant by Hamlet's famous advice to the players:

[...] o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For any- | thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, | whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to | hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature

(*Ham.*, III.ii.19-22)

<sup>47</sup> *Anaphora* is: '[t]he repetition of the same word or phrase in several successive clauses'.

The brevity of the period between funeral and wedding plays heavily on Hamlet's mind, a fact revealed to us by his constant harping on this word, 'month'.<sup>48</sup> Such *anaphora* allows Hamlet to tangent off from (and subsequently return to) his main theme. The device lends the whole speech a pulsating momentum, which tends to be a general effect of *anaphora*.

The word 'heaven' (echoed in the expletive: 'Heaven and earth, must I remember?') sustains the *anaphora*; here, the incidence of 'heaven' in the preceding line informs the terms of Hamlet's subsequent outburst. In my own experiments with the figure, I found this sprung quality of *anaphora* — where each new clause is energised by the charge already accrued by the term or phrase repeated — particularly useful in speeches and soliloquies. In these larger sense units, the repeated word acts like a baton, successively taken up and re-enlivened. The device is most prominent in Gertrude's <sup>K</sup> eulogy (Kavanagh, p. 87-88), where a succession of repetitions (each headed up by the recurring phrase, 'I have lost') reveal a nostalgic mind-set, and the paralysis of grief.

So much is achieved by way of these uncomplicated rhetorical devices. Indeed, when we finally reach Hamlet's ultimate, and most damning, accusation: 'O, most wicked speed, to post | With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!' (l. 156-57) it is *sibilance* (some nine S sounds in total) that accents Hamlet's personal disgust and underscores this prohibition against incest: a *natural* law.

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<sup>48</sup> Later he quips, 'The funeral bak'd meats | Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables' (I.ii.180-81).

### III. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Symbolic language points towards the ineffable. We use figurative tropes to compensate for some of language's inherent deficiencies. What allusion, simile and metaphor have in common is that they move language beyond the realm of direct representation and into the richer realm of symbols and relationships. By 'relationships', I mean the way in which poetic devices bring disparate concepts into concert. Even in an uncomplicated simile — such as Gertrude's<sup>K</sup> 'And there, like a sated bull, he lay' (Kavanagh, p. 70) — a relationship is suggested. Here, the relationship between a 'sated bull' and the king is enacted; the audience are enlisted to tease out its implications.<sup>49</sup>

Shakespeare's plays abound in symbolic imagery, and the soliloquy presently under examination perfectly encapsulates many of the devices he exploited.

#### A) ALLUSION

References to classical material are found throughout Shakespeare's work (and typical of poetry more generally). Allusions of this type enrich an author's text by bringing it into contact with the inherited literary canon.

In the line, 'So excellent a king; that was, to this, | Hyperion to a satyr' (*Ham.*, I.ii.139-49) we meet the soliloquy's first direct allusion ('unweeded garden' offered an *indirect* allusion to Eden). A full consideration of the meaning of 'satyr' proves revealing,<sup>50</sup> for with the appellation 'satyr' Hamlet foreshadows the soliloquy's later

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<sup>49</sup> Primarily, a bull is kept to inseminate cows; a 'sated' bull points to a kind of post-coital stupor; and while this image is not necessarily negative in itself, when combined with the litany of slights against the king already amassed, this latest comparison further denigrates him.

<sup>50</sup> '[o]ne of a class of woodland gods or demons, in form partly human and partly bestial [...] *fig.* a type of lustfulness' (*OED*).

charge of unlawful sex in comparing Claudius<sup>S</sup> to this ‘lusty beast’. The allusion also carries forward Hamlet’s theme of *wanton fertility* (‘things rank and gross in nature’ (l. 136)).

The line itself is rich in terms of rhetorical figures: we encounter *simile*, *hyperbole*, alongside classical allusion. Turning to *hyperbole* first,<sup>51</sup> we come to understand that Hamlet’s deification of his dead father is more than incidental. Indeed, here the paired allusions reveal the extent to which Hamlet aggrandises the late king. The polarity of the comparison is extreme: on the one hand, Claudius<sup>S</sup> is framed as a lowly, lustful beast (‘a satyr’), and, on the other, the late king is conceived as ‘Hyperion’, literally ‘the high one’.<sup>52</sup> This conception of the late king (in the scheme of allusion) would make Hamlet Helios (Hyperion’s son/sun). A possible continuation of the line with which Hamlet rebuffed Claudius’s<sup>S</sup> inquiry, ‘How is it that the clouds still hang on you?’ (*Ham.*, I.ii.66). To which Hamlet quips, ‘Not so my lord, I am too much I’ th’ sun’ (I.ii.67), punning the homophones *son* and *sun*. All of which stands to illustrate just how entangled such allusions can become, and to reveal Shakespeare’s playfulness.

Moreover, the instance of classical allusion here, as throughout, further solidifies the characterisation of Hamlet as a scholar; thus, such allusions are endemic to his habits of thought, moulded through a university education at Wittenberg. His

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<sup>51</sup> ‘A figure of speech consisting in exaggerated or extravagant statement, used to express strong feeling or produce a strong impression, and not intended to be understood literally’ (*OED*).

<sup>52</sup> Jenkins refers to him as ‘the sun-god’ (Jenkins, p. 438) but (as far as I can discover) that is not quite accurate; rather, Hyperion was the father of Helios (the sun-god). ‘Hyperion: a Titan, son of Uranus and Gaea, later identified with Apollo, from Greek, literally "he who looks from above," from hyper "over, beyond"’. Def. from: ‘Hyperion’, *Online Etymology Dictionary* <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/Hyperion>> [accessed 14/07/2018]. For more see Jenkins who dedicates a long note to the comparison and its ramifications (Jenkins, p. 438).

tendency to over rationalise — the scholar's habit — is why, later, he chastises himself for having to 'like a whore unpack my heart with words' (II.ii.581).

Further on, when Hamlet comes to compare himself to Hercules (l. 153), the tone is *bathetic* (or sarcastic); the comparison — between Hercules (that famous man of action) and Hamlet (whose preferred mode is introspection) — is obviously overblown. Even so, a dichotomy between an idealised realm (of honourable, deific fathers and sacred familial duties) and the harsh reality of Denmark, as Hamlet now finds it, is preserved.

Allusion infuses a text and enlivens its potential for meaning. But such allusions need not concern those who are unfamiliar with their origin, for it is often the case (in Shakespeare's work) that the line offers some foothold. In the line, 'Like Niobe, all tears' (l. 149), for example, the reference is to:

the prototype of the bereaved mother, weeping for the loss of her children [...] she was turned into a rock on Mount Sipylus [...] which continues to weep when the snow melts above it.<sup>53</sup>

While that knowledge enriches the image, enough information remains that we are not barred completely from following the passage: whoever Niobe may be, we know, at least, that she is 'all tears'. Indeed, the Hyperion allusion works in much the same way: for it contains the sound 'high', which an actor can use (inflectionally) to mark out the difference between Hyperion and satyr. Of course, the risk of allusion is that one

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<sup>53</sup> 'Niobe', *Encyclopedia Britannica* <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Niobe-Greek-mythology>> [accessed 16/09/2018].

alienates a reader, but plays, even more so than books, are art works that encourage several viewings. Shakespeare's works are demanding, but the effort expended pays dividend.

## b) METAPHOR & SIMILE

*Metaphor* (and the closely related figure *simile*) offer the writer an *intertextual* device very like allusion, but one in which all phenomena become the cannon from which a writer may draw. Donald Davidson's definition is particularly clear: 'metaphor is a figure of thought and of speech that "makes us see one thing as another."' <sup>54</sup>

Hamlet's first *metaphor*, the image of an 'unweeded garden' (l. 135), is prescient, preparing us for the orchard, which is the site of King Hamlet's assassination. The image presents, too, a kind of devil-twin of Eden. However, this 'garden of the world' is void of goodness and/or Godliness; productive without purpose. The implicit notion of a paradise lost solidifies Hamlet's conception of the 'world' as it stood before his father's death; and, by contrast, reveals just how great the fall from grace he thinks the union of Gertrude and Claudius is. Thus, we may appreciate (by way of a single metaphor) the sheer magnitude of Hamlet's grief, and see how radically his entire worldview is affected.

As we shall see, *metaphor* is a particularly powerful tool, and (when used with mal intent) a potentially dangerous one. For example, Hamlet's damning exclamation: 'a

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<sup>54</sup> As quoted by Mikics in, David Mikics, 'Metaphor', *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2007) pp.181-82 < <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com> > [accessed 13/09/2018].

beast, that wants discourse of reason, | Would have mourn'd longer' (ll. 151-52) frames Gertrude<sup>S</sup> in the same sub-human terms that Hamlet attributed to Claudius<sup>S</sup>. This is character assassination, a powerful *pathetic* ('[p]roducing an effect upon the emotions; moving, stirring, affecting') tactic often employed by judicial/political orators.

The poetic nature of Hamlet's rationalisations suits an interior view: it feels correct that the mind would communicate by way of *metaphor* and *simile*, explaining the (topsy-turvy) present by comparing it to known phenomena, and doing so in an exaggerated, emotive manner. As I. A. Richards maintains, "thought is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison" (J. Richards, p.118). And, as David Gauntlett observes, metaphor is such a common mode of communication that we often take it for granted;<sup>55</sup> to do so is to risk being unduly influenced by the artificial relationships others would have us take for granted, and, in so doing, we reduce those with whom we disagree to subhuman 'beasts'. Figurative language can enrich a text through allusion, situating it within the literary cannon; and, the type of allusion used informs characterisation. With metaphor and simile an author extends their text, revealing the frame through which a character views others, and the world more generally.

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<sup>55</sup> David Gauntlett, *Creative Exploration : New Approaches to Identities and Audiences* (London: Routledge, 2007) p. 142.

## IV. OTHER RHETORICAL DEVICES

### a) Hyperbole & Redundancy

Like simile and metaphor, *hyperbole* seeks to colour an auditor's understanding.<sup>56</sup>

While such figurative strategies are not to be 'understood literally', it is my own feeling that they do nonetheless carry considerable weight by framing context.<sup>57</sup> *Hyperbole* portrays an impassioned speaker's tendency toward exaggeration and inflation.

Hamlet's conception of the late king as a god finds further (subtle) advancement in the line: 'so loving to my mother | That he might not beteem the winds of heaven | Visit her face too roughly' (*Ham.*, I.ii.140-42). The line attributes to the king an almost divine ability to control the elements.<sup>58</sup> This is *hyperbole* of the kind particular to Hamlet, and later he claims of Gertrude<sup>S</sup>: 'why, she would hang on him, | *As if increase of appetite had grown | By what it fed on:*' (emphasis added). Here the figurative idea of 'growth', initially linked with 'things rank and gross in nature', has become a quality of love. Such contradiction is interesting in that it seems to undermine Hamlet's credibility: growth was originally productive without purpose, but

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<sup>56</sup> As briefly touched on above, *hyperbole* is defined as '[a] figure of speech consisting in exaggerated or extravagant statement, used to express strong feeling or produce a strong impression, and not intended to be understood literally'.

<sup>57</sup> The mechanism by which *hyperbole* works is similar to that which underlies the pre-sale-price gambit typical in retail: that larger pre-sale figure (though the buyer will never pay it) suggests that the new, reduced price offers a real saving; that they have somehow gained as a result of it. In the same fashion, a typical *hyperbolic* claim like, 'I've told you a million times, sit properly!' provides a gauge of the emotional weight of the speaker's feeling and thus seeks to sway the auditor. In the example given, the actual amount (of 'times' they have told you to 'sit properly') may be as little as three, but the exaggeration reframes reality, betraying the build-up of frustration experienced by the speaker. Both the pre-sale price and the hyperbolic exaggeration act as cognitive/emotional leverage.

<sup>58</sup> Especially when one takes 'beteem' here as the *OED* suggests: '(2.b) To allow, permit (to do something) [...]1604 Shakespeare *Hamlet* (I.ii.141) "That he might not beteeme [1623 beteene] the winds...Visite her face too roughly."'

here it is a sign of deep devotion. This combination of *hyperbole* and contradiction reveal that Hamlet's assertions (while not entirely false) are drastically skewed by grief. In *Ger.*, too, we come to question the veracity of accounts; after all, here are people setting out to assassinate a king — an end initially achieved through character assassination.

