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Narrative Boundaries in Shakespeare's Plays

I

Boundaries exclude and enclose. They indicate closure (what had been possible on one side is no longer so on the other, what had been possible before will no longer be so after), but they also provide the opportunity to cross. One may divide any notional area, any semiotic domain, along the edges of conceptual differences. The possibilities, seemingly endless, mark out innumerable ends. (Imagine a chess board. The rules constitute boundaries that, insofar as it is a question of chess, are necessary. The knight does not corkscrew itself into the bishop's diagonal move. The same game-space sub-divides, according to different rules, into a number of sharply defined areas. Now consider the ghostly demarcations of other games that also inhabit the game-space: games that could be played, and can be imagined. Checkers is there, of course, but so are other games, including private fantasies of children, forgotten variants of chess, and games as yet unplayed. Consider it forcefully enough, then even the Royal Game of Ur might begin to emerge from the pattern of squares.) Since notional areas crowd in upon each other, a principle of parsimony seems called for: *entia rationis*, such as boundaries, should be methodically shaved. Keep a sharp razor on the desk.

A parsimonious map of boundaries might stake its initial claims upon commonsense or intuition (no boundaries unless most readers can see them or agree to them once pointed out); it might trace only contours that could be seen to exist already according to some other designation. Thomas Pavel's *Move-grammar for English Renaissance drama* traces salient boundaries, but it does so only by re-drawing what other models of the same literary texts would also admit: sequences of events, or plots, and characters, or narrative agents, who decide, act, or make moves (1985). When the definition of what is being studied has been changed, Wallace Martin writes, "we change what we see; and when different definitions are used to chart the same territory, the results will differ" (15). Thus Pavel's *Move-grammar* re-draws a

traditional chart of dramatic plot (a sequence of characters' decisions, actions and their consequences, say) into a more abstract configuration, invoking prior definitions from Game Theory, of *Problem*, *Move*, and *Solution*, but it does so within the scope of a linguistic model that promotes a distinction between deep structures and surface manifestation: the *Move*-grammar will "generate *narrative* structures" which are "independent of their linguistic manifestation" (1985, 132). It does not follow that Pavel, because the same territory has been traced before and may be studied through other maps, is *only* refining what has already been known. The basic definitions with which he begins, from linguistics, Game Theory and the structuralist tradition, change what we see, in Martin's words, and make the familiar territory of English Renaissance drama both strange and new.¹

A literary text constitutes the nexus of many boundaries. Borders, both interior and exterior, divide it along perceptible lines of difference. In the geo-physical metaphor of boundaries, difference will equal distance or, to put the proposition inversely as Pavel does, fictional "distance appears to boil down to difference" (1986, 89). Whether "difference must be kept to a minimum" in order to make distance manageable is another question: Pavel seems to make the "principle of minimal departure" a constraint upon the creation of fictional worlds (1986, 87); it could also be taken, embodying methodological parsimony, as a constraint upon critical analysis and description.² A literary text's boundaries will have been seen, clearly or unclearly, prior to an explicit mapping. The most highly analytic semiotic tools, for example, will incise differences that even untrained readers, already familiar with the text's language, can perceive.

1 The problem of boundaries, so important in structuralism and narratology, also plays a central role in poststructuralism. It reveals, in a peculiarly fundamental manner, the instability of conceptual structures. See especially, Jacques Derrida (1980). The "law of genre" is, succinctly, its decay, its degenerescence. Derrida offers for consideration this hypothesis: "a text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one or several, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging" (65). This essay will not argue that the boundaries that divide embedded narratives from their encompassing dramatic context decay, collapse or, in any respect, degenerate. Nonetheless, it would be foolish to deny that the presence of self-enclosed narrative worlds, having their respective times, spaces and narrative agents, *within* a distinct dramatic action could have other than destabilizing effects. One might accept the poststructuralist notion of "trembling" without dashing onwards to embrace collapse and "degenerescence."

2 The "principle of Minimal Departure," which Pavel invokes, was first formulated in Marie-Laure Ryan's 1980 essay. Whether this is a verifiable, empirical constraint upon either creation or reading would not seem to have been determined. Relatively little involved in the process of reading has been, it seems, empirically verified (See Miall).

