HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Shakespeare's Narration
Author(s)	Twiddy, Iain
Citation	国際広報メディア・観光学ジャーナル, 14, 71-86
Issue Date	2012-03-15
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/48864
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	JIMCTS14_004.pdf

Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP

Jimcts

Shakespeare's Narration

大学院メディア・コミュニケーション研究院　特任准教授
Iain Twiddy

abstract

In analysing the impossibility of a harmonious union with a Montague, Juliet dissects internal from external identity, imaginatively instructing Romeo to 'doff thy name / And for thy name, which is no part of thee, / Take all myself'. The potential marriage is precluded not by an innate identity, but by Romeo's status, his position as a signifier in the text of Verona's rigid familial superstructure. Juliet proposes an active self-narration in opposition to its passive endurance, and a possible union with Romeo is an attempted translation. Juliet assumes that in such a translation the 'innate' self remains inviolable, but as the play demonstrates in the protagonists' deaths, internal and external identities are impossible to dissever, and the alteration of a single signifier is inextricable from the mutation of its context, the familial network; as Romeo laments, it is not he, but his 'name's cursed hand' that is responsible for the death of Juliet's kinsman Tybalt. Shakespearean characters constitute texts within contexts, the networks of family and state in which they function. They experience the divisive condition of attempting to narrate while continually being narrated. Internal and external crises occur at the points where characters recognize themselves as textual characters, and when they either claim or rescind control over their narrative meaning. Attempts to translate the self and others, and to show others as they are perceived, frequently result in personal suffering, due to the difficulty of interpreting competing levels of signification within power structures: characters as signifiers switch between monosemic, metaphorical and polysemic roles. In *The Merchant of Venice*, religious identity is both innate and mutable as it serves the interest of economics. Shylock attempts to expose the Christians' practice of duplicitous literalism through his bond, but justice itself is a nebulous and manipulable entity. In the death of his father, Hamlet is unwilling to play his expected role in the new theatre of state, and attempts to perpetuate the original condition through administering justice; by the end of the play the state is translated by foreign occupation. Richard, Duke of Gloucester's active narration of others and the creation of the unreadable self, in the construction of the text of kingship, ultimately effect self-abnegation, the destruction of the self as a signifier and the loss of any kind of autonomy, as he is replaced by another actor in the role of king. Examining the nature of this dialectic of passive and active narration, where characters narrate and are narrated, requires considering liminal places of conflict in the different translating actions — whether of the self or others — that characters perform, and the complex signifying operations of power structures.

In analysing the impossibility of a harmonious union with a Montague, Juliet dissects internal from external identity, imaginatively instructing Romeo to 'doff thy name / And for thy name, which is no part of thee, / Take all myself'.[1] The potential marriage is precluded not by an innate identity, but by Romeo's status, his position as a signifier in the text of Verona's rigid familial superstructure. Juliet proposes an active self-narration in opposition to its passive endurance, and a possible union with Romeo is an attempted translation. Juliet assumes that in such a translation the 'innate' self remains inviolable, but as the play demonstrates in the protagonists' deaths, internal and external identities are impossible to dissever, and indeed the alteration of a single signifier is inextricable from the mutation of its context, the familial network; as Romeo laments following his murder of Tybalt, it is not he, but his 'name's cursed hand' that 'Murder'd [Juliet's] kinsman'.[2]

Romeo and Juliet presents an illustration of a divisive and dividing condition, of attempting to narrate while being narrated. Individuals experience subjectivity and agency, but also subjection by their society; as Louis Montrose put it in 1996, '"Subject' is meant to suggest an equivocal process of *subjectification*'.[3] As the confluence of two competing currents, the self experiences and employs a continuous process of translation, as a text permeating and permeated by a context. This would be unremarkable if it were not for the crises that occur at the points where characters either claim or rescind control over their narrative meaning, and the internal and external conflicts that arise when they so much as attempt to read the signs of themselves and their environment, the moments when they recognize themselves as textual characters. Examining the nature of this dialectic, of the energies of active and passive narration, requires the consideration of places of liminality and conflict, in the different translating actions — whether of the self or others — that characters perform.[4] This essay will examine the operations of narration and translation within power structures, and the high level of individual suffering involved, in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet* and *Richard III*.

The points of liminality and conflict in *The Merchant of Venice* are located in the contest of two discourses of identity, occasioned by the interaction of a dominant Christian ideology with Shylock's subversive practice. A definition of Shylock's alien status may be useful here. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt described how

> The alien is perceived by the authority either as that which is unformed or chaotic (the absence of order) or that which is false and negative (the demonic parody of order) [⋯] the alien is always constructed as the distorted image of the authority.[5]

Considering the characters of the play fundamentally as elements within a text, we

►1 All quotations are from William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (London: Arden, 1998); here *Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.47-9.

►2 *Romeo and Juliet* 3.3.104-5.

►3 Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16.