The Herald's <sup>K</sup> speech, announcing the king's return (Kavanagh, p. 34-35 – discussed in detail below, pp. 164-70), is full of such exaggerations, and (purposefully) laced with bombast of the type that now contributes to a general mistrust of rhetoric.<sup>59</sup> In this phase of my play, the bombastic mode portrays the king and his retinue; oratory style reflects the king's (high) self-estimation. In this way, *hyperbole* and bombast warrant close attention as they provide a measure of bias, emotional context, and self-delusion.

A related device, redundancy (or, *pleonasm*), serves a similar end. In lines 151-52: 'my uncle, | my father's brother' serves to reintroduce the figure of the father, and to reassert Hamlet's *partisan* comparison of these brothers.<sup>60</sup> The seemingly redundant phrase, 'my father's brother', serves the purpose, too, of foregrounding the sibling relationship between Claudius <sup>S</sup> and the late king. That relationship makes Gertrude <sup>S</sup> Claudius's <sup>S</sup> sister (under law). And this legally-binding relationship is what Claudius <sup>S</sup> means when he refers to Gertrude <sup>S</sup> as: 'our sometime sister' (*Ham.*, I.ii.8).<sup>61</sup> By

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<sup>59</sup> As Katie Wales avers: '[f]or modern readers, brought up to distrust public oratory and to relish the terse and downbeat in literature, the grand style has proved something of a problem' (Wales, p. 41).

<sup>60</sup> Of course, the term 'uncle' might refer to Gertrude's own brother (but that is the stuff of Greek tragedy). The familiar concept of patrimony, or even the 'elective monarchy' Jenkins refers to (Jenkins, p. 433), means that the new king is likely to be the late king's brother (as here) or son (more typically).

<sup>61</sup> This is a delightfully ambiguous phrase: does Claudius <sup>S</sup> mean, simply, that she was his sister for that period during which she was the wife of his brother (the late king); or, is there a suggestion that she was

foregrounding the sibling relationship, Hamlet prepares a case for his last and most damning attack: the charge of incest; a claim this instance of redundancy ultimately serves.

## b) Antithesis

One of Shakespeare's primary rhetorical strategies is *antithesis*.<sup>62</sup> An *antithesis* between 'heaven and earth' runs throughout *Hamlet*. Lines 142-43 ('Heaven and earth, | must I remember?'), in which the antithesis is merely an emotional outburst, mirror the polarity already set in motion by the Hyperion-satyr comparison. Later (in reverse order) Hamlet, sarcastically, compares himself to Hercules. These comparisons cohere, and the substructure of the speech reveals a dichotomy at the heart of Hamlet's lament: the realm of the ideal (the past) is opposed to the base and corrupt state of affairs in (present-day) Denmark.

## c) Aposiopesis

As we have seen throughout this analysis of Hamlet's first soliloquy, rhetorical figures reify the emotional and psychological drivers of a character's speech acts. *Aposiopesis*, '[a] rhetorical artifice, in which the speaker comes to a sudden halt, as if unable or unwilling to proceed', is employed at various key points in the soliloquy. In lines 145-

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'sometimes' not his sister even when, legally and morally, she should have been? In other words, was it the case that the pair's dalliance actually preceded King Hamlet's death?

<sup>62</sup> Defined as: '[a]n opposition or contrast of ideas, expressed by using as the corresponding members of two contiguous sentences or clauses, words which are the opposites of, or strongly contrasted with, each other'. For a practical and informative exploration of this subject (and many others besides) see the following television series:

John Barton Dir., *Playing Shakespeare*, (RSC for London Weekend Television, 1982), online playlist of video recordings, YouTube, 11 November 2015, <[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLboSQWmG70j\\_S2nWkRlncZYW49nLeFKWj](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLboSQWmG70j_S2nWkRlncZYW49nLeFKWj)> [accessed 01/08/2017].

46 ('and yet, within a month— | Let me not think on't') the sudden break continues a series of self-interruptions, a meta-structure that indicates distress; it also allows the speech to be contracted, meaning Shakespeare can control the amount of detail afforded his audience so early in the play's action.

There occurs an even more subtle use of *aposiopesis* in line 149 (Folio version): 'why she, even she' (before we return to that familiar outburst: 'O, God!' which echoes earlier invocations). An unfinished thought leaves open the possibility that some ineffable horror remains hidden; the effect is akin to the redaction of materials released for public consumption, say, where missing material often fosters conspiracy.<sup>63</sup> The soliloquy's final accusation of incest is followed hard by the proclamation: 'It is not nor it cannot come to good. | But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue'; and so, Hamlet's soliloquy terminates in an enforced silence: a final *aposiopesis*. What is left unsaid is as important as that which is spoken.

#### d) Prohypanthesis & Prolepsis

The line, 'But two months dead — nay, not so much, not two' (l. 138) offers a possible instance of *prohypanthesis*: successive affirmation and denial; or, *prolepsis*.<sup>64</sup> These figures perfectly capture Hamlet's distraught mind-set, and lend credence to the impression that he wrestles here with rapidly-emerging, emotionally-charged thoughts. Thus, the momentary error reifies an illusion of introspection.

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<sup>63</sup> This is not, I think, the case in line 149 — where I suspect some sign of tenderness from Gertrude towards the late king catches Hamlet, and his pause is due to a sudden surge of emotion — but such a pause allows for all kinds of interpretation.

<sup>64</sup> '[a] rhetorical figure by which an opponent's objections are anticipated and answered' (*OED*)

In this soliloquy, Hamlet could merely have related the bare facts of the case, but Shakespeare is able instead, through a skilled use of figuration, to create a psychologically-convincing character. Those waves of raw emotion, followed by rationalisation, which culminate in renewed vexation, are all recognisably human mannerisms: they feel genuine, and thus establish *ethos*.<sup>65</sup>

In Claudius's<sup>K</sup> 'How well she sees into the heart of me' soliloquy the following passage achieves a similar end:

What meat might satisfy, or soporal fume  
disarm? What spell entreat him to a peace?  
I do not know, nor can I find the answer  
out. Can you smooth an ocean over,  
reason with the wind? It is not possible!

(Kavanagh, p. 21)

The doubt and the admission of ignorance suggest fallibility and limitation, rendering a character with which an audience may better identify.

## SUMMATION

An apprentice to Shakespeare comes to understand that there is nothing accidental in his art; stops and starts, self-corrections, self-deprecating quips, and even redundancies are all included with the purpose of supporting our suspension of disbelief and engaging us more deeply.

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<sup>65</sup> 'Character or characterization as revealed in action or its representation' *OED*.

Dramatic characters must struggle or a play lacks tension; the mind is, more often than not, the site of such struggles. As we have seen, Shakespeare uses subtle means to reify that *wilderness* of introspection, bringing before us an ever-varying terrain. Viewing Shakespeare through the lens of rhetorical figuration reveals the art (as well as the artifice) beneath the surface of his text. In the soliloquy examined above, we encounter (at surface level) a prince distraught and prone to tangential wanderings, hyperbolic assertions, complete caesurae.

However, in examining the layers of structure beneath, a powerful, pulsating drive is uncovered. Shakespeare employs a rich variety of rhetorical figuration in order to render Hamlet's grief, anger, and obsession credible. In terms of meta-structure, this soliloquy follows a rhetorical mode where *ethos* is established, evidence both *atechnic* (inartistic) and *entechnic* (artistic) is supplied, and a conclusion is reached.

The speech is not, then, the emotional outburst it initially appears to be. There is a sophisticated *technician* at work throughout. No part is incidental; nor accidental. Nor is any allusion merely ornamental. Every part (each rhetorical device) informs our interpretation — even silences and the words left unspoken weigh on our interpretation.

## SOLILOQUIES AND SPEECHES

Having examined Shakespeare's craft at the atomic and molecular level (of letters, words and phrases), it will benefit us to gain an overview of larger units of text: soliloquies and speeches. In most of Shakespeare plays principal characters soliloquize, but I think that the soliloquies in *Hamlet* have a special quality of psychological credibility essential to that play. Hamlet's introspection feels authentic, and the character we come to know through soliloquy appears multidimensional, variant, and even contradictory — that messy confluence of competing drives and impulses we recognise as human. And, as we have already seen, what is gleaned solely from the text supports an illusion of even greater depth.

In this section, I delve into just what constitutes that *reifying* effect, and discuss how adopting Shakespeare's methodology has shaped my own construction.

### I. SOLILOQUIES

Taking its constituent parts in reverse order, the word *soliloquy* literally means talking (*loqui*) alone (*solus*). But actors in performance are never truly alone — a fact that has interesting ramifications.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> To gain a foothold here it is worth interrogating the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the term: 'soliloquy: [an] instance of talking to or *conversing with oneself*, or of uttering one's thoughts aloud *without addressing any person*' (emphasis added); and, while this definition is technically correct, the following observation usefully extends it:

It becomes apparent [...] that the instinctive dramatist in Shakespeare sensed early on the latent possibilities of *dramatisation within the soliloquy*, of *the process whereby monologue becomes dialogue*, the speaker being split into two selves which are in conflict with one another.

Wolfgang Clemen, *Shakespeare's Soliloquies*, translated by Charity Scott Stokes, (London: Methuen, 1987) p.6. (emphasis added)

While it is true that the soliloquiser speaks to/by themselves, in practice, soliloquy provides a way of revealing an inner dialogue. This ‘split[ting] into two selves’ only takes place within truly complex characters. Were a character incapable of this kind of internal dialogue (where contrary positions are assayed) then such a character is unlikely to strike us as fully dimensioned (in the way that I argue Hamlet is). Indeed, characters that are capable of action without conscience — without moral scruple — tend not to make psychologically *complete* characters. I consider Hamlet a psychologically complete character: one whose inner turmoil suggests depth and warrants intellection on our part.<sup>67</sup>

David Scott Kastan (discussing *Henry V*) suggests that if Henry is an effective leader at all, it is precisely because he lacks moral complexity; and, reminding us that *Henry V* has very few soliloquies, suggests that Henry is just not particularly introspective.<sup>68</sup>

Soliloquy offers the dramatist an uncomplicated and highly efficient dramaturgical instrument (an actor speaking directly to (or, for the sole benefit of) the audience). Such a dramaturgical instrument provides a means with which to expose the unique constellation of pressures under which a character suffers. Aside from the obvious advantages (of providing compressed exposition and commentary on events:

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<sup>67</sup> Certainly, less dimensioned, less internally-conflicted figures exist in Shakespeare, but these often act more like forces: fate, fortune, or the gods of ancient Greek drama or the morality plays. Such characters act on other characters, but they remain largely unchanged by events themselves. I am thinking here of major characters such as Richard III or Iago; by the end of their respective plays neither has gained any personal insight. Rather, they act as catalysts.

<sup>68</sup> David Scott Kastan, ‘Thinking with Shakespeare; or, What Can We Learn from Him’, *Vermont Humanities* (Fall Conference, 2016), online video recording, YouTube Video, 9 November 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=GJPTvxo3ZS0>> [accessed 26/03/2018].

past/present/future), soliloquy's primary strength is its capacity to lay bare this live stream of introspection.

Soliloquy has become such a staple of theatre practice that we are likely to overlook just how remarkable a window on introspection is gained thereby: a kind of (one-way) telepathic access — a power unknown to us in real life. Indeed, there can be no greater potential for empathetic engagement than that afforded by direct access to the very thoughts of a character. In addition, when this function of soliloquy is properly realised in the theatre one moves beyond what Brook terms passive spectatorship.<sup>69</sup>

This empathetic effect works precisely because the only thoughts we have direct access to are our own; by allowing the audience access to a character's thoughts, the playwright extends the role, enfolding the audience within it.

This inclusivity can create its own tensions: if the character is morally reprehensible we may not entirely enjoy such proximity; we may feel marred by association. On the other hand, part of the thrill of the theatre is the access we gain to minds and lives unlike our own.

Of course, soliloquy may strike us as a somewhat antiquated instrument: parodies of Shakespeare often present a brooding lone figure.<sup>70</sup> But the mechanism of the soliloquy is really nothing other than the kind of direct storytelling from which all literary art must have originated: that preliterate, oral tradition where the teller spoke directly to their audience. Storytelling is at the very core of Shakespeare's craft, as

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<sup>69</sup> Brook claims that the theatre that proceeded Brecht was either 'Naturalism' or 'Total Theatre'; both of which demanded *passivity* from the audience. (Brook, pp.80-81)

<sup>70</sup> See for example, Peter Sellers delivering the lyrics to 'Hard Day's Night' (by The Beatles) after Laurence Olivier's portrayal of Richard III, online video recording, YouTube, 6 September 2006, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLongUBPm5Y>> [accessed 26/03/18].