In Shakespeare's plays there is a perceptible difference between the give-and-take of characters, on the one hand, and the voices of single characters, whether in soliloquy or not. This difference may be marked as a rhetorical border between dialogue and monologue or, as it was often in the eighteenth-century, between drama and declamation. Dr. Johnson, considering Shakespeare's use of declamation, thought that it, or narration (Johnson's preferred term), was always Shakespeare's weakest suit, an occasion to intrude an alien element into drama that, disproportionate to compositing supplanting action, necessarily breaks up drama's forward-flow (5117). It may also be marked as the difference between drama and narrative or that, following Aristotle, between telling a story in the voices of its characters or in that of a narrator. Once this degree of remapping has been undertaken, then it will also be possible to note that, since the characters in a dramatic narrative are seldom the same as those in the encompassing dramatic action itself, the embedded narratives contain several interior boundaries. For example, characters within an embedded narrative, being different both from the characters within the drama and from the voice that narrates their actions, evoke separate spheres of action and even, if these spheres are sufficiently different from those in the encompassing drama, wholly distinct semiotic domains.

Pavel argues that dramatic plots split into various narrative domains each governed by specific sets of heterogeneous propositions. He calls these "maxims" (although their conceptual sway over their respective domains makes them function rather more like pseudo-axioms), indicating ontological, epistemological, axiological or proairetic ("action-governing") sub-classes. Narrative domains display consistency and coherence according to the propositions that rule them. Some literary works, such as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, are said to be "partitioned" to the extent that their domains contain dissimilar sets of propositions; others, dialogic or "works fighting against themselves, may make more radical use of partitions" (1985, 45-46). One purpose of this paper is to argue that the problem of semiotic partitioning extends beyond the presence of disparate narrative domains within drama to the interior structure of the embedded narratives. These are never co-temporal with the entire course of the drama (Pavel's taxonomy treats only dramatic co-temporalities) and are often exceedingly brief.

Once the boundaries of a Renaissance drama have been remapped to reveal the presence of narratives (neither solely narrative origins, a problem in sources, nor the overall narrative structure or grammar), then it becomes possible to ask questions previously occluded. Do the boundaries of an embedded narrative arise wholly upon a shift in voice? the presence of precise deictics? or must the analyst have recourse to the existence of agential domains within the narrative (making, that is, exterior boundaries

partly a function of interior ones)? One should also begin to ask questions concerning the constitutive narrative conventions that function within the embedded narrative. Above all, one should ask about the consequences of having self-contained narratives within a dramatic action.

Narratives need not be extensive to build fictional worlds. Minimal indices, a few deictics, a descriptive phrase or two, a barely adumbrated agential domain, will suffice to create a narrative that can be experienced as a world, or as world-like. (Anyone who has read Shakespeare's sonnets may recall the self-enclosed worlds, as textually succinct as a quatrain, that emerge. In sonnet 65, for example, Honey Breath, a personification of an aspect of summer generated by the rhetorical process of synecdoche, hopelessly endures time's decaying siege, helpless to prevent the inevitable effects of his bizarrely sequential battering ram.) One may extend Lubomir Doležel's account of the intransitive relation between fictional worlds and the actual world to include interior cross-world traffic:

The access [to a possible world] requires crossing of world boundaries, transit from the realm of actual existents into the realm of fictional possibles. Under this condition, physical access is impossible. Fictional worlds are accessible from the actual world only through *semiotic channels* by means of information processing. (1988, 484-85)

An analogous situation occurs between dramatic characters and the worlds produced for their ears, and indirectly for an audience's. It may be said, of course, that such analogous situations also occur in most long narratives, epics as well as novels, since characters typically tell stories to other characters. Indeed, the primary structural principle of epic, the beginning *in medias res*, strictly demands the secondary convention of exposition, the analeptic telling of what had occurred prior to the action's abrupt opening. There are three reasons for calling attention to the embedded narratives in Renaissance drama: 1) dramatic action seems peculiarly vulnerable to interruption since, even if partitioned in Pavel's sense, it follows a strong, end-oriented line of action (Baxtin), it is worth noting, dismisses drama as "alien to genuine polyphony" since, in his view, it can permit only one, not multiple, worlds [34]); 2) in drama the narratees stand visibly about the narrator, physical surrogates for the audience's attention, and part of the story may be written upon their faces (the recognition of which greatly widens the scope of semiotic investigation in drama); 3) the scholarly tradition in the study of English Renaissance drama, especially in dealing with Shakespeare, has been to elevate drama, as a hierarchically superior and exclusive mode of representation, to the status of an ideology. The final point suggests an ideological fixation, unmindful of cultural history and indifferent to textual evidence, that deserves correction.