►4 'Liminality' is intended to suggest the points at which subjects are aware of two or more possible modes of being, for instance — in this paper — direction by the self and direction by others, competing methods of financial transaction and religious identity; a mourner's refusal to accept existence without the dead; an illegitimate rise to kingship. These are all locations in which the subject experiences conflict in choosing an identity or mode of existence that is currently opposed by others. This creates a condition of liminality, in which a subject attempts to pass through his or her present condition into another, more desirable condition.

►5 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 9.

can paraphrase this description at the level of signification. We can identify 'order' with a literal monosemy, a seamless unity of signifier and signified; the 'false' may describe their imperfect correspondence, or metaphor (or the potential for metaphor when required); thirdly, the 'chaotic' may describe the mulitiplicity of signifieds which a signifier may generate, or polysemy (or the possible instability and misapprehension of meaning). These semic forms interweave in the play's opening scene, which presents Antonio in conversation with Salarino and Solanio, attempting to read the text of himself:

> In sooth I know not why I am so sad,
> It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
> I am to learn:
> And such a want-wit sadness makes of me
> That I have much ado to know myself.
>
> (*M of V* 1.1.1-7)

Antonio delineates an innate and stable self, penetrated by an alien essence that temporarily disguises it. Yet the visibility of that underlying core is further obscured by Salarino's suggestion of a counter-movement, of the self's fragmentation and diffusion into a multiplicity of external relations: 'Your mind is tossing on the ocean, / There where your argosies with portly sail, // [···] fly by [···] with their woven wings' (*M of V* 1.1.8-14). Antonio acknowledges such a possibility (*M of V* 1.1.41), but the self's involuntary dispersal is prevented by a pre-emptive regulation: 'My ventures are not in one bottom trusted, / Nor to one place [···] / Therefore my merchandise makes me not sad' (*M of V* 1.1.42-5). Movement is ordered and the self remains stable, and the threat to the self posed by external penetration is annulled by its absorption and overwriting. Unable to account for the origin of his sadness, Antonio integrates its surface effect into the self's core, overlaying the original essence, translating its initial obscuring into a historically constant signifier:

> I hold the world but as the world, Graziano,
> A stage, where every man must play a part,
> And mine a sad one.
>
> (*M of V* 1.1.77-9)

Antonio depicts a world in which falsity is affirmed as truth. His method is enlightened by Graziano's argument concerning the arbitrary nature and interchangeability of theatrical 'parts', of identity's mutability (*M of V* 1.1.79-102), which is refused both by Antonio (*M of V* 1.1.113) and Bassanio, who states

that ‘Graziano speaks an infinite deal of nothing’ (*M of V* 1.1.115).[6] The sleight of hand, the substitution that Antonio has performed, in overwriting an initial fracture, is a duplicitous literalism, a monosemy that validates itself by its invalidation. Antonio presents a self-enclosed structure of identity which attempts to resist modification by external forces and fragmentation by them, and which uses but refuses to acknowledge the languages of metaphor or polysemy in its ideological constitution.

Antonio’s practice is that of overwriting, and although the anatomization of his sadness may seem of minor significance, Antonio’s convention reappears in the play’s central contest. Salarino’s insistence upon the commodity relations of selfhood, of the shaping function of external influences, and Graziano’s awareness of metaphor, prefigure Antonio and Shylock’s initial encounter. Their exchange concentrates on the practice of usury, which serves an emblematic purpose in presenting their opposing discourses of identity. Shylock describes Antonio’s ideology of self-enclosed and monosemic meanings, of loan and equal repayment, and a rigid religious identity asserted aggressively in opposition to his own: Antonio

> lends out money gratis, and brings down
> The rate of usance here with us in Venice [⋯]
> He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,
> (Even there where merchants most do congregate)
> On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,
> Which he calls interest: cursed be my tribe
> If I forgive him!
>
> (*M of V* 1.3.41-50)

Antonio’s hostility towards ‘interest’, the alteration or augmentation of what an initial signifier signifies, is consistent with his opposition to the acknowledgement of metaphor and polysemy. An alien religion is complicit in threatening to destabilize a monosemic identity. Antonio is prepared to conduct business with Shylock, to use Shylock’s funds for Bassanio’s suit — the preservation and extension of a wealthy Christian lineage — but not to recognize Shylock’s practice or religion as valid. If Shylock may not practise without persecution, if he may not seal off a commercial and religious discourse untouched by the dominant Christian policy, he must attempt to demonstrate the invalidity of the latter, in the validation of his own. In agreeing to Shylock’s bond, ‘Antonio shall become bound’ (*M of V* 1.3.6), forced to re-read his system of duplicitous literalism, ‘to learn’ (*M of V* 1.1.5), to acknowledge the latent transactions of metaphor and polysemy, the alien elements which he continually overwrites.