Scott Kastan reminds us: ‘[i]n all the plays, Shakespeare explores the ways in which human beings conduct their private and public lives through acts of storytelling’.<sup>71</sup>

This notion — that what communication amounts to, is the stories we tell each other — underpins my play. For, even in our own epoch, we seem susceptible to false accounts (what is now termed ‘fake news’). Even more so, we are susceptible to the stories we have internalised, which we more generally call ‘culture’. Soliloquy exposes these internalised stories.

In prose writing, first-person narration offers a mechanism akin to soliloquy. Certainly, the two are different: soliloquizing characters do not *only* tell us their story, but the overall effect is the same. Soliloquy and first-person narration both provide access to a character’s introspection, and, in so doing, they gesture toward interiority and complexity. I am thinking here of the way in which J. D. Salinger’s character Holden Caulfield first addresses us:

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.<sup>72</sup>

This diaristic tone provides *ethos*, reifying character.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> David Scott Kastan, ‘Narratives’, in *Reading Shakespeare’s Dramatic Language: a Guide*, ed. by, Sylvia Adamson, Lynette Hunter, Lynne Magnusson, Ann Thompson and Katie Wales (Methuen Drama: London, 2001) pp. 102-12 (p. 104).

<sup>72</sup> J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (London; New York: Penguin, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Salinger undermines the very business of literary exposition by having Holden denounce it as ‘David Copperfield kind of crap’. The mode of address is coloured by Holden’s mood: ‘but I don’t *feel* like going into it’ (emphasis added). He portrays himself as a credible (if reluctant) narrator by suggesting that it is the reader who wants ‘the truth’; that they wish ‘to hear about it’.

As Morteza Yazdanjoo, et al., contend: ‘Holden’s language characterizes him as an immature juvenile oscillating between reservation and action.’<sup>74</sup> This very tendency to oscillate — a trait common to Holden and Hamlet — lends credibility. We recognise in it an uncertainty at the heart of the psyche: an essential constituent of conscience. Indeed, if life never demanded of us that we ‘split into two selves’, we would have little need of introspection; perhaps, doubt is the very engine of thought (‘I doubt therefore I think’, to paraphrase Descartes). It might even be said that the very plot of *Hamlet* depends on doubt: Hamlet persistently wills himself to act impulsively, and yet refuses to do so without proper evidence of just cause. As an audience, we come to best appreciate that uncertainty by way of his soliloquies.

## II. SPEECHES

Because the speeches and soliloquies in Shakespeare’s plays share many points of similarity, in this section I will highlight only the most salient ways in which speeches differ from soliloquy.<sup>75</sup>

The most obvious difference is that speeches often seem more consciously constructed — which makes sense: our own public utterances are generally made with their *recipient* in mind and are typically more coherent than self-talk need be. Speeches are often performances of power (or of its lack): where a character like Claudius<sup>S</sup> speaks some three hundred words in his first speech (*Ham.*, I.i.1-38) to assert his position, his new-got crown, and to assure the court that Norway’s threat is in hand; a

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<sup>74</sup> Morteza Yazdanjoo, Reza Ghorban Sabbagh, and Hesamoddin Shahriari, ‘Stylistic Features of Holden Caulfield’s Language in J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*: A Corpus-Based Study’, *English Studies* 97.7 (2016), pp. 763–778. (p. 777) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2016.1198122>>.

<sup>75</sup> Note: in my use of the term ‘speeches’ I include the term ‘monologues’.

character such as Isabella (*Measure for Measure*) eloquently and emotively expresses her distain for injustice (*Meas.*, II.ii.111-24) even though doing so seems futile.

Speeches are almost always about convincing others of something important to the speaker; whether through open appeal, or judicious concealment.

We learn a great deal about a character (such as Hamlet) through observing the differences between their public and intrapersonal modes. The difference can be polar, as in the way Hamlet speaks to Ophelia in the scene immediately following his famous soliloquy (*Ham.*, III.i.57-89): the ‘To be, or not to be’ soliloquy is full of profound humanity (wherein Hamlet acknowledges humanity’s shared struggle, ‘the whips and scorns of time’ (l. 70)); in contrast, the exchange with Ophelia is caustic and (verbally) violent.

To really appreciate the persuasive power of speeches, we need look no further than Mark Anthony’s famous appeal to the people, following Caesar’s assassination (which is a rhetorical masterpiece). The first part of which I quote in full:

ANT. Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears:  
 I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.  
 The evil that men do lives after them:  
 The good is oft interred with their bones.  
 So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus  
 Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:  
 If it were so, it was a grievous fault,  
 And grievously hath Caesar answer’d it.  
 Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest  
 (For Brutus is an honourable man;  
 So are they all, all honourable men)  
 Come I to speak in Caesar’s funeral.  
 He was my friend, faithful and just to me;  
 But Brutus says he was ambitious,  
 And Brutus is an honourable man.  
 He hath brought many captives home to Rome,  
 Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill.

Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?  
 When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:  
 Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.  
 Yet Brutus says, he was ambitious,  
 And Brutus is an honourable man.  
 You all did see, that on the Lupercal  
 I thrice presented him a kingly crown,  
 Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?  
 Yet Brutus says, he was ambitious,  
 And sure he is an honourable man.  
 I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,  
 But here I am to speak what I do know.  
 You all did love him once, not without cause:  
 What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?  
 O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts  
 And men have lost their reason. Bear with me.  
 My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,  
 And I must pause till it come back to me.

(*Julius Caesar*, III.ii.74-108)

The speech has many of the devices we met above; particularly effective is that moment of *apostrophe* at the end of this quoted section: Mark Anthony is so overcome by the power of his feeling that he must 'pause'.

But this speech is much more orderly, much more measured, than any of Hamlet's soliloquies. Even though Mark Anthony is, arguably, more distraught than Hamlet (speaking here shortly after the brutal murder of his friend), he suppresses powerful emotion well enough to present a reasoned, constructed argument. He has enough wit, even in distress, to win over his audience through indirect means: while he purports not to praise Caesar, the speech manages throughout to do just that. That refrain-like phrase 'honourable man(/men)' is, by the section's end, so completely worn out through overuse as to have become a slur against Brutus and his cohort.

Where soliloquies can be direct, honest, piecemeal in construction, speeches are more often indirect, pragmatic, and (typically) logically complete; by which I mean, they tend to stake a claim, provide evidence, and offer a conclusion. Soliloquies can afford to seem more improvised — through introspection a character may try out various possibilities, but a speech which seeks to move others must follow a surer course.

### III. SPEECHES AND SOLILOQUIES IN *GERTRUDE AND CLAUDIUS*

In the following section I examine many of the speeches and soliloquies created for the play *Gertrude and Claudius* (dealing with each as they occur in the play text). I use these close readings of my own work as the site upon which to stage an analysis of the ways in which Shakespeare's craft has influenced my own, and to extrapolate the broader implications of the methods I have adopted.

#### a) 'Now more than ever we must speak of love' (*Ger.*, I.iii)

With Gertrude's <sup>K</sup> first major speech, I aimed to echo the theme of rankness and foulness found in *Hamlet*. Themes which recur throughout *Hamlet*, extending that play's central concern with *unnaturalness*.<sup>76</sup> These themes are taken up in my play in order to imply that the period preceding the king's murder (which Hamlet conceives of as idyllic) might have been just as prone to rankness and foulness.

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<sup>76</sup> The unnaturalness of the king's murder, the queen's subsequent (hasty) marriage, and of Hamlet's seeming inability to exact revenge. The following instances of 'rank' all relate (either directly or indirectly) to the murder of King Hamlet: 'So the whole ear of Denmark | Is by a forged process of my death | *Rankly* abus'd' (I.v.36-38); 'Thou mixture *rank*, of midnight weeds collected' (III.ii.251); 'O, my offence is *rank*, it smells to heaven' (III.iii.36); 'Nay, but to live | In the *rank* sweat of an enseamed bed' (III.iv.92); 'It will but skin and film the ulcerous place, | Whiles *rank* corruption, mining all within, | Infects unseen' (III.iv.150); and later in the same speech: 'And do not spread the compost on the weeds | To make them *ranker*.' (III.iv.153-54).

Again, the instances of 'foul' bear some relation to that murder: 'All is not well. | I doubt some *foul* play [...] *Foul* deeds will rise' (I.ii.255-57); 'Till the *foul* crimes done in my days of nature | Are burnt and purg'd away' (I.v.12-13); 'Revenge his *foul* and most unnatural murder' (I.v.25); 'Murder most *foul*, as in the best it is; | But this most *foul*, strange, and unnatural' (I.v.27-28); 'It is a damned ghost that we have seen, | And my imaginations are as *foul* | As Vulcan's stithy' (III.ii.82-84); 'Forgive me my *foul* murder?' (III.iii.52); while the following quotation refers to Laertes's slaying of Prince Hamlet, it nonetheless serves to further the association of murder with foulness: 'The treacherous instrument is in thy hand [...] The *foul* practice | Hath turned itself on me' (V.ii.322-24)

Indeed, in my play the world seems just as horrendous. As evidenced by the line, ‘And a wreck of mangled bodies, strewn, ungraven — | Have but the *foetid stench* of rot for funerary cense...’ (Kavanagh, p, 13; emphasis added), where Gertrude<sup>K</sup> seeks to boost the affective power of her speech by adopting a lexicon of disgust — as did Hamlet with his accusation of incest.<sup>77</sup>

Such *affective* framing is a common feature of emotive appeals. After all, a speaker who seeks to persuade, rarely presents a neutral, unadulterated case. But Gertrude’s mannered speech (unlike Hamlet’s faltering, impassioned outburst) is indicative of the care she takes to control the terms and tenor of her communication.

Her choice of imagery, too, seeks to colour Claudius’s<sup>K</sup> conception of the king. There are appeals to innocence throughout the speech. The initial image of ‘crawling toddlers’ is a figure influenced by the conception of ‘pity’ in *Macbeth*;<sup>78</sup> also, for ‘crawling’ the *OED* offers: ‘any short-limbed quadruped or reptile, an insect, serpent, worm, slug’, so that (though the referent is a ‘toddler’) the word bears those connotations too.<sup>79</sup> This richness of texture — where a word is chosen because its connotations offer alternate interpretations — is an attribute of Shakespeare’s craft I look to reproduce throughout *Ger.*.

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<sup>77</sup> Though, obviously, Hamlet is alone while soliloquising — and we might question why he needs recourse to ‘affective’ language — it can be said, even so, that either Shakespeare presents the ‘incest’ case for the benefit of the audience, or, merely that Hamlet seeks to satisfy himself as to the facts of said case (as he sees them).

<sup>78</sup> ‘like a naked new-born babe, | Striding the blast’ (*Macbeth*, I.vii.21-22)

<sup>79</sup> I am thinking particularly of Samuel Coleridge’s, ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ <<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/rime-ancient-mariner>> [accessed 19/09/2018]:

The very deeps did rot: O Christ!  
That ever this should be!  
Yea, slimy things did *crawl* with legs  
Upon the slimy sea.

(emphasis added — part II, stanza X).

The ‘panic-stricken mothers’ have a twofold potential for victimhood: their own mortal vulnerability, and the danger of losing their soldiering sons. The story of these characters-on-the-fringes is told, but only in so far as it furthers Gertrude’s<sup>K</sup> cause.

With the image of ‘cattle’ that ‘wild-eyed stumble through the noisome din’, I was after something like the bull and horse figures central to Picasso’s *Guernica*. In my image, cattle represent (all) animals as an ultimate symbol of innocence: where people can typically be ascribed some degree of culpability (however remote or unreasonable), animals cannot.<sup>80</sup> Here Gertrude’s<sup>K</sup> use of animals is clichéd: alongside women and children, they symbolise innocence and victimhood. Her Gertrude<sup>K</sup> may be in earnest, or her words may merely stem from some cynical desire to achieve her ends. In developing my characterisation of Gertrude<sup>K</sup> and Claudius<sup>K</sup>, I tried not to collapse down the potential for good or bad; I am more interested in the compromise humans must strike between moral instinct, and the kind of pragmatism survival demands.