It should seem strange that comparatively little attention has been paid to the presence of narrative in Shakespeare's plays. Narrative was the privileged literary mode in the Renaissance, dominating both theoretical discussions and Humanistic education, and the focus of many disputes. One should expect narrative to be in the background of all Renaissance literary production (as, indeed, both as source and structure, it is) and even to show up where one might least expect it.³ Narrative had been, of course, an important element in drama since the Classical period. The *nuntius* (a name that Shakespeare actually gives, in a stage direction, to Aemilius in *Titus Andronicus* [4.4.61 s.d.]) constitutes an indispensable convention in a drama that does not allow representations of violence on stage. Messengers are important in Senecan tragedy, the dramatic model for so many Elizabethan plays, and in the heroic drama of seventeenth century, in French and Spanish as well as English practice. Clearly, the convention of a narrator, telling of events that have taken place outside the action of the drama or which have been too violent for theatrical representation, had a longstanding

3 Shakespeare's two narrative poems have been studied many times from a variety of angles, though not from that of actual narrative conventions. The narrative sources of the plays have also been studied repeatedly. How Shakespeare transforms Thomas Lodge's *Rosalinde: Euphues Golden Legacie* (1590) into a very different (sprightlier? more humane? richer? more realized?) work, *As You Like It*, is a problem with which every student of Shakespeare should try to have thoughts about. It is not, however, the same as analyzing the narrative elements in the plays themselves. Whatever their conceptual focus, studies of narrative have generally ignored the narratives embedded in the plays. For example, Louis Zocca's *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry* has nothing to say about the narrative elements in Shakespeare's plays nor in those of any other Elizabethan dramatist. Eleanor Prosser comments several times, in passing, upon elements of story in *Hamlet* in her "*Hamlet*" and *Revenge* but does not analyze the constitutive narrative dimensions of this story-telling. Joan Rees's *Shakespeare and the Story* studies the narrative forms of the dramatic action; that is, how structural aspects of the narrative sources survive into their dramatic transformations. In his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt has a great deal to say concerning the Renaissance understanding of narrative purposes, the intellectual conditions that make narrative possible, and its uses in Shakespeare, particularly in *Othello*, as a tool of psychological and conceptual construction. None of these studies actually examines the embedded narratives, *qua* narrative, in terms of specific conventions and strategies. Patricia Parker comes closest to an explicitly narrative analysis of narrative in Shakespeare's plays, once again focussing upon *Othello*, in her excellent discussion of narrative as a manifestation of rhetorical principles and as an inevitable (though perhaps subversive) supplement to dramatic action. See "Shakespeare and Rhetoric: 'Dilation' and 'Delation' in *Othello*," Parker gathers together a number of essays, including "Shakespeare and Rhetoric," dealing with Renaissance attitudes towards rhetoric, particularly in Shakespeare's plays, in her *Literary Fat Ladies*. In "Shakespearean Narrative: *The Rape of Lucrece* Reconsidered," I discuss the congruence of conventions between the narrative poem and the embedded narratives of the plays.

currency throughout the Renaissance. In Elizabethan drama the *nuntius* occasionally undergoes a transformation into a chorus or (like the narrative sonnets, spoken before the beginning of the first and second acts, in *Romeo and Juliet* or the personification of Time in *The Winter's Tale* or Gower in *Pericles*) a choral figure. The Chorus in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, for example, seems closer to the convention of the *nuntius* in most of its functions than to the collective moralizing of the Classical chorus. However, the narrative dimension in much Renaissance drama, and particularly in Shakespeare, is strikingly complex and far exceeds the traditional narrative conventions of drama. Shakespeare creates narratives in many guises and gives them many roles. He pervasively displays a sophisticated and playful awareness of narrative potentialities.