The bond thus concentrates two competing discourses, or as Antonio states, ‘If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not / As to thy friends [⋯] / But lend

►6 The events of the play would suggest that identity is something of an untouched and untouchable core regardless of external events. Antonio is melancholy both in prosperity and paucity, Bassanio is always dependent, Shylock always an outsider, whether Jewish (not Christian) or Christian (no longer Jewish); and despite her empowering turn as lawyer, Portia reverts quickly back to being a devoted wife (from being a devoted daughter).

it rather to thine enemy' (*M of V* 1.3.130-3). Since Antonio refuses to accept the validity of Shylock's discourse, Shylock insists that the bond be inscribed in extreme terms of Antonio's 'literalism'. Loan and repayment will be equivalent, and as an embodiment of literalism, the forfeit will consist of a pound of Antonio's flesh (*M of V* 1.3.143-50). Yet this second literalism being metaphorical, if Antonio fails to unite the signifier and signified of the money borrowed and money repaid, the imperfect correspondence of the two is reflected in that of the forfeit's exaction, since the extraction of flesh will be inextricable from Antonio's death. The additional meaning of the pound of flesh is analogous with the additional repayment present in the practice of usury. Since the forfeit also serves a metonymic role, as an attack upon both Antonio's body and that of the Christian whole, its enforcement would be a resistant action against Christian hostility, or the continued validation of Shylock's religious identity. If the loan is repaid, Antonio's ideology is vindicated, that ideology which insists his identity as a successful merchant is fixed, rather than variable; if the loan is forfeited, the surface layer of the penalty's literalism will be stripped away to reveal the core of metaphor and polysemy in the discourse of identity from which Antonio is constituted, but which he refuses to recognize, Shylock's language.

Thus the 'single bond' (*M of V* 1.3.144) is an attempt at translation: Shylock accommodates his practice of 'interest', and Antonio's policy of the overwriting of metaphor, into the terms of Antonio's language of surface literalism, so that if the bond is forfeited, Antonio may recognize the text of the bond as that of his own practice, that there is nothing literal, that the justice of not charging interest — one of the differential markers between Christians and Jews — is a specious one. Antonio's duplicitous ideology is constituted by — and generates — processes of translation, one of which is illustrated in the covert love affair of Lorenzo and Jessica. Their elopement and Jessica's conversion reprise Antonio's falsifying convention: disregarding the secondary implication of Shylock's unending avarice, Lorenzo states that 'If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven, / It will be for his gentle daughter's sake' (*M of V* 2.4.33-4). Jessica's conversion is achieved by means of a specious syllogism: Jessica is good; Jews are evil: therefore Jessica is not a Jew, she is a Christian. This transforming logic denies any occurrence of change, since Jessica has always been 'good', or, as she states, 'though I am a daughter to [Shylock's] blood, / I am not to his manners' (*M of V* 2.3.18-9). Difference is overwritten to produce similitude, by means of that very difference, just as the lovers' survival as a Christian unit depends upon the practice of transformation, the wealth Shylock has accrued from usury (*M of V* 2.4.29-32). Thus Shylock must insist upon the exaction of the bond's forfeit, to assert his translation of Antonio's and the Christians' practice of translation, since the latter is actively transforming his existence, the multiplicity of external and metaphorical bonds which constitute his identity: family, commerce, and religion. As post-colonial critics remind us, a root meaning of to 'translate' is to 'conquer',

and the bond, Shylock's translation of Christian translations, marks his tentative reclamation of power, and his illustration of the means of producing identity, and thus his desire to be recognized as an equal, rather than an oppositional alien. As their respective stock of identity diminishes, as Jessica elopes and Antonio's ships miscarry, Antonio is in a position equally bereft, expedient to be confronted with the full implications of his and the Christians' falsifying literalism.

Following Antonio and Shylock's final exchange before the court scene, Antonio concedes that in his insistence upon the bond's validity, Shylock is speaking both Antonio's and the state of Venice's language:

> The duke cannot deny the course of law:
> For the commodity that strangers have
> With us in Venice, if it be denied,
> Will much impeach the justice of the state,
> Since that the trade and profit of the city
> Consisteth of all nations.
>
> (*M of V* 3.3.26-31)

Venice's dependence upon international trade and its reputation for legality and justice form a dialectic. Yet the state's maintenance also depends upon 'strangers' within its fabric — Jews such as Shylock — from whose usurious transactions the state benefits, but which it would superficially condemn as corrupt. Venice is a state that welcomes 'corruption' while propounding justice and literalism as its visible structural principles. Under such terms, the literalism of Shylock's bond must be accepted: its surface layer of literalism and its core of metaphor and polysemy mirror the practice of Antonio, the Christians, and the state of Venice; 'no lawful means' may invalidate it (*M of V* 4.1.9).