So, Gertrude<sup>K</sup> may mislead (and, on occasion, lie), but that fact does not damn her; in the same way, Claudius<sup>K</sup> does not in actuality perform the physical act of murder, but nor does that fact exonerate him.

Later in the speech, Gertrude returns to the animal motif in the lines: ‘The mud-eating worm, and the fish in the pond, | the insect and the elephant alike, | all love their tiny lives’ (Kavanagh, p. 13). Here, an instinct for self-preservation is posited as a trait common to all living things. In acknowledging this shared vulnerability, Gertrude<sup>K</sup> contends that power-lust (a root cause of war) is a harm inflicted on all living things — a harm analogous to a ‘cancer’.

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<sup>80</sup> Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 cm × 776 cm, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid <<http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/guernica>> [accessed 02/08/2018].

Persuasion is attempted through *hyperbolic* exaggeration; a mode much utilised by Hamlet. Bias is typical of those seeking to persuade. Rhetoric is largely concerned with presenting the most appealing and affecting case; and so, only the semblance of truth is called for.<sup>81</sup>

But more than an uncomplicated desire to manipulate, the vocabulary of Gertrude's <sup>K</sup> speech reveals a will to speak back to power, to call out tyranny, to bear witness.<sup>82</sup> And she insists that Claudius <sup>K</sup> corroborate this testimony. In the end, her demand is quite direct: 'O, say that you see: the king's a cancer' (Kavanagh, pp. 13-14).

As in Mark Anthony's speech — where one end is professed but the aim is to achieve its opposite — characters can be deceptive and genuine all at once. I am interested in the multiplicity of character (their duplicity with others — and themselves). Only in fabulous or moral tales should we expect characters to be *typically* consistent (to be stereotypes); a complex character wants flaws, and such flaws are revealed to us through a character's various strategies of persuasion.

There are other modes of advocacy utilised by Gertrude <sup>K</sup> in this speech. She employs a *rhetorical question* in the line: 'Is there any nicer idiocy than war?' (Kavanagh, p. 13). A speaker's choice to frame a 'declarative assertion' as a question<sup>83</sup> invites the

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<sup>81</sup> However, in suggesting that the king's power-lust is 'venomous' (Kavanagh, p. 13) Gertrude <sup>K</sup> unwittingly undermines her own argument by reminding us that nature can be 'red in tooth and claw' — she cannot, concurrently, support 'Nature's creed | of beauty in abundance' (Kavanagh, p. 13) and abhor this 'venomous' aspect. A similar tendency toward contradiction informs Hamlet's promissory avowal following the Ghost's counsel where he wilfully couples heaven and hell in the line: 'O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else? | And shall I couple hell?' (*Ham.*, I.v.92-3), but later (II.ii.559-600) demands 'grounds | more relative' for fear that this same ghost might be a beguiling devil. As I have already argued, these inconsistencies are wanted if a character is to appear psychologically credible.

<sup>82</sup> Terms such as: 'speak', 'cry', 'mouth', 'decipher', 'wail', 'creed' ('from Latin *credo*: "I believe"'), 'mythology' ('anything delivered by word of *mouth*'; emphasis mine), 'breath', 'call' and 'say', all these suggest Gertrude's <sup>K</sup> need to testify. 'Creed' and 'mythology', *Online Etymology Dictionary* <<https://www.etymonline.com>> [accessed 03/08/ 2018].

<sup>83</sup> Known as '*erotema* (Greek) and *interrogatio* (Latin)' (Wales, p. 297).

auditor to work toward the speaker's implicit conclusion.<sup>84</sup> In this way, as Gabriel Teninbaum maintains, a rhetorical question is, 'a question that leads the audience to fill in the desired blanks'. The blanks are not difficult to decipher here, for Gertude's<sup>K</sup> question contains its own answer; the terms are loaded.

Such a question, too, supplies a header for the matter succeeding it; in this way, *erotema (interrogatio)* prepares the listener's mind for receipt of the material to come, or, as David Williams puts it: '[the question] awaken[s] attention to the subject of discourse'.<sup>85</sup> In this instance, Gertrude's<sup>K</sup> use of *erotema (interrogatio)* indicates a move away from (what up to this point have been) a list of the war's *specific* effects, to a more *general* polemic against war. And the insertion of a rhetorical question facilitates that shift.

The rhetorical question is a device much employed by Shakespeare; indeed, Hamlet is a character seemingly overburdened by an interrogative impulse (See *Ham.*, II.ii.543-601).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> I adopt Teninbaum's term, 'declarative assertion', here (p.486). Gabriel H. Teninbaum, 'Who Cares,' *Drexel Law Review* 3.2 (Spring, 2011), pp. 485-520 (p. 486) <<http://heinonline.org/HOL>> [accessed: 11/04/2018].

<sup>85</sup> David Williams, *Composition, Literary and Rhetorical, Simplified (1850)*, (p. 129). <<https://books.google.co.uk/books>> [accessed 11/04/2018].

<sup>86</sup> His 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy provides a glut of such questions, which come in quick succession to reveal the antagonism at the core of Hamlet's psyche:

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
That he should weep for her? What would he do,  
Had he the motive and the cue for passion  
That I have?  
[...]  
Am I a coward?  
Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?  
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?  
Tweaks me by th' nose? gives me the lie i' th' throat  
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this, ha?

(*Ham.*, II.ii.543-601)

In Hamlet's 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy serial *erotema* (*interrogatio*) ramps up the tension — working like a motivic repetition in a music.<sup>87</sup> During this passage, the audience witness a man wrestle with his own inner demons. What better rhetorical figure with which to achieve that end than *interrogatio*? For Hamlet does *interrogate* himself most aggressively.

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Mid-way through Gertrude's <sup>K</sup> first speech, there is a noticeable shift in register: in a pique, a more colloquial mode is adopted: 'insatiable pride — the pissing match writ large' (Kavanagh, p.13). The profanity ('pissing') adds force, and carries an emotive charge. But the insult also suggests intimacy between Gertrude and Claudius. One tends not to be so free and casual with mere acquaintances. If their relationship were not already secure, such a flagrant attack on the king might have proved a dangerous misstep.

In a similar vein, intimacy is suggested by Hamlet's bawdy pun on 'country matters' during his strained exchanged with Ophelia, which runs as follows:

HAMLET	Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
OPHELIA	No, my lord.
HAMLET	I mean, my head upon your lap?

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<sup>87</sup> Examples of what I mean abound in classical music, but a particularly obvious instance is found in the opening few bars of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> symphony: where a four-note motif seems to jab at the air. In a similar fashion, each question here acts as a motivic phrase; its contents may vary (as do the intervals (major to minor) in Beethoven's 5th), but that insistent, interrogative motion (that jab) is repeated — with accumulative effect.

Daniel Barenboim (conductor), West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Royal Albert Hall, 23 July 2012: 'Beethoven - Symphony No. 5 (Proms 2012)', online video recording, YouTube, 15 August 2012, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jv2WJMVPQi8>> [accessed 23/09/2018].



strike the modern reader/auditor as overwrought, it is because we have forgotten to situate them on a day-lit, undressed stage, where only costume and an acting troupe's skill will work to fill the 'the two hours' traffic of [the] stage' ((prologue) *Rom.*, I.i.12).

A writer following Shakespeare's example learns a good deal by encountering the challenges he must have dealt with in attempting to construct a speech such as this. The character, in speaking, reveals something of their personality (both directly and indirectly). They speak to their immediate audience (here Gertrude speaks to Claudius<sup>K</sup>), but the writer must keep the needs of their own audience in mind. Themes are introduced; character and mood are established. Any speech act, then, is after more than *direct* communication. We have seen here how textual richness invites the audience to *construct* meaning; how bias and inconsistencies lend a character dimension; and, how *active* devices (such as the rhetorical question) seek to engage an audience's intellection.

b) 'I think to clench my fist and find my fist' (*Ger.*, II.iii)

While the moniker 'Bard' certainly gives prominence to Shakespeare's poetic abilities, his line can, on occasion, be disarmingly plain. Indeed, one of his most famous lines: 'To be or not to be, that is the question' (*Ham.*, II.i.57) is almost entirely monosyllabic, and, taken at surface level, poses little difficulty — in reality, of course, the line lies at the very crux of a long-standing debate about the precise meaning of the soliloquy it opens.<sup>89</sup> One need only list the opening lines of Hamlet's soliloquies to appreciate how regularly Shakespeare employs such simple, uncomplicated lines:

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<sup>89</sup> For an exhaustive overview of the issue, see Jenkins, long note: 'To be, or not to be, that is the question', pp. 484-88.

O that this too too sullied flesh would melt (I.ii.129);  
 O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else? (I.v.92);  
 O what a rogue and peasant slave am I! (II.ii.544);  
 To be, or not to be — that is the question (III.i.57);  
 'Tis now the very witching time of night (II.ii.379);  
 Now might I do it pat, now he is praying (III.iii.73);  
 How all occasions do inform against me (IV.iv.32).

'Occasions' is the longest word here, and 'pat' may be unfamiliar to a modern reader/audience.<sup>90</sup> The notion of a 'rogue and peasant slave' is, perhaps, the most complex.<sup>91</sup> But these are all accessible lines, which an actor's delivery should further clarify. Throughout Shakespeare's plays, we see that simplicity (clarity) regularly precedes complexity.

During the re-drafting stage of my own play, the need to provide clear (sometimes simple) lines at key points became increasingly obvious. It became apparent that Shakespeare exploited variation so as to guide an audience through the more difficult material. Even if the occasional figure or idea is lost, an attentive auditor should be able to follow the argument.<sup>92</sup> When hearing/seeing a play (particularly a verse play): it is often enough that the general plot is followed and that the mood is appreciable.

Soliloquies and speeches, then, are *signposted* by these 'unvarnished' phrases, which aid comprehension — an especially necessary feature in an ever-evolving,

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<sup>90</sup> 'Pat', for which the *OED* cites this line as a usage example, has the follow def.: '[i]n a manner that exactly fits the purpose or occasion; appositely, opportunely, readily, promptly'.

<sup>91</sup> That said, the notion of 'occasions informing against one' may also prove difficult.

<sup>92</sup> This kind of generalised attention, I find, is similar to how one listens to art music (classical, jazz): there are melodic lines (typically in the higher registers) that one follows, but not every phrase is (or can be) appreciated, and at different times, different elements come to the fore.

visual-auditory experience. Easily digested lines offer the listener momentary breaks from the more demanding work tasked them during denser passages. They provide cognitive footholds, allowing one to get one's bearings — as in music, when an earlier motif is returned to.

Thus, at the surface level, a line such as: 'I think to clench my fist and find my fist | is clenched' (Kavanagh, p. 28), offers an easily-comprehended idea; but, like Macbeth's line: 'Is this a dagger I see before me' (*Mac.*, II.i.33), the idea wants attention and requires processing. The message is intelligible, but the meaning is, as yet, suspended and in need of elaboration. The form of such constructions is essay-like: an assertion is made and subsequent inferences drawn. The soliloquy/speech evolves from a simple statement, to gain in complexity as the statement's ramifications are explicated. The caveat being, of course, that a soliloquy/speech need not adhere to the strictures of academic argument. They can be partial, interrupted by a surge of emotion, say — as we noted in Hamlet's 'too, too sullied flesh' soliloquy above. Of course, anything a character says to the audience should make sense (or, if not, it should at least serve some dramaturgical purpose), but there is no need for completeness. Indeed, the illusion of a mind at work is bolstered by incompleteness. The way to help an audience traverse such material is to provide the occasional foothold: the plain line.

It cannot be accidental that the opening lines of the soliloquies in *Hamlet* are concise and easily comprehended.<sup>93</sup> Soliloquies offer contemplative (if impassioned

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<sup>93</sup> Here they are in full (including those of Ophelia and Claudius): 'O that this too too solid flesh would melt'; 'My father's spirit- in arms? All is not well.'; 'O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?'; 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!'; 'To be or not to be, that is the question:'; 'O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown'; 'Tis now the very witching time of night'; 'O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven'; 'Now might I do it pat, now he is a praying'; 'How all occasions do inform against me' (Newell, pp. 165-72 — wherein all the play's soliloquies are useful collected in an appendix).

and lively) breaks from the main action of the play. In constructing my own soliloquies, naturally, I expected that they would end up being structurally and semantically complex. After all, one's lasting impression of such passages is of intricate, challenging, figuratively-rich speech acts. I eventually realised, however, that I had often made the *mistake* of starting my soliloquies at their core. An audience would need some form of invitational gesture: a way into the material. For example, the 'I think to clench my fist' soliloquy originally began with the line, 'The sea grows frustrate through each useless undulation', but I came to see that this was far too abstract a notion to open the piece with. Indeed, that line now comes later in the soliloquy; before it arrives, we are assisted by the preceding, less involved, material.