Narrative recurs throughout Shakespeare's plays. Characters stop in the midst of the action to tell one another stories, and they do so with masterful command of narrative technique. Not only do the characters have stories to tell, but there are always other characters who are willing to listen. They are transformed into attentive narratees who may believe, or disbelieve, but who never refuse to hear. Embedded discontinuously within the dramatic action, narrative explodes from within the plays. A boundary, separating the dramatic action from the abruptly-present narrative world, emerges where it had not previously existed, almost, one might say, before the eyes. It is a boundary that may be crossed from the world of the dramatic action, but not conversely. However, the centripetal power of the narrative often casts so strong a spell that the characters in the containing world of the dramatic action find themselves drawn across its boundaries, as if compelled into a magic circle. Figures of rapt attention, of patient but devouring ears, are everywhere.⁴

Although the embedded narratives of the plays do have, and indeed must have, dramatic functions (all of which are relatively easy to grasp), they can be analyzed as narratives. It is possible to separate them from the dramatic action within which they are embedded even if the narrative appears in, and functions purposively within, a drama. What can be said concerning Shakespeare's manner of telling stories, and the manner that he gives to the narrative-men (Todorov), so clearly diverse, who tell their stories in his plays?

4 Greenblatt refers to the narrative capacity that Shakespeare's characters display as "improvisation" which he defines as an ability to take available materials, including another person's self-image, life story, and/or ideology, and transform them into a self-serving narrative. The problem of the actual conventions required, or even available, to do this is left open. There is a vast difference between making claims for the general purposes of narrative, its culturally encoded objectives, or even its normal operative modes, and identifying its constitutive conventions for analysis.

Narratives create worlds, focalize the experience of that world, play upon their own potential, and call attention to their own acts (as narrative and as narration): in doing so, merely in being narrative, they interrupt dramatic action. Patricia Parker, reformulating a commonplace of dramatic theory, observes how the "contracted time and place," which is the conventional mode of drama, prompts a narrative enlargement of "circumstances" (the particularizing details that cling to a story-matrix) since the need for amplification inheres in dramatic construction. "Part of the sheer space given to narrative 'unfolding' or report," she writes, "results from the fact that in this contracted space, so much less can be directly seen on stage and must therefore be represented in words" ("Shakespeare and Rhetoric" 66, 65). The greater amplitude of narrative results from its capacity to represent, as Aristotle observes, simultaneous actions (1459b), and from its inherent plasticity that allows the co-presence, in however abundant terms, of other discursive modes such as argument, exposition and, above all, description. Description, as Genette argues, marks one of the interior frontiers of narrative: a difference that indicates a shift from one aspect of narrative to another (from events to uneventful details), but nonetheless aspects that can function co-presently (60-61). The Chorus in *Henry V*, in urging the audience to imagine, think or suppose a scene greater, and more adequate, than that which the "unworthy scaffold" of the stage permits, seems to have in mind narrative's greater amplitude in admitting the co-presence of a descriptive aspect.

Shakespeare, who alludes repeatedly to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* throughout his writing, understands the possibilities of telling different actions simultaneously, cross-cutting one narrative line by another, at least as well as did his Ovidian contemporaries, such as Spenser. The narrative potential to tell distinct stories that take place within the same time-frame is also (as Genette notes) a necessity to tell them successively: like Chinese boxes, or Russian dolls, narratives unfold in sequence to display their logical simultaneity. Even the Chorus in *Henry V*, that "choric envelope" (Hart 82), though chiefly focussing the aspect of descriptive amplitude, tells numerous successive narratives to reveal the simultaneous existence of many small stories, all acting together (though unfolding separately). At the beginning of Act II, for instance, the Chorus ranges from different places in England, each with its own story of excitement and patriotism, to France where the leaders "shake in fear" and pursue "pale policy" in order to divert the war-determined English, and finally back to England to narrate summarily the treasonous attempt against the king. Narrative supplements drama, but it also breaks into, and shifts attention away from, the dramatic action.