Yet under the terms of such a system, there is no means by which Shylock's bond can be validated. Although the bond represents metonymically the dominant system, it remains a translation. Since, as Stephen Greenblatt points out, 'There is no translation that is not at the same time an interpretation', Shylock's interpretative translation cannot contain the full range of its possible signification.[7] Portia seizes upon the inherent fissures within the translation in order to invalidate the bond, drawing out its alternative, additional meanings by increasing and expanding its range of signification, rendering it polysemic. The agreement does not entitle Shylock to Antonio's blood (*M of V* 4.1.303-10), the weight of the extracted flesh must be exactly one pound (*M of V* 4.1.322-30), and the forfeit constitutes the attempted murder of a Christian by 'an alien' (*M of V* 4.1.344-61). The bond has always possessed this third meaning of attempted murder, but it is the unknown context of the signification of this intention, the specific religious law it contravenes, that constitutes the polysemic element. The principal of Shylock's deed, from its initial signification, is made to expand, in the manner of

►7 Greenblatt, 115.

interest, the unnatural expansion of an original form. In the most convoluted of literalisms, Shylock's status as deviant, 'misbeliever, cut-throat dog' (*M of V* 1.3.109) has been exposed by that which defined him as such initially. Defeated by his own open use of metaphor and polysemy, Shylock is then overwritten, made to sign a deed stipulating that 'He presently become a Christian' and bequeath half of his estate, which is returned to him by Antonio, to Lorenzo and Jessica (*M of V* 4.1.378-88). Originally excommunicated from the Christian body by his identity discourse, Shylock is now included in that system by the very process that previously enforced his exile. In both provisions, Shylock's practice, his discourse of identity, feeds the Christian body, which implements but then overwrites the fragmentary actions of metaphor and polysemy, and seals the fissure with a new surface literalism, an invalidating validation.

From Antonio's management of 'sadness' in the opening scene, the play continually reprises the same amorphous process, to present a discourse of Christian and state despotism, if we take Shylock's experience as representative of outsiders, and if we consider Marx's assessment in *Grundrisse* that 'The acquisition of the alien will is the prerequisite of any relation of domination.'[8] This is illustrated in part of Shylock's punishment, Antonio's insistence that he become Christian, after the Duke has rescinded the death penalty, the reason being 'That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit' (*M of V* 4.1.366). The punishment makes little sense from an ethical perspective: if it is intended to save Shylock's soul, it cannot possibly succeed if Shylock does not believe; in fact, the state may save his life, but it ensures that his soul is lost. But Antonio's request does illustrate the Christian conviction that it is possible to believe anything, to assert a false condition as true, and to force anyone to believe anything; in this way, it also demonstrates the great power of that authority.

Since Shylock's attempt to show the duplicity and injustice of this system is merely a translation, it inheres within that dominant system, a closed discursive cell which, although constitutively mutative, may be stabilized in its mutations and replications by its practitioners. The alien is overwritten at points of conflict and liminality, and the key to signification is continually withheld, embodied by that 'lewd interpreter' Portia (*M of V* 3.4.80), both in the casket and the court scenes. The dominant authority may speak in the language of the alien in order to validate itself, but it precludes by its very constitution a reverse linguistic movement. The injustice of this system is seen in its arbitrariness. Portia is the only figure in the state who can deconstruct the bond; she has no legal authority, and her disguise demonstrates that truth and law are proved by means of falsity.

Yet although Shylock's translations come to demonstrate the increasing erosion of the rigidities of sign and referent — the subject's illusory control over the interpretation and manipulation of signifying systems — they emphasize the importance of that capacity to read and monopolize a text and its messages. Such messages may provide alternatively mutable and stable meanings and tissues of

►8 Karl Marx, quoted in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984), xxxii.

connectivity in self-definition. *Hamlet* explores the tentative restoration of a text of identity to an anterior stability and legibility, in opposition to its fracture and mutation; it shows a character's attempt to translate a translation back into its original language.

Hamlet begins with a scene of fragmentary dialogue, indistinction and liminality. The night guards attend the apparition of two shadows which project from one initial fissure, the death of old Hamlet: the latter's ghost, and the spectre of possible invasion by the forces of Fortinbras. In an undertaking that prefigures Hamlet's, Fortinbras seeks the recovery or reassertion of an original text, the lands his father conceded to old Hamlet, whose death Fortinbras has assumed effects the cancellation of the agreement or translation (*Hamlet* 1.1.82-110). Yet in his first appearance, Hamlet occupies a liminal position within the wound of his father's death. In response to his mother's question regarding his unnaturally long period of mourning, his inability to accept the death as a natural process — 'Why seems it so particular with thee?' (*Hamlet* 1.2.75) — Hamlet provides an anatomy of grief:

> Seems, madam? Nay it is. I know not 'seems'.
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> [···] Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These, indeed, seem;
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> But I have that within which passes show —
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe.
>
> (*Hamlet* 1.2.76-86)