An argument builds piecemeal from a less complex beginning. The (redrafted) opening line — 'I think to clench my fist...' — provides the actor with an organic gesture not unlike the potential for gesture found in Macbeth's line, 'Is this a dagger which I see before me?' (*Mac.*, II.i.33). Indeed, with this line, too, the idea is superficially uncomplicated, one can grasp the image, but the line subtly introduces a much more philosophically troublesome notion: the question of agency, free will.

Just because a line is simple, does not bar it from having multiple meanings. While the phrase 'I think to clench my fist' holds one meaning for Claudius<sup>K</sup> (who is concerned with ideas of agency and free will), the image also bears a suggestion of violence: a fist balled in anticipation of a fight.<sup>94</sup> Positioned at the beginning of the soliloquy, such a

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The only exception is Claudius's 'And England, if my love thou holdst at aught', which, it might be argued, is an untypically long aside and not actually a soliloquy proper. Even so, the phrase aids orientation.

<sup>94</sup> The quality of suggestiveness is not as pronounced, say, as the many allusions to the 'ear' in Hamlet: most notably, when the Ghost reveals, "'Tis given out that [...] | A serpent stung me. So the whole *ear* of Denmark | Is by a forged process of my death | Rankly abus'd' (I.v.35-38); or, when Polonius is, 'plac'd so [...] in the *ear* | Of all their conference' (III.ii.186-87); when Hamlet lambastes his mother with: 'Here

line is likely to elicit various interpretations (before the subsequent material solidifies meaning).

The suggestion of violence in the image ‘clenched fist’ adds to a host of imagery indicating a troubled mind: ‘the bramble’s teeth’; ‘the mud’s | wet tongue, in whispering its soft falsities’; ‘[t]he sea grows frustrate’; ‘useless undulation’; ‘[the moon’s] luring’ or ‘glowering’; ‘obfuscation’; ‘darkness’; ‘emptiness’; ‘ancient loneliness’. From his choice of vocabulary, we glean a good deal about how Claudius’s<sup>K</sup> interior monologue frames his experience (and vice versa). The soliloquy follows Shakespeare’s habit of *prefiguring* (in the verbal texture) what will come, or echoing what has already occurred.

The symbolic use of animals — and of the natural world: ‘brambles’, ‘saplings’, ‘mud’, ‘forest’, ‘sea’, ‘moon’ — suggests an ultimate lack of agency, because (as Claudius<sup>K</sup> discovers) all are subject to the laws of nature. Moreover, the use of such symbolism — variously to denigrate the king, to suggest the innocence of war’s victims, to proffer a lack of agency (as here), to honour the state (as in the Herald’s speech) — subjugates all of the characters under that same force: nature. Though Claudius<sup>K</sup> does not recognise it here, his brother (the tyrant king) is just as *agentless* as Claudius<sup>K</sup> fears himself to be.

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is your husband, like a mildew’d *ear* | Blasting his wholesome brother’ (II.iv.64-5); to which she replies: ‘These words like daggers enter in mine *ears*’ (II.iv.95) (emphasis added).

In the above allusions, the ear is variously the site of violence, intrigue or disgust; in each case the allusion is selected to echo the apparent manner in which the late king was assassinated (having had poison poured in his ear while he slept). In a long play, such allusions offer motivic lines through the material, lending unity to the whole.

In following Shakespeare, one recognises that themes (such as ‘nature’ here) must have multiple facets and extended application. Part of Shakespeare’s skill is his ability to exhaust the possible meanings of a term, image, or theme. A modern writer gains much in following Shakespeare’s example: ensuring that themes are fully developed.

However, one must remain wary of lending themes too prominent a foregrounding.

Themes must evolve.

The final two lines of Claudius’s <sup>K</sup> soliloquy develop the sense of the opening line; the soliloquy ends as follows:

Finding the clenched fist, and thinking I have  
clenched it. I have clenched it. I have... I...

(Kavanagh, p. 29)

Here, Claudius moves from using ‘clenched’ straightforwardly (to evoke the physical action of closing his grip), to later using the verb in the figurative sense (‘clenched’: as in grasped, or, ‘settle[d] conclusively’, meaning he has comprehended the matter).<sup>95</sup>

Enveloping the soliloquy sees it open and close with the same motif; thus, the line takes on some of the *affective* power of refrain: ‘units of independent sense whose *changing implications* comment on the rest’ (emphasis added).<sup>96</sup> The recurrence of the phrase ‘implies a distinction [...] between repeated and non-repeated parts’ (Burt, p. 1151).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Clenched: ‘*fig.* To fix, confirm, drive home, settle conclusively (an argument, a bargain, etc.)’ (*OED*).

<sup>96</sup> Stephen Burt, ‘Refrain’, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Fourth Edition), ed. by Stephen Cushman, et al., (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 1151-52 (p. 1151) <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com>> [accessed: 02 August 2018].

<sup>97</sup> As Krystyna Mazur maintains: ‘exact repetition is impossible: the simple fact of temporal discontinuity between repeated elements leads to a difference in their functions, via the accumulation of significance and recontextualization.’ Krystyna Mazur, ‘Repetition’, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Fourth Edition), ed. by Stephen Cushman, et al., (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 1168-71 (p.1169) <<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com>> [accessed: 02 August 2018].

In the ‘I think to clench my fist’ soliloquy, the opening-line’s ‘implications’ have ‘changed’ by the soliloquy’s close. In closing, Claudius<sup>K</sup> returns to his opening comment, but we may ask if his understanding really has progressed. That doubt is a result of the line’s fracturing. The repetition serves an emphatic role, but repeating an assertion, in order to reinforce it, risks suggesting the point required special support to begin with. The inherent weakness of Claudius’s<sup>K</sup> assertion is underscored by the fact that the line peters out.<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, in Hamlet’s exchange with Gertrude<sup>S</sup> (*Ham.*, I.ii) his harping on the word ‘seems’ draws attention to his tendency to misapprehend his interlocutors (a hypersensitivity possibly brought on by grief, or, the result of petulance); each reiteration betrays this sensitivity.

To employ repetition, then, is to wield a double-edged sword: speakers rely on it to bolster a point, but, as we have seen in the examples above, each reiteration runs the risk of weakening the recurring term/phrase’s effectiveness; and, as Mazur warns, ‘intense repetition may lead to the loss of meaning’ (Mazur, p. 1170). Indeed, this degradation of meaning is (partially) what happens when Claudius<sup>K</sup> returns to his opening phrase; that degradation may, in this instance, suggest ‘self-division’ (Burt, p. 1152).<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> ‘Finding the clenched fist, and thinking, I have | clenched it. I have clenched it. I have– I–’ (Kavanagh, p.29). The lines immediately preceding the closing pair (full of their own internal repetitions) prepare us for this tapering effect: ‘we rationalise after the fact, saying why | we did what we did when what we did is done!’ (Kavanagh, p.29)

<sup>99</sup> ‘In mod. poems not otherwise songlike, refrain can suggest self-division, haunting, or obsession, hence mortality (E. A. Poe, “The Raven”; M.-L. Halpern, “Memento Mori”) or else a congregation’s call-and-response (Sterling Brown, “Old Lem”)’ (Burt, p. 1152).

In examining this soliloquy, I have revealed how a writer, occasionally, requires a ‘plainness of line’, and that ‘modal variation’ in speeches aids comprehension during denser passages. The plain line (heading up a speech) prepares the mind, but such a line may illicit various interpretations. We have seen, too, that while speeches/soliloquies tend to follow the form of an academic argument, they need not be complete. Indeed, *incompleteness* reifies psychological credibility. We witnessed the way in which the allusions a speaker adopts reveal their framing, or world view. I discussed the need to ensure that themes are fully developed. And we looked again at how repetition can charge language, escalating tension, revealing vulnerability, betraying emotional intensity. Soliloquies, then, are layered both technically, and in terms of potential meaning.

c) ‘With pomp processional and trumpet blast’ (*Ger.*, III.i)

Although throughout *Ger.* we hear much of the king and his ‘noisome’ train (particularly in Act IV), the only contact with his retinue we have is via a Herald sent to announce the king’s homecoming. This lack of direct access to the king was a conscious decision on my part. By excluding him from the stage, I wanted to exploit the fact that the audience are forced to rely entirely on reportage to delineate his character. Of course, those plotting his murder will seek to incriminate him, but even the tenor of his representative’s report (potentially) undermines the king. *Prima facie*, the language supplies the pomp his position warrants, while bearing alternate readings.

The Herald’s speech is central in portraying the king’s manner of self-aggrandizement. To achieve this end, the speech is front loaded with boasts of the king’s combative prowess: we learn that he has vanquished the ‘cowards’ of Norway and now journeys home, burdened with the ‘spoils of war’. Superficially, the whole

seems uncomplicatedly vainglorious. But earlier complaints against the king have primed us to receive the speech's negative connotations. An image of the king has already been formed, so that terms such as, 'pomp', 'stripping', 'sinking', 'spoils', 'weighed', 'waddle', 'swell', 'intoxicated', 'glut', 'trink', 'swaying', 'loud', 'toppling', 'heap', 'jealous', 'snivelling', 'captive', 'slaving', 'hungry', and 'wearied', are parsed in a different manner, and may just as easily describe a corpulent, drunk and abusive monarch (Kavanagh, pp. 34-35).

The closing section of the speech, on the other hand, seems to appropriate the use of nature imagery earlier deployed by Gertrude<sup>K</sup> and Claudius<sup>K</sup> to disparage the king. In contrast, the Herald's allusions to nature align the king with natural phenomena, and so, implicitly suggest his rule is natural.<sup>100</sup>

Both factions adopt the same rhetorical strategies. Tragedy often highlights the fact that, in the case of two competing passions, no one agent can claim moral supremacy: the assassination of King Hamlet (in *Ger.*) remains a crime and an immoral act, despite the evident passion, and the rationale proffered in its support; likewise, Hamlet's

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<sup>100</sup> He is blessed by the land as is '[a] bear in spring awake', the Herald avers, and continues with the following conception of Denmark's relationship with the king:

whose gentle rains are like a mother's kisses,  
 whose winds sound soft familiar songs...  
 The glassy streams alive with glistening salmon  
 and forests shy with speckled fawn, and green fields  
 like a blanket to be wrapped within...

(Kavanagh, pp. 34-35)

I was interested in the use of the natural world and ideas of manliness, thinking in particular of the images of Putin (riding bare-chested on horseback through some rugged wilderness); see image accompanying *NYT* article:

Celestine Bohlen, 'Letter from Europe: Putin Puts Tough Image Before Words', *New York Times*, 16 June 2014 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/17/world/europe/putin-puts-tough-image-before-words.html>> [accessed 10/08/2018].

revenge passion is just as reprehensible as the power-lust that fuelled Claudius<sup>S</sup> act of murder.

With this speech I experimented with a more typically bombastic style. But, as we have seen, when the ground has been prepared, negative connotations are more salient. We are all vulnerable to having our opinions shaped by the general biases of our culture. And the words of others often prime us for particular interpretations. This overview reveals that the same strategies may be adopted by either side of a political/cultural divide.

d) ‘O, let me prove a tiger in this swamp’ (*Ger.*, III.i)

Gertrude’s<sup>K</sup> ‘tiger in this swamp’ soliloquy (Kavanagh, pp. 40-41)) came about as a reaction to two sources: Lady Macbeth’s ‘unsex me here’ soliloquy (*Mac.*, I.v.37-53) and Queen Elizabeth’s ‘Speech to the Troops at Tilbury’.<sup>101</sup> In both, the speakers find their sex wanting.<sup>102</sup> If Lady Macbeth equates maleness with brutality,<sup>103</sup> and Queen Elizabeth’s apology for the *weakness* of her sex is taken at face value, then Gertrude’s<sup>K</sup> refusal to ‘denigrate’ her sex breaks with this standard notion that ‘mettle’ is a typically

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<sup>101</sup> Queen Elizabeth I, ‘Elizabeth’s Tilbury speech July 1588’, *British Library: Learning Timelines, Sources from History* (no pagination) <<https://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item102878.html>> [accessed 30/06/2018].