The worlds that narrative creates sharply underscore the relation of narrative to drama and the levels of discursive interplay that it makes

possible.⁵ Embedded within dramatic action, narrative interrupts that action, shifts all attention (the narratees within the drama as well as the audience itself) to another fictional world, with its distinct time-scheme, its own space, and its internal characters. In doing this, narrative obliquely calls attention to the narrower (if more vivid) possibilities of drama to create fictional worlds. The generic boundaries that separate drama and narrative, at least in the orthodox ideology of English studies, become perturbed, even uncertain. The narratives perplex the action and invest it with the consequences of plural worldhood: another action in a different time and space, other characters, each bringing his/her separate potential for narrativization, intrude upon the play's main action. The dramatic action is enhanced by narrative, but it is also lessened. As the Chorus in *Henry V* knows, narrative, in creating plural worlds, does something that drama cannot do. As the Chorus does not seem to know, narrative abrades drama's claims.

II

The Buddhists sometimes picture the universe as a cobweb strung with beads of dew, each drop reflecting all the others. In the novelist's world, not only does every thing imply every other thing and each event every other event, as Leda's egg hatched the history of Troy; but the egg itself, the dew-strung web, is an artistic whole — distinct, harmonious, and radiant — as the actual real world is not. (John Barth 19)

To say that a text creates a "world" is an ordinary, and yet profoundly strange, idea. It accords with the experience of common readers who often claim that they become lost in the world of the text or who reject certain forms of fiction (the short story, say) because their worlds, in being less fully developed, are either uninteresting or frustrating. Metaphors of exploration,

penetrating, dwelling within, inhabiting and becoming lost (absorbed, swallowed, overwhelmed) in the text, all describe the ordinary strategies of readerly immersion. "World" is also the term by which scholars express their perception of the text's self-containedness and coherence. The "world of" the *Faerie Queene*, or of *Hamlet*, indicates both the enclosedness and the range of the text's difference. On the other hand, when scholars refer to the "world of" an author, they normally mean either the extra-textual world in so far as it has led to, borne upon, or become encoded within the author's texts or else they mean the author's production, viewed synchronically, as a total display of specific conventions, mannerisms, and characteristic choices in motifs, *topoi* and themes. When Maynard Mack writes of "The World of *Hamlet*," he seems to have in mind something of all three possibilities: the self-containedness (and inherent difference) of the text itself, the way in which the actual world of Renaissance England has been textually encoded, and Shakespeare's characteristic way of writing.

"World" is evidently a term rich in applications, serving to identify and set apart any area of signification that can be thought independently. C.S. Lewis observes that it is a word which, etymologically, signifies either time or space (an important point if one takes "world" to indicate wholeness and textual set-apartness), and which unmistakably conveys great concreteness. Certain uses of "world," such as, in Lewis's example, Keats's "Daffodils / And the Green World They Live In" (or, one might add, Shakespeare's "fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world"), seem to possess an almost visceral emphasis (260).⁶ When one calls any notional area a "world," one always suggests that it has internal unity and a character that "sets it apart from other areas." Thus any region "whatever can be called a *World* if it is being regarded, within a given context, as constituting a (relatively) closed system" (260, 258). Other terms, such as "domain," "realm," or "field," each bearing spatial connotations, might serve, and sometimes do serve, as synonyms, but "world" has become the normal term by which to indicate the self-enclosedness and set-apartness of (in Lewis's phrase) a "notional area."

One may distinguish "possible worlds" from the actual one as conceptual entities access to which may be gained only through semiotic channels that arise in, and from, the actual world. Thus one might conceive a world, different only in a single salient detail (that Notre Dame de Paris is painted blue, for instance) from the world in which one lives. It would be a *possible* world. In a larger sense, the problems of discussing notional worldhood are inherent in the concept of signification. The interplay of concepts, whether the referents are taken to be actual or fictional, must tend to establish