The death of Hamlet's father constitutes a wound, the breaking of the previously seamless correspondence of signifier and signified, the original flesh. It is the original essence of connectivity in self-definition, 'that within which passes show', to which Hamlet clings. The clothes of mourning, the display of the wound, may not be removed, because such a motion indicates assent to a scar's formation, which both seals over the trauma and renders the original permanently invisible and inaccessible. Although the untorn flesh is irrecoverable, Hamlet must resist accepting the overwriting of that which it had defined, since to do so signals that loss as final. He must refuse to reprise his previous familial and courtly roles which are now modified, refuse to become again in Claudius' request, 'Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son' (*Hamlet* 1.2.117). Yet just as the garments of mourning defer an incomplete meaning of grief back to its source, to 'that within' — which remains only partially accessible and representable — the increasing persistence of Hamlet's stasis, in his wearing of the unreliable signifiers, effects the corruption through continual mediation or misrepresentation

of that internal essence. So Hamlet seeks a twin sense of arrest, to maintain the inviolable openness of the wound, and in resisting the forces effecting its granulation or overwriting, in refusing to enter the discourse of the current system, not to dissipate any of the wound's emotional intensity.

Hamlet's oppositional liminality becomes self-dividing when he learns the fact of his father's murder. In their exchange, the ghost of old Hamlet instructs his son to 'Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder' (*Hamlet* 1.5.25), who laments again the condition of dislocation known to be deliberately inflicted: 'The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right' (*Hamlet* 1.5.196-7). Like mourning garments, the current discursive system is that of incomplete representation, the fracture of the correspondence of signifier and signified. Hamlet must restore his father's ghost from the liminality of purgatory, to heaven, the which action corrects the fissure. Yet such an action is an equivocal restoration, as that which asserts the original text, revenge, is also the process which renders the original permanently inaccessible. In the necessity of warping the translation, Hamlet's action is one of substitutive agonism, of what Jonathan Dollimore described as 'purposefully re-engaging with society — albeit at the cost of brutalisation'; but the difficulty of the substitution required is that Hamlet must overwrite a presence of absence with an absence of presence, forsake contact with the ghost for the destruction of Claudius, complete by a twin action of not completing.[9] Subjected to the pull of opposing lateral forces, Hamlet strives to consolidate his position between the poles, to preserve medial permanence. He devises discursions that attempt to render vertical the linear progression of time that makes the incursion of vengeance inevitable.

►9 Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 36.

Hamlet seeks the confirmation of the reliability of the ghost's text — 'I'll have grounds / More relative than this' (*Hamlet* 2.2.605-6) — through the use of the play, and by exchanging the role of mourning for the mask of madness (*Hamlet* 1.5.176-88). Essence is tentatively drawn out by means of unreliable texts, imperfectly corresponding signifiers and signifieds or 'trappings' (*Hamlet* 1.2.86). Yet the confirmation of the ghost's accusation in Claudius' reaction to the play (*Hamlet* 3.2.271) is a truth revealed by an agent analogous to that of the unreliable signifier of the ghost. Hamlet's devices mark a deferral: meaning here is either doubly known or doubly unknown, and as such Hamlet's madness and use of the play are merely exercises in form. The figurative accesses the literal, yet the revelation is attended by residue, the postponement of engagement, for which Hamlet berates himself just before deciding upon the device of the play: 'This is most brave, / That I [···] / Prompted to revenge [···] / Must like a whore unpack my heart with words' (*Hamlet* 2.2.584-7). The negation of unreliable signifiers accompanies its affirmation, a narrative plane that recedes as it proceeds, and it is this state of self-cancellation that Hamlet externalizes in Act 3 Scene 1:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:

> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
> And by opposing end them
>
> (*Hamlet* 3.1.56-60)

The certainty of such mortal 'slings and arrows' contrasts with 'The undiscover'd country' (*Hamlet* 3.1.79) of a death achieved by suicide. Yet the two opposing currents create the same impasse. Suicide is an uncertain text, but the attempted murder of Claudius, a certain text, would in all probability cause Hamlet's death, the uncertain text of a death either stained by sin or ennobled by vindication. To narrate the self in the action of suicide, and to effect or narrate the murder of Claudius, have the same resultant meaning; not to be directed or narrated by the ghost by means of suicide, and to be narrated by its instruction to kill Claudius are in turn equivalent in realizing Hamlet's death. Action and reaction are self-identical, and this echoing aporia makes reading problematic for Hamlet. Expression of the texts simply defers in a circular motion to a central absence from which the speaker is exiled, the centre of the vortex which projects out signifiers forbidding access to that originary location, the keys to both the meanings of signification and the ability to narrate. Hamlet's position is similar to that other knowing hero reaching the confluential truth that narrative agonism means only the passive process of being narrated, who admits, 'I am in blood / Stepp'd so far, that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er.' [10]