<sup>102</sup> Lady Macbeth’s pleads, ‘Come, you spirits [...] | unsex me here’ (*Mac.*, I.iv.39-40) and a little later, ‘Come to my woman’s breasts, | And take my milk for gall’ (ll. 46-47) while Queen Elizabeth admits: ‘I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king’.

<sup>103</sup> And the assertion that her sex must be razed in order that she be filled ‘from the crown to the toe top-full | Of direst cruelty’ (ll. 41-43) would seem to suggest as much. Indeed, Macbeth’s line: ‘Bring forth men-children only; | For thy undaunted mettle should compose | Nothing but males’ (*Mac.*, I.vii.73-75) furthers that reading.

male quality.<sup>104</sup> She suggests instead that she need not raze her sex, nor apologize for it.

Contemplating Lady Macbeth's soliloquy in particular, I noted how subtle a dramatic device was afforded the writer by such invocatory petitions.<sup>105</sup> Invocatory speeches/soliloquies — far from being the highly stylized showpieces they are/were sometimes rendered in performance —<sup>106</sup> suggest (to my mind) something akin to 'self-talk'.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, an audience may recognise in them the same wishful pleading that

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<sup>104</sup> Though it is clearly a superb rhetorical trick, presenting her willingness to enter the affray as all the bolder by highlighting her particular (feminine) vulnerability.

<sup>105</sup> One thinks of Lear's petitioning the heavens:

LEAR [...] O heavens!  
 If you do love old men, if your sweet sway  
 Allow obedience— if yourselves are old,  
 Make it your cause! Send down, and take my part!  
 (K. Lear, II.iv.381-84)

Or of Claudius's<sup>s</sup> failed attempt to pray:

CLAUDIUS [...] but O, what form of prayer  
 Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder?'  
 That cannot be, since I am still possess'd  
 Of those effects for which I did the murder —  
 (Ham., III.iii.51-)

<sup>106</sup> I am thinking here of Sir John Gielgud's somewhat mannered, oddly melodic rendition of 'To be or not to be', which (though in many ways excellent) may strike a modern audience as too studied, too ceremonial. Of course, the version I am referring to is from a radio drama starring Gielgud as Hamlet, and that medium may have warranted that style of delivery: *Hamlet* for 'Theatre Guild on the Air' broadcast on 4 March 1951; see: 'Hamlet - Starring John Gielgud, Dorothy McGuire & Pamela Brown – 1951', online video recording, YouTube, 29 April 2015, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGz1vrU1oCY>> [accessed 06/08/2018].

Indeed, as Gielgud (later) rather wittily remarks of his verse reading: 'I don't know what my Shakespeare acting was like in those days', and looking back to a 1965 film *Chimes at Midnight* he comments on seeing it again, 'I thought I was like an old operatic diva singing'. For full interview clip see: 'Laurence Olivier on Modern Ways of Delivering Shakespearean Blank Verse', Online video recording, YouTube, 24 January 2017, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9XWTtxlYgE>> [accessed 15/09/2018].

<sup>107</sup> 'Self-talk is a term used widely in the research literature to describe what athletes say to themselves out loud or internally and privately. A number of terms have been used to describe self-talk, including inner or internal dialogue, monologue, voice or speech, auditory imagery, private speech, self-statements, stream of consciousness, and more'. For more on this subject, see: Judy L. Van Raalte, 'Self-talk',

they themselves occasionally engage in. And even though Gertrude<sup>K</sup> seems assured that her powers of discretion are sufficient ('I know the salamander from the snake; | will lay down poison for a rat, yet nurse | a weakling lamb upon my lap' (Kavanagh, p. 41)), still, like Lady Macbeth, she appears to call on those 'spirits | That tend on mortal thoughts' (*Mac.*, I.v.38-40). Despite the fact that Gertrude<sup>K</sup> does not petition any particular god or spirit, the prayer-like, invocatory tone is much the same as that illustrated above (by Lear, Claudius<sup>S</sup>, Lady Macbeth). Rather, in this speech, Gertrude<sup>K</sup> splits her psyche in two, petitioning her best self, and willing that self to muster the requisite 'mettle' and wiles needed to pull off an assassination.

With this speech, then, the aim was to produce a counter to the kind of speech found in *Macbeth*, where Lady Macbeth seems to denigrate her femaleness. Even so, the same 'invocatory' (wishful) tone is employed; and there is still a desire to be transformed: to have some aspects sharpened, and others dampened. And so, this speech is ultimately a war chant akin to Hamlet's, 'let my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth' (*Ham.*, IV.iv.66).

e) 'Here lies the nest of an infamous poisoner' (*Ger.*, IV.ii)

While Corambis's only soliloquy (Kavanagh, p. 60) is more typical of an earlier form of soliloquy (one used as a means of exposition), it also exemplifies the kind of polysemous word use which hallmarks Shakespeare's craft. Even in the soliloquy's opening line the words 'lies' and 'nest' both offer negative connotations: 'lies' meaning falsehood, and 'nest' bearing connotations of vipers, especially when brought

into association with ‘poisoner’.<sup>108</sup> Such words may alert the play’s audience to the major plot development here: this is a pivotal scene wherein the necessities are secured, and regicide becomes ever more likely.

The word ‘nest’ is later modified by ‘crow’, which (being a bird) in itself suggests augury:<sup>109</sup> as when Hamlet remarks to Horatio before the fencing contest that will result in his death, ‘we defy augury; there’s a special providence in | the fall of a sparrow’.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> The *OED* definition of ‘nest’ has the following: ‘A number or collection of people, esp. of the same type or class, or inhabiting or frequenting the same place. Frequently in nest of vipers’.

<sup>109</sup> Birds generally connote augury but crows/ravens are particularly ominous. Some other occurrences (in Shakespeare) of the crow/raven with an ominous aspect are as follows (all emphasis to follow mine): ‘Begin, mur- | derer. [...] Come, | the croaking *raven* doth bellow for revenge’ (*Ham.*, III.ii.246-48); ‘O, I die, Horatio. | The potent poison quite o’ercrows my spirit.’ [...] [and, a little later, predicting the news from England] ‘I do *prophesy* th’ election lights | On Fortinbras’ (*Ham.*, V.ii.357-61); ‘The owl shriek’d at thy birth,—an evil sign; | The night-*crow* cried, aboding luckless time’ (*3H6*, V.vi.44-45); Cassius reports that the two eagles that had accompanied their troupe are gone: ‘And in their steads do *ravens*, *crows* and kites, | Fly o’er our heads and downward look on us, | As we were sickly prey: their shadows seem | A canopy most fatal’ (*JC*, V.i.82-85); Lady Macbeth’s famous oath:

The *raven* himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements.

(also, under ‘croak’ *OED* has the following: ‘*fig.* to speak in dismal accents, talk despondingly, forebode evil (like the raven).’ Which meaning may have led to the later (nineteenth cent.) sense: ‘to die’ — *Mac.*, I.v.37-39)

‘I had as lief have heard the night-*raven*, come what plague could have come after it.’ (*Ado*, II.iii.80-82); ‘And their executors, the knavish *crows*, | Fly o’er them, all impatient for their hour’ (*H5*, IV.ii.50-51); Alexander Iden, having slain the rebel Jack Cade, threatens to cut off his head: ‘Which I will bear in triumph to the king, | Leaving thy trunk for *crows* to feed upon’ (*2H6*, IV.x.82-83) here crows, while not ominous, feed on the Cade’s body and are thus associated with death; in the following quote (from *Macbeth*) the mention of the ‘crow’ comes at the crux of Macbeth’s atmospheric speech (a speech that precedes the scene in which Banquo is murdered):

MACBETH [...]  
Light thickens; and the *crow*  
Makes wing to the rooky wood  
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;  
While night's black agents to their preys do rouse.

(*Mac.*,  
III.iii.50-53)

<sup>110</sup> Under ‘augury’ the *OED* has: ‘The practice of predicting the future [...] on the basis of the observation and interpretation of natural signs (such as the behaviour of *birds* or celestial phenomena)’ (emphasis added).

Corambis's<sup>K</sup> soliloquy also leans on imagery found in *Hamlet* — ‘‘Tis an unweeded garden | That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature | Possess it merely’ (*Ham.*, I.ii.135-37) — and repurposes it: ‘Here is the garden where each gnarled weed | is wanted [...]’ (Kavanagh, p. 60).

In so doing, I wanted to suggest that ideas proffered by Hamlet in the source play might have an alternate resonance in the zeitgeist of *Ger.*’s pre-*Hamlet* world. The ‘weeded garden’ (far from being a symbol of ‘rank’ fecundity) has ‘base potential’ pertinent to the plot of the (later) action of *Hamlet*: for the poison that will ultimately lead to Hamlet’s revenge is the product of the very grossness that he will later come to reject. In this way, the passage offers a motivic echo of the original material, but gleefully corrupts Hamlet’s plaint against nature — we find that an unweeded garden need not be as ‘unprofitable’ as he maintains. The overall intention was to *undermine* the notion of inherited narratives. Instead, *Ger.* suggests that knowledge of the past is always partial, always contingent upon the reporter, and to what end the report is made.

The particular list of small animals used (newt, toad, worm) conveys ideas of witchcraft and/or occult knowledge by chiming with the kinds of animals typically evoked in spell casting.<sup>111</sup> Even the word *cawl* (a Welsh broth/soup) in Corambis’s soliloquy is

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<sup>111</sup> For example, the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*:

Fillet of a fenny snake,  
 In the *cauldron* boil and bake;  
 Eye of *newt* and toe of *frog*,  
 Wool of bat and tongue of dog,  
 Adder’s fork and blind-*worm*’s sting,  
 Lizard’s leg and owlet’s wing,  
 For a charm of powerful trouble,  
 Like a hell-*broth* boil and *bubble*.

(*Mac.*, IV.I.12-21 — emphasis added)

suggestive of ‘cauldron’ as both terms image things boiled in a pot; also, *cawl* partly echoes cauldron.

In feel, these images are almost primordial. Indeed, the influence of biblical/folkloric imagery runs throughout my text (as does it Shakespeare’s). That influence is manifest in the simplicity and directness of such imagery. By ‘directness’ here, I mean that one may grasp the superficial image easily, while the figurative sense must be worked out. For example, small, familiar garden animals (who pose no obvious threat) can, by way of occult knowledge, be rendered deadly. In aligning Corambis with this revelation — that things supposed benign can be made fatally potent — I colour his characterisation: Corambis is, by association, a newt, toad, worm. Thus, a seemingly powerless figure (a mere clerk) will later prove acutely malevolent.

We return to the zoomorphic mode with the character Woman being likened to a crow. As stated above, the image of the crow develops the word ‘nest’, but the image of the crow also has particular significance in terms of the planned assassination: the collective noun for crows being ‘a murder’; also, their nature as carrion scavengers makes them an ominous emblem of the events to come.

Further, with Corambis’s attack on Woman, I wanted to suggest that what one observes in others often suggests deep-seated truths about one’s own psyche.<sup>112</sup> This conception is further developed by the inclusion of a German loan-word *Giftschrank*

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<sup>112</sup> While Baumeister, *et al.*, acknowledge that ‘[t]he view that people defensively project specific bad traits of their own onto others as a means of denying that they have them is not well supported’, the authors go on to suggest, ‘[t]he Freudian view implied the transfer of the schema from one’s self-concept directly into the impression of the other person. It may, however, be more accurate to see the effect on impression formation as simply a consequence of heightened accessibility resulting from efforts at suppression.’ Roy F. Baumeister, Karen Dale, and Kristin L. Sommer, *Freudian Defence Mechanisms and Empirical Findings in Modern Social Psychology: Reaction Formation, Projection, Displacement, Undoing, Isolation, Sublimation, and Denial* (p. 1092)  
<<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1467-6494.00043>>.

(meaning ‘poison cabinet’). By observing this trait in Woman, Corambis reveals that he is cognisant of such a state of mind: a veritable store of mal intent. He reveals, too, that his knowledge is specialised, organised and dangerous. Indeed, the other characters desire (to varying degrees) that the king be assassinated, but it is Corambis who provides the means and suggests the method. The very use of a borrowed term such as *Giftschrank* indicates occult knowledge on Corambis’s part, and, thus, the accusation rebounds upon the accuser.<sup>113</sup>

In the ways cited above, then, this soliloquy serves soliloquy’s most basic function: motivic exposition. It sets the tone for the immediate scene, certainly, but also prepares the ground for the subsequent Act wherein the regicide is brought to fruition.

Again, a close reading of the words used throughout the soliloquy better clarifies this underscoring effect; words such as: ‘nest’, ‘poisoner’, ‘curse’, ‘hidden’, ‘peculiar’, ‘haunt’ (here meaning ‘abode’ but with obvious overtones of paranormality), ‘occult’, ‘secrets’, ‘unearthed’ (here I imagine something like ‘resurrected’: the Ghost figure of *Hamlet*, say), ‘gnarled’ (of Germanic etymology: ‘a knotty growth on wood’

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<sup>113</sup> Even an auditor scanning the sound, supposing it to be an English neologism, might hear the phrase ‘gift shrank’, which may suggest a ‘petty offering’, or ‘a present not given/received in the true spirit of generosity’, say. Again, it is not always necessary that the audience comprehend *every* detail (each word, each allusion, each figure) so long as there is enough of a trail to follow.

Something like this phenomenon (that our accusations return to us) is captured in Macbeth’s observation about the irony of a murderer’s fate:

But in these cases  
We still have judgment here; that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice  
Commends the ingredients of our poison’d chalice  
To our own lips.

(*Mac.*, I.vii.7-12)

— its use here suggestive of a ‘knotty’, difficult problem: i.e. the assassination),<sup>114</sup> ‘weed’ (here the noun, but with suggestions of the verb: to weed out), ‘spittle’ (hinting at the tendency to spit or spew having been poisoned), ‘unknown’, ‘scrubby’, ‘spy’, ‘base’, ‘blood’, ‘dark’, ‘dirge’, ‘vengeful’, ‘venomed’, ‘weeping’, ‘drugs’, ‘hurt’, ‘corrupting’ — all of which combine to alert the audience to the tenor of the next phase in the action.<sup>115</sup>

This more typically expositional and atmospheric soliloquy of Corambis’s, then, achieves much within a short, (poetically) dense space: it darkens the sonic tonality in preparation for what is to follow, and it reveals Corambis’s true character, betraying the fact that the new State —to be ushered in with this king’s demise — may not improve upon the one it will displace.

f) ‘The last face that my brother saw was mine’ (*Ger.*, V.ii)

The opening of Claudius’s<sup>K</sup> post-assassination soliloquy foregrounds familial duty, a duty he now dreads he has neglected.

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<sup>114</sup> See more at def. of ‘gnarled’, *Online Etymology Dictionary*  
<[https://www.etymonline.com/word/gnarled?ref=etymonline\\_crossreference](https://www.etymonline.com/word/gnarled?ref=etymonline_crossreference)> [accessed 06/08/2018].

<sup>115</sup> The text conjures a certain atmosphere; I had the following, atmospheric, lines of Hamlet’s in mind:

‘Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out  
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood  
And do such bitter business as the day  
Would quake to look on.

(*Ham.*, III.ii.379-83)

These lines precede Hamlet’s conference with Gertrude<sup>S</sup> (in her closet); a scene wherein that play’s first major death occurs. This preamble whets the audience’s senses and marks the modal shift. From that point on the play’s action seems to run its own unalterable course.

Particular attention is paid to the father and mother — those primordial figures so important to the plot of *Hamlet*. Claudius<sup>K</sup> becomes overwhelmingly aware of the blood-bond broken, and of the magnitude of his transgression.<sup>116</sup> This (Claudius's<sup>K</sup>) second soliloquy appropriates some of the texture of the Genesis fable by echoing such lines as: 'The *voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground*' and 'So now you are cursed from the earth, which has *opened its mouth* to receive your *brother's blood* from your *hand*' (emphasis added).<sup>117</sup> So that the soliloquy should resonate with elements of that famous fratricide.

The soliloquy purposefully counterpoints Claudius's<sup>S</sup> pragmatic and seemingly unsympathetic advice in *Hamlet*, where he treats the business of losing one's father as a minor existential hiccup.<sup>118</sup>

In Claudius's<sup>K</sup> soliloquy we meet a man who is painfully aware that something more was owed his brother than inaction. That, instead, 'soft regard', 'mercy', and 'protection' were due him (Kavanagh, p. 73).

As Hamlet comments, on finding the quality of Gertrude's<sup>S</sup> grief lacking, 'A beast that wants discourse of reason | Would have mourn'd longer' (I.ii.150-51); here

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<sup>116</sup> As Claudius<sup>S</sup> says of the murder: 'It hath the primal eldest curse upon't, | A brother's murder!' (*Ham.*, III.iii.36-37). Indeed, this act (fratricide) is the second major transgression chronicled in the Old Testament: Cain's slaying of Abel.

<sup>117</sup> Genesis 4.1-26, *King James Version* (online)  
<<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+4&version=KJV>> [accessed 10/10/2017].

<sup>118</sup> But you must know, your father lost a father;  
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound  
In filial obligation for some term  
To do obsequious sorrow. But to persever  
In obstinate condolement is a course  
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief  
(*Ham.*, I.ii.89-94)

too the emphasis is on a failure to perform the expected ‘filial obligation’. In the immediate aftermath of the deed, Claudius is figuratively dismembered: the eyes, mouth and hands become sites of accusation. And this self-accusation here is similar to the verbal flagellation in *Hamlet* at:

Am I a coward?  
 Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?  
 Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?

(*Ham.*, II.ii.566-68)

For here, too, the body is particularised, and attacked.

In order to deepen the connections to the source play (*Hamlet*), I wanted the prequel play to prefigure the heaven-earth (God-beast) dichotomy that runs through *Hamlet*.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> The following examples of the heaven-earth (God-beast) dichotomy occur: Hamlet associates the late King with a god and Claudius with a satyr (*Mythol.* [...] class of woodland gods or demons, [...] partly human and partly bestial — *OED*): ‘So excellent a king, that was to this | *Hyperion* to a *satyr*’ (I.ii.139-40); the Ghost in reference to Claudius: ‘Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate *beast*’ (I.v.42); Hamlet’s plaint against the quality of his mother’s mourning: ‘O God! a *beast* that wants discourse of reason | Would have mourn’d longer’ (I.ii.150-51); Hamlet on Pyrrhus (an avatar for Claudius): ‘The rugged Pyrrhus, like th’ Hyrcanian *beast*’ (II.ii.446); Hamlet’s repugnance turned inward: ‘What is a man, | If his chief good and market of his time | Be but to sleep and feed? A *beast*, no more.’ (IV.iv.33-35); interestingly, even Claudius aligns a lack of judgment with beasts: ‘poor Ophelia | Divided from herself and her fair judgment, | Without the which we are [...] mere *beasts*’ (IV.v.84-86); Hamlet’s hyperbolic alignment of his father with Hyperion (‘literally “he who looks from above,”’ — *Online Etymology Dictionary*) — an idea he augments with the figurative suggestion of divine powers (i.e., controlling the weather): ‘So excellent a king, that was to this | *Hyperion* to a satyr; so loving to my mother | That he might not betem the winds of *heaven* | Visit her face too roughly. *Heaven and earth!* | Must I remember?’ (I.ii.139-43) — indeed, there is, potentially, a suggestion of divine power in: ‘Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive | Against thy mother aught. Leave her to *heaven*’ (I.v.85-86) where the Ghost speaks as though he were an agent of heaven (later, Hamlet is quite explicit about being such an agent; on having stabbed Polonius he avers: ‘I do repent; but *heaven* hath pleas’d it so, | To punish me with this, and this with me, | That *I must be their scourge and minister.*’ (III.iv.175-77)); when Hamlet first accosts the Ghost he acknowledges the contrasting possibilities: ‘Be thou a *spirit of health* or *goblin damn’d*, | Bring with thee *airs from heaven* or *blasts from hell*’ (I.iv.40-41) (he later confirms this possibility: ‘The spirit that I have seen | May be a *devil*; and the *devil* hath power | T’ assume a pleasing shape’ (II.ii.594-96)); the division between the world of ideals and that of earthly concerns is made clear: ‘There are more things in *heaven and earth*, Horatio, | Than are dreamt of in your philosophy’ (I.v.174-75); ‘Prompted to my revenge by *heaven and hell*’ (II.ii.580); ‘What should such fellows as I | do crawling between *earth and heaven*?’ (III.i.128-29); Claudius’s confessional soliloquy is largely concerned with the earthly drives that have resulted in his great offence against heaven: ‘O, my offence is rank, it smells to *heaven*; | It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t — | A brother’s murder!’ (III.iii.36-38)

In Claudius's<sup>K</sup> soliloquy, specifically, the god-beast dichotomy is broadly marked by the move from 'O, god! God!', in the first half of the soliloquy, to 'O, devil! Devil! That I am', in the latter. In this way Claudius<sup>K</sup> precedes Hamlet in establishing his association with a beast/devil by indicting himself.<sup>120</sup>

Claudius further exacerbates these feelings of remorse by remembering (and, thus, refiguring) his brother as a child. The world of childhood play, and the reality of this latest deed, stand in stark contrast — but the image also provides an insight into King Hamlet's early character: 'The boy with the wooden sword — | I see him still in some lost game of youth — | the boy who would be king!' (Kavanagh, p. 74). And so, we find that, even as a child, the king is associated with combat and a desire to lead.

By remembering his brother as a child, Claudius<sup>K</sup> exaggerates the charge against himself: upgrading it from fratricide to infanticide. This progression, from assassination of a king to the slaughter of an innocent child, is prepared for by the earlier image: 'a child surprised; the honest animal in sleep' (Kavanagh, p. 74), which

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— he finally gives up this attempt at prayer, conceding: 'My words fly up, *my thoughts remain below*. | Words without thoughts never to *heaven* go' (III.iii.97-98); Hamlet forgoes an opportunity to kill Claudius at prayer, reasoning: 'No. | Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent. | [...] Then trip him, that his heels may kick at *heaven*, | And that his soul may be as damn'd and black | As *hell*, whereto it goes' (III.iii.88-95); nowhere is the god-beast dichotomy more fully realised than in Hamlet's speech comparing the late King and Claudius (at III.iv), which begins: 'Look here upon th's picture, and on this, | The counterfeit presentment of two brothers. [ff.]' — 'What *devil* was't | That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?' (III.iv.53-77) (which echoes Polonius's assertion: 'with devotion's visage | And pious action we do sugar o'er | The *Devil* himself.' (III.i.47-49)); when Claudius enquires of Hamlet where Polonius is Hamlet retorts: 'In *heaven*. [...] If your messenger find him not there, seek him i' *th' other place* yourself' (IV.iii.33-35), further solidifying the association of Claudius with hell; Laertes demanding a full account of his father's death: 'His means of death, [...] | Cry to be heard, as 'twere from *heaven* to *earth*, | That I must call't in question' (IV.v.210-14), and: 'How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with: | To *hell*, allegiance! vows, to the *blackest devil* | Conscience and grace, to the *profoundest pit*!' (IV.v.130-32).

<sup>120</sup> Also, there is an underlying argument in *Hamlet* which states that sans judgement (and wanting reason) we are mere beasts; by aligning Claudius with beasts Hamlet seeks to dehumanise him and, thus, demonise him. But here Claudius demonises himself: blaming his 'pride and petty keening' (the underlying sentiment of which echoes Wisdom, 2.24: 'But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world').

acknowledges the blameless, innocent quality of the sleeping figure, or the potential for innocence that engagement with the world, perforce, corrupts.<sup>121</sup>

It is not exactly clear why Cain slays Abel; one assumes jealousy, but the Genesis story is short on detail. That lack of psychological insight is at once exciting and disappointing. It excites speculation, but the lack of adequate evidence ultimately frustrates.

Shakespeare's characters, on the other hand, manage to reveal their inner workings whilst remaining mysterious: we know, for example, that Hamlet is feigning madness, and yet he will come to seem truly mad; particularly, when he murders Polonius, or leaps into Ophelia's grave.