Hamlet's soliloquy here is an attempt to make the tools of this discursive system visible, 'to / hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature' (*Hamlet* 3.2.22-3). Yet the system constitutes the mirror, or a series of mirrors established at oblique angles to others. As he considers himself, Hamlet's image fragments; at any one time, or in any one direction, he can see only a fraction of his totality. The multiplicity of form and fragmentation, and the inability to hold on to an absolute, self-identical image or meaning, leads Hamlet to attempt its seizure by means of destruction. Yet the other mirrors persist, and the illusion of narrating is merely the confirmation of stimulation by being narrated. The necessity of destroying Claudius currently defines Hamlet's identity, but performing the action will ensure Hamlet's destruction, since Claudius' death and his own are equivalent. Since the shattering of one mirror — Claudius as Hamlet's current means of self-identification — effaces a multiplicity of reflections, the action implies that the deaths of Claudius and Hamlet will be inseparable from many more.

However, the illusion of active narrating which confirms the tyranny of being narrated is a necessary misreading, and it is a fissure of misrecognition that occurs when Hamlet takes a decisive action of textual modification. In the tentative consolidation of the current system — Claudius' translation — Claudius

►10 *Macbeth* 3.4.135-7.

attempts to direct Hamlet to his death by means of a letter, in dispatching him to England (*Hamlet* 4;3, 40-6). In discovering onboard ship the document ordering his execution, and forging another so that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are killed in his stead (*Hamlet* 5:2.12-56), Hamlet actively comprehends and rewrites a textual meaning. Yet he stands at the concourse of two narrative strands, one of direction by his father and one of narration by Claudius. By negating the latter he affirms the former, and so narration enforces the condition of being narrated, Hamlet's completion of one story whose resolution contains his death. In this way, in contrast to the static self-division of the play's first half, a sense of meaningful agonism is engendered only by a voluntary misreading. Like Fortinbras' soldiers compelled to risk death 'Even for an egg-shell' (*Hamlet* 4.4.53), a sense of active narrating is achieved only by abandoning resistance, by actively consenting to the terms of the condition of being narrated. As Hamlet states, 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will' (*Hamlet* 5.2.10-11). Hamlet's consent thus marks a shift from attempting to discover the motion of his narrative strands, to a condition which may be experienced and represented only in motion. He fights with the pirates, returns to Elsinore, scuffles with Laertes in Ophelia's grave, and agrees to the resolvent duel.[11] For Hamlet, physical action is now omnipotent:

> We defy augury. There is special
> providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not
> to come: if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not
> now, yet it will come. The readiness is all.
>
> (*Hamlet* 5.2.218-21)

Ceding to the motion of being narrated thus stimulates not stasis but energy, the urge to perform one's current part intensely. As actor in his father's narrative strand, Hamlet may not direct its action, but he must fulfil those actions he is required to perform: he must express the form and leave that form to achieve its own content. In this way, like the narrative Hamlet's father sets in motion, Claudius' desire to narrate and effect Hamlet's death is appropriately unpredictable. Resolution through play or narrative is a means of establishing boundaries, and these may not be foreseen definitively. Yet this resolution relies upon the fulfilment of formal roles for its operation: Hamlet and Laertes must play their parts within the drama, they must narrate while being narrated, but the story and its dénouement remain arbitrary. It is significant that the fulfilment of the original condition of being narrated, that of murdering Claudius, is achieved by the condition of Hamlet's narration by Claudius, a location of double subjection. In acknowledgement of this, Hamlet in his dying words demands three times that his story be told, that he be narrated continually (*Hamlet* 5.2.346-7, 356-7, 364-5). The moment Hamlet begins actively to narrate, in electing Fortinbras as his

►11 The power of narration can be seen in Ophelia's fate, as she cannot function when her control by brother, father and lover is withdrawn.

heir, he dies. Hamlet has fulfilled his passive part, finished speaking his playwright father's words, and 'the rest is silence' (*Hamlet* 5.2.365), as his active narration is not scripted. The original closure that Hamlet had to effect, and the boundaries he had to re-establish, have been asserted but not recovered, and indeed their assertion only creates the dislocation of the state's occupation or overwriting by a foreign power. In an ironic symmetry, the recovery of the original text that Fortinbras initially sought, the reclamation of his father's lands, has been achieved indirectly. Fortinbras has been narrated into such a position.

Like Shylock, Hamlet's opposition is eroded, and he is transported by the dominant narrative stream. Yet for Hamlet, the construction of an agonistic text is achieved only in that experience of the flow of being narrated. Since such a current is never static, the character experiences the liberating or horrifying induction along its chains of signification; but *Richard III* examines a tentative oppositional stance, that of active self-division. Richard Gloucester attempts to break with the immediate, to seal off an internal self from passive narration, not in attempting to read the signs of his condition, but in the projection of unreliable texts for others to read, the attempted narration of others.