We learn a good deal about what Claudius<sup>K</sup> feels here and yet not long after this outpouring he acquiesces to Freya's murder (seemingly) without a moment's hesitation. Indeed, though we gain access to character's introspection, we can never

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<sup>121</sup> Both the image of the *child* ('new-born babe striding the blast' and of *sleep* ('Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more! | Macbeth does murder sleep", the innocent sleep' (*Mac.*, II.ii.34-35)) are used by Shakespeare to symbolise innocence. While Lady Macbeth provides, to my mind, the most arresting example of a child as emblem of innocence when, goading her husband, she assures him:

I have given suck, and know  
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:  
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
 Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,  
 And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you  
 Have done to this.

(*Mac.*, I.vii.54-59)

Yet, she later excuses herself from personal involvement in the murder, reasoning: 'Had he [King Duncan] not resembled | My father as he slept, I had done't' (*Mac.*, II.ii.12-13). Is it credible that Lady Macbeth would dash out the brains of a suckling child (presumably her own) but balk at assassinating a man who merely *resembles* their father? Whatever one's conclusion, the proximity of that shift in sensibility offers the actor an interesting inconsistency to work with: an example of the oscillation and variability that are necessary traits of complex characters.

really pretend to know them, for the same reasons that we may find some of our own behaviours inscrutable.<sup>122</sup>

The soliloquy analysed in this section, then, takes up themes (from both ‘Genesis’ and *Hamlet*) to do with ‘fratricide’, and ‘heaven and hell’ (respectively). Doing so energises the text and deepens its connection to the source play. The aim being, that this prequel text prefigures the beast imagery of *Hamlet* by having Claudius<sup>K</sup> accuse himself. The memorialising of childhood is like Hamlet’s tendency to idealise the past. And such connections reframe the source material.

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<sup>122</sup> Besides, as we have discovered throughout, characters lie — even to themselves. This idea of alienation from the self is prefigured in the First Guard’s concern that ‘a man’s left foreign even to himself’ (Kavanagh, p. 4), or in Claudius’s<sup>K</sup> observation about moonlight:

The night poor counterfeits the day; pale moonlight  
misremembers once-familiar forms,  
the fowl of the air and cattle of the field  
appear to be transmogrified by gloom...

(Kavanagh, p.11)

## CONCLUSION

I began to wonder what child writers would achieve when they questioned, and were questioned by, Shakespeare. I'd always taken for granted that Shakespeare is simply 'too difficult' for primary children. I now know that I was mistaken. (Sedgwick, p.3)

The primary reason I took on this project was to spend time in Shakespeare's company. An indulgence that has been its own reward. And with this thesis, I have begun what I hope will be a *lifelong* engagement with his work.

Shakespeare is lauded for reasons which do not require rehearsing here, but it is his ability to crystallize in writing some deep, personal truth that first attracted me, and maintains my interest still. The first Shakespeare play I saw (aged sixteen) was *Hamlet*. I had not been taught Shakespeare at school. Yet, through all the noise and confusion of adolescence Shakespeare's words came to me like a bolt of lightning.

I remember still the line that struck me: 'for there is nothing | either good or bad but thinking makes it so'. The line both thrilled and terrified at once; for, I grown up in a religiously-dominated culture; one that prescribed (with great ferocity) exactly what was 'good' and 'bad'. The idea, then, that these categories might be questioned — more, that they were mere constructs of the mind — seemed truly radical.

I realise now, of course, that I had understood the line as making some pronouncement about morality, when, in fact, Hamlet is talking about Denmark seeming to him a prison – where it is not so for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

But this mistake is the whole point.

As an actor, your given a script and you begin to read it aloud, piecing together its sense. It is a job of work, and so you are less daunted by a writer like Shakespeare than someone outside the theatre who may pick up a copy of *King Lear*, say, and begin to read. Certainly, the actor has no greater facility for comprehending a work like *Lear* than the average reader, but they (unlike said reader, who can just as easily put down what they so casually took up) must ‘persever’. Through this ‘job of work’ they are compelled to *make* sense (sometimes even where they cannot), for they will eventually have to stand on a stage and deliver their lines *as if* they understand them.

Of course, they often fail.

But through serial failure success is won. Macbeth’s famous fear (‘If we should fail?’) is answered in a heartbeat by his wife: ‘We fail’ (Mac., I.vii.59-60).

It is an actor’s approach to Shakespeare, then, that informs the approach taken here. In this thesis, I have taken Shakespeare’s work apart, to look closely at its constituent units. Viewing Hamlet’s first soliloquy through the lens of rhetorical figuration illustrated just how rich a texture might be built by adopting those devices. I demonstrated the power of apostrophic address, repetition, figurative language, and a host of other rhetorical strategies. So doing evidenced an approach to Shakespeare that seeks to understand him on his own terms, as a writer whose ‘humanist rhetorical education’ informed the ways in which he handled language.

I went on to consider those larger textual units, the soliloquies and speeches. I looked here at what I felt to be the key speech-acts in my own work and sought to evidence the ways in which this apprenticeship has shaped the creative element of my thesis. I noted that plainness of line was sometimes needed in order that a reader/auditor be able to orient themselves. I discovered that incompleteness (or,

fractured speech) fostered psychological credibility. My analysis demonstrated that the allusions and vocabulary a character employs can reveal their inherent worldview and bias.

In terms of thematic development, I discussed the need for a writer to fully explore themes, while being careful not to overburden their text; and, I brought out the many points of contact I hoped to make with the source material. I stated that my more general intention was to bring into question *all* such claims to truth. Indeed, this play has been an exploration of the power of language to mislead and malign. My play has explored the various registers of public and private discourse; from the bombast of the Herald to the wilfully enigmatic quips of the Fool.

This thesis has paid particular attention to the form and function of soliloquy. I discussed the ways in which this theatrical device had evolved out of our oral storytelling tradition to offer the playwright a way in which to reveal introspection and reify character. I focused on that dramaturgical instrument more than any other because it has always excited me.

From that first viewing of *Hamlet*, I have always delighted in soliloquy's facsimile of *access* to a character's private thoughts. From Holden Caulfield's first-person account in fiction, to Groucho Marx's asides in film, that feeling of *inclusivity* and semblance of an extended, enfolded interiority has captured my imagination.

While I agree that '[b]ecause of the complex experimental, material and social processes through which artistic production occurs and is subsequently taken up, it is not always possible to quantify outcomes of studio practice' (Barrette, p. 3); I feel that in terms of the creative element, *Ger.* offers a successful work of *poetry* – which

utilizes a verse-drama as its supporting framework. Moreover, while the principle aim of this thesis is to expose and adopt Shakespeare's methods, *Ger.* often achieves *novel coinages* and displays a keen poetic sensibility; all of which serves to evince a unique poetic voice in development – in spite of (and because of) the apprenticeship served.

As I stated in the introduction, it is my belief that the real *merit* of a project such as this is that of 'personal development'; for, "writing...is practically the only activity a person can do that is not competitive" wrote Paul Theroux [...], and, more famously, William Blake said that "Real Poets [cannot] have any competition" (Sedgwick, p.4).

Moreover, '[Louise] Johnson suggests that the value of cultural capital is not only dependent on the field in which it is produced, but also through the institutional and social contexts in which it is received and circulated' (Barrett, p.8). I am particularly interested in what Johnson terms 'embodied cultural capital', as I believe that has been the true worth and gain of the present endeavour. Moreover, I now understand more fully that *practice* is a method of 'knowledge-production and thinking' (Barrett, p.11). That is why I claim that *I* am the site of a (future) contribution to knowledge, and that the play text and exegetic essay offer evidence of that knowledge acquisition.

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'[Kenneth] Burke argues that we need "to move inside and infiltrate the duplicitous but powerfully entrenched language of liberty" that persuades us to cooperate in the first place' (Richards, p.163). I am thinking about this assertion in relation to the central

question of my own play: How do people create these group identities, and convince each other to do *violence* in the name of the group?

It is the failure of the conspirators in *Ger.* that they do not fully explore the alternatives open to them. They cannot, it seems, conceive of a different form of society (one without royal hierarchy), and this collective failure of imagination (of their *rhetoric*) means that they are destined always to propagate a system they ultimately reject. They suppose that the King is an objectionable entity to be exercised, but they fail to see that he is just a manifestation of the unequitable system of hierarchy.

Aristotle maintains that one should be able to argue both sides of an argument in order to know all the facts of the case and to refute false arguments (Richards, p.32). Often the characters in *Ger.* communicate in such a way as to conceal their own biases, and they fail to detect those of their interlocutors.

Their lack of *objective* reflection is what ultimately dooms them.

At heart, this is the message of *Ger.*: if we are to truly effect change, we must seek to know our society and ourselves better. Tragedy is the inevitable end when we cannot appreciate that our means of *defence* mirror our enemy's means of *attack*. Learning to think in a *truly* rhetorical manner – by anticipating our opponent's argument – has the unintended advantage of forcing us out of our own comfortable viewpoint. Cicero offers a defence of rhetoric 'as a critical method, which prompts us always to think again and to recognise that no conclusion is ever absolute'; in other words, rhetoric facilitates 'critical distance' (Richards, p.63; p.128).

On reflection, the whole process of this thesis is bounded by an interested in rhetoric.

Rhetoric runs through Shakespeare's work, from the micro level of figures and idioms, to the macro level: for, '[rhetoric] is also a process of argument, a way of

thinking which understands that all positions are ultimately arguable' (Richards, p.13). By which I mean that Shakespeare is a *rhetorical* author. For, he examines his subject through the antithetical, dialogic process of rhetoric.

As Jennifer Richards suggests, while it is always possible to mock the pomposity of rhetorical instruction, the renaissance did nevertheless evince writers capable of employing the art while breaking 'free of [its] apparent constraints' (Richards, p.87). When we ask, *Why study rhetoric?* I think that we answer in the full knowledge that it is an *imperfect* tool, that there is benefit to be had, whilst being ever mindful that the tool might surely be improved – or discarded once a superior means is found. But, as de Man (like Nietzsche) reminds us, we should 'regard with suspicion [...] claims to communicate in a lucid and straightforward fashion' (Richards, p.152); for no such language exists.

Indeed, '[Kenneth Burke] wants us to recognise what we can no longer readily see, the rhetorical motives that structure our everyday social interaction' (Richards, p.164). In my play, the Fool's comparison of Elsinore to a labyrinth slyly comments on this *ensaring* effect of hierarchical social structures, which are difficult to navigate and impossible to fathom in their entirety. Language is also an ensnaring meta-structure, but rhetoric offers a crude map with which to navigate. But more than this, rhetoric also allows for a new cartography: for, '[rhetoric] uses argument on different sides to unsettle positions that seem 'natural' and unquestionable' (Richards, p.177; quoting Meyer). Through its mastery, then, we can respond creatively to the narratives we have inherited.

In conclusion, I feel that this thesis offers a practical approach to the challenges posed by a writer such as Shakespeare. It is an approach I think that would benefit students of literature generally. 'By responding to Shakespeare's poetry, children learn (the potential is there for ourselves as adults, too) about themselves: their loves, their horrors, their delights, their dreams, their eventual deaths' (Sedgwick, p.5).

It is by no means an original method; indeed, it has long been common practice in the fine arts (that is why in every national gallery, in front of some gigantic canvas by an old Renaissance master, you see, even now, young people sketching). I am not, of course, suggesting that every student be made to write verse-plays; only that an awed and reverential approach to Shakespeare is unnecessary. His works will remain intact after one has prized them open and fiddled about inside; it is, rather, our own works that stand to benefit by the endeavour.

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## APPENDIX 1

*Hamlet*, Act I, scene ii: numbered sections highlight the successive waves (indents indicate where a verse line has been split).

1.

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!

2.

O God! God!  
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden,  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely.

3.

That it should come to this!  
But two months dead — nay, not so much, not two —  
So excellent a king, that was, to this  
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother  
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
Visit her face too roughly.

4.

Heaven and earth!  
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him  
As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month—

5.

Let me not think on't — Frailty, thy name is woman! —  
A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,  
Like Niobe, all tears — why she, even she—

6.

O God, a beast, that wants discourse of reason,

Would have mourn'd longer — married with my uncle,  
My father's brother, but no more like my father  
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,  
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
She married —

7.

O, most wicked speed, to post  
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.  
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.