Richard Gloucester's opening speech reprises his soliloquy following his murder of King Henry in *3Henry VI*, in which he announces 'I am myself alone', descanting on the disjunction between his form and the present condition.[12] In the tranquillity of Edward's provisional peace, Richard outlines his 'deformity' (*Richard III* 1.1.27), how he is 'not shaped for sportive tricks / Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass', but is

> curtailed of this fair proportion,
> Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
> Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world scarce half made up
> (*Richard III* 1.1.14-21)

Richard's aberrant status is marked out by his transparency, the instant readability of his form. External appearance corresponds perfectly with an imperfect or 'subtle, false and treacherous' interior (*Richard III* 1.1.37). Signifier directly reflects signified, so the success of Richard's intentions depends upon a twin movement. The first consists of rendering an 'internal' essence of selfhood opaque — 'Dive, thoughts, down to my soul' (*Richard III* 1.1.41) — and the second of projecting specious narrative threads — 'lies steeled with weighty arguments' — (*Richard III* 1.1.148), for the manipulation of others; this mastery of improvisation and language enhances the unreadability of the 'internal' self. Richard's progression to the throne is engendered by his rivals' submission to his narratives, in which after the Duke of Clarence, one by one 'I'll dispatch the rest, / Counting myself but bad till I be best';[13] Richard describes this practice in Act 1

►12 *3Henry VI* 5.6.83.

►13 *3Henry VI* 5.6.90-1.

Scene 3:

> The secret mischiefs that I set abroach
> I lay unto the grievous charge of others.
> [···] And thus I clothe my naked villainy
> With odd old ends stol'n forth of Holy Writ,
> And seem a saint when most I play the devil.
>
> (*Richard III* 1.3.325-38)

Attributing meanings to different characters, creating various roles, recycling, misquotations and exploiting textual ambiguities are methods instrumental to narration and translation, deftly manipulating texts in a system that depends for its power and sustainability upon that which is immediately visible and communicable, in the symbols of the robes of state and the crown. Thus the paranoia attending textual tyranny is vulnerable to exploitation, something conveyed by Richard's 'prophecy, which says that "G" / Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be' (*Richard III* 1.1.39-40). A concise illustration of textual improvisation is Richard's exchange with Queen Margaret: approaching the climax of a lyrical vilification of himself, Richard interrupts, substituting for its semic telos — 'the period to [the] curse' (*Richard III* 1.3.238) — for his own name that of the speaker:

> Margaret: Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb!
> Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins,
> Thou rag of honour, thou detested —
> Richard: Margaret!
>
> (*Richard III* 1.3.231-4)

Margaret thus 'breathe [s] [her] curse against [her] self' (*Richard III* 1.3.240), in the subtle alteration of a text. Power and meaning depend upon the ability to mutate others' discourses, to enclose them within specific narratives while the self eludes an identical entrapment. The two murderers who receive the warrant for Clarence's 'dispatch' are both literal and textual 'executioners' (*Richard III* 1.3.339, 346). The self-created roles for the self's inhabitancy which potentiate the seduction of others into different narratives are performed comprehensively but provisionally. The 'internal' self is withheld, enduring in a state of dormancy until the different narratives have effected the destruction of the current system, until the totalizing narrative of elimination has assumed its complete form, the open space that paradoxically achieves Richard's centrality, and in which the latent self may be reborn:

> if I fail not in my deep intent,

> Clarence hath not another day to live:
> Which done, God take King Edward to his mercy,
> And leave the world for me to bustle in.
> (*Richard III* 1.1.149-52)

Yet the self may not, as Richard believes, be born naked, untouched by external narrative. In his progress to the throne, Richard has used an expansive practice of narration which effaces parts of the initial system, which creates fissures in an extant text. But in his ascension to the point of centrality — kingship — that plenitude of absence must be refilled, re-inscribed with a network of relations that consolidate his position, in the accumulation and manipulation of texts both centripetal and centrifugal, acts of narration that both sustain himself and repel the threats posed by others.

The necessity is addressed by Richard following his coronation, when he asks of Buckingham, 'But shall we wear these glories for a day. / Or shall they last, and we rejoice in them?' (*Richard III* 4.2.5-6). The consolidation of his position, the increasing layering of the robes of state, is accompanied by the sedimentation of texts, something seen when, considering the necessity of marriage with Elizabeth of York, Richard reflects, 'Uncertain way of gain! But I am in / So far in blood that sin will pluck on sin' (*Richard III* 4.2.63-4). In the increasing need for the narration of others in order to support the self, a double movement occurs: Richard sends out a sphere of influence, which expands until it completes its directive, the annulment of opposition or the acquisition of something the self requires; in its contraction, the sphere promotes the self, conferring greater power upon it; but this process also leaves the self more exposed — 'plucked' bare — and therefore more unknowable to the self, in the misrecognition of greater power as greater security, and the dissemination of the self's influence in different and interlinked narratives. The self's ability to read and manipulate these directing narrative spheres is impaired, as is its ability to read and assess a sense of self now fragmented and exposed. A corrupt use of language becomes tyrannous. The self has no existence outside of these discourses, the markers of power and disempowerment. Richard becomes a story of himself, which he may not read or direct, and he loses the ability to control the stories he has created, in his narration of others; he is thus vulnerable to their direction. The stories Richard has created retract and return to seek their origin, the absence that is the centre of his self, which may not repel them.

Richmond's imminent return to England, a competing discourse of power, elicits Richard's desire to cling to the condition of his own story either as narrator or narrated protagonist: he demands,

> Is the chair empty? Is the sword unsway'd?
> Is the King dead? The empire unpossess'd?

What heir of York is there alive but we?
And who is England's king but great York's heir?
(*Richard III* 4.4.469-72)

Richard grasps the insubstantial, asserts form as validation. Yet the temporality of form ensures that it is the fate of a narrative to be completed, consumed and replaced. Like those whom Richard 'dispatch [ed]' (*Richard III* 1.3.341), into his narratives to their deaths, the conclusion of the story of Richard as king, his disinheritance as narrator and protagonist, and the invisibility of his own story and self, are announced at the battle of Bosworth. The appearance of Richard's past characters, those who ceded to his spheres of narration, reappear as circling ghosts in a dream on the eve of battle. Richard's attempt to read his self, his own story and the stories he has fashioned is an attempted reassertion of narrative autonomy, which, as Jonathan Dollimore puts it, 'collapses into paradoxical self-division'; but its fractures also expose the initial and subsequent obscurations of the 'real' internal self that Richard performed:[14]

What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
Richard loves Richard, that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am!
Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why
Lest I revenge? What, myself upon myself?
[…] Fool, do not flatter.
My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.
(*Richard III* 5.5.183-96)

The self is constituted now only by the narratives it has fashioned, dispersed across a multiplicity of discourses which ensure the position of the 'internal' self within a narrative unreadable to the self, if it exists at all. The king's translation of his original situation has rendered both the original 'self' and the translation illegible. Richard collapses beneath the mask's fixity: only Richmond, not he, may remove it. The attempt to discover a disjuncture between surface and essence, mask and face, and clothes and body, deteriorates into the confirmation of the tyranny, the ravelling and tissues of infinite but temporal form. Richard's self-narration into kingship has effected only the suffocation of being narrated, of unreadability, which is figured in Richmond's use of counterfeits, and demonstrated in a moment of ironic symmetry, in Richard's reaction to the notice of treachery pinned to the Duke of Norfolk's tent, where he dismisses a reliable signifier as unreliable, 'A thing devised by the enemy' (*Richard III* 5.3.307).[15] Unable to interpret correctly the signs of a new narrative, or to prevent its

►14 Dollimore, p. 177.

►15 The notice reads, '*Jockey of Norfolk, be not so bold: / For Dickon thy master is bought and sold*' (*Richard III* 5.3.305-6).

encroachment, Richard announces in desperation:

> I have set my life upon a cast,
> And I will stand the hazard of the die.
> I think there be six Richmonds in the field:
> Five have I slain today, instead of him.
>
> (*Richard III* 5.4.10-13)

The counterfeits offer a glimpse into the superstructure of the textual system. Power in opposing the dominant system belongs to whoever can manipulate others into their narrative, which signals their condemnation to death. Yet Henry VII's story, like the spheres of Richard's narratives, expands to absorb Richard's current position; and in its contraction, Henry's acquisition of the throne, Henry becomes in turn the subject of the story of kingship. This kind of self-narration, as Richard's story has demonstrated, is as unforgiving as it is mutable.

Richard's final position emphasizes the inevitable erosion and collapse of the attempted narrations, self-narrations and translations that Shylock and Hamlet perform in the networks of family, state, religion and commerce. Shylock's attempt to create an oppositional and self-validating translation, Hamlet's quest to restore an original text and Richard's self-translation — which effaces his original position in a structure — all culminate in an ultimate dispossession and self-abnegation. The discursive structure in which characters operate can be glimpsed metonymically in Shylock's bond, the deed of Hamlet's execution, and the Duke of Norfolk's paper and Richard's narrative facility. To narrate is merely further to inscribe the condition of being narrated, in and by a system that is both restricting and protean in its openness, its ability to overwrite at will. There is no escape from signification, yet characters are continually unable to read the signs of their own stories, or to predict how that narrative will eventuate. No clearing exists where characters may assume a position of narrative mastery, without entanglement in becoming a tale of themselves, and attempts to know and establish identity in such a system are analogous to formulating a translation when the identity and syntax of the original language, the keys to signification, are unknown.

Works Cited

Bürger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984).

Dollimore, Jonathan, *Radical Tragedy* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989).

Greenblatt, Stephen, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

Montrose, Louis, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Shakespeare, William, *The Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (London: Arden, 1998).

(Received September 27, 2011 / Accepted November 15, 2011)