5 This high degree of self-consciousness with regard to conventions should be considered as a mode of play. For a recent discussion of the play-element in Shakespeare, see Keir Elam, *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse*. The analysis of play and game elements in literature has become widespread in contemporary criticism and critical theory and a great deal of this discussion has an immediate relevance to the study of Shakespeare. For an annotated bibliography of works dealing with play and game concepts in literary analysis, see James A.G. Marino, "An Annotated Bibliography of Play and Literature." In *The Motives of Eloquence*, Richard A. Lanham makes the case that rhetoric is essentially reflexive, concerned always to stretch the conceptual gap between story and discourse, or, more generally, between accepted *topoi* and their rhetorical elaborations. The principle of *copia* necessarily promotes reflexivity. Lanham develops the argument further in "The Politics of *Lucretius*." Parker comments interestingly on *copia*, see especially, *Literary Fat Ladies* (8-31). Both Parker and Cave argue for the congruence of traditional rhetorical analysis and contemporary modes of narrative investigation. Felperin makes the same point, recurring in poststructuralist thinking, forcefully in *Beyond Deconstruction*.

6 Lewis's discussion of "world" provides an excellent overview of the word's etymological diversity. On Shakespeare's use of "golden world," see Livesay.

conceptual boundaries, as well as diplomatic corridors, many of which have not existed previously, that map distinct notional areas. (The spatial metaphors are extremely deep and quite reasonable: a conceptual area, or field, in which different concepts are brought into play together, even though those concepts must be introduced diachronically, responds well to spatial metaphors.) From within, as a dimension of experience (whether as reader, viewer or player), notional areas extend, stretch, seem filled or empty, collapse or suffer deformation: they take on casts, shapes and limitations all of their own. Experienced from within (like games) to the exclusion of all *extra-actuality*, they can be, in some sense at least, felt, even seen in the mind's-eye, as spatially independent.

How is *Hamlet* like a world? What features in the particular discourse of a text lead one to confer worldhood upon it? The second question masks several others. One may always ask how the world of a text resembles the actual world, inquiring after the semiotic indices that evoke, more or less recognizably, the extra-textual world. One may also ask about the differences that distance the text from an extra-textual world. In many cases these may seem to be all that may reasonably be inquired after. Literary realism may partially determine questions about worldhood (if it is not *the* world, then how can it be called *a* world?), though there is no necessity that this should be so. The distinctness and self-enclosedness (the sheer world-likeness) of literary texts are frequently overpowering, and always unmistakable.

Questions about worldhood move back and forth from the textual indices that evoke the actual world and those that evoke a self-enclosed, but often extravagantly non-actual world. Doreen Maitre identifies a class of texts characterized by the "oscillation between could-be-actual worlds and could-never-be-actual worlds" (79). Yet, while one can certainly think of texts that constitute "could-be-actual" worlds and even more, like fantasy, fairy tales and fables, that constitute "could-never-be-actual" worlds, most texts seem to be mixtures, containing some indices of the actual world, but insufficient to underscore an important correspondence. They may be described as oscillating between. Thus the *Faerie Queene*, a text that might seem massively to constitute a world that could never be actual, contains frequent references to parts of the actual world, including physical aspects of the setting, historical events and human individuals. It has consistently inspired a line of investigation, historical allegory, that seeks to correlate fictional characters, places and events with referents in the actual world. The

allegories do not fit the world exactly, as a hand grasping an object, but they do overlay it, flowing like a thin mist, across the spread of the world's things. Mack seems to have some such oscillation in mind: at once, distinctively set apart by its imagery, motifs, themes and conceptual preoccupations, *Hamlet* seems self-enclosed, a text (like no other) "pre-eminently in the interrogative mood" (Mack 33), but it also extends countless tentacles to the English Renaissance world, crossed by its own darkness and preoccupied by problems of certainty, explanation, verification and truth. If *Hamlet* is a world, then it is certainly a multiplex one: an infolded world containing plural world-hoods.⁸

Certain aspects of the literary text, words particularly used to point and to indicate, seem to build worlds. These might be called "world-creating predicates" (McCawley). They are the deictics, the indicators of time, space and voice, which together, but in often astoundingly minimal numbers, build the self-enclosure of worldhood. Furthermore, different grammatical moods contribute diversely to world-building. A world built out of, or largely dependent upon, questions, such as *Hamlet's*, will be unlike, perhaps in unpredictable ways, one in which no questions are asked. Yet, despite their foundation in complex textual processes, worlds seem also to be a function of the interiority of reading. Deictics are only the necessary, but never sufficient, conditions of the experience of worldhood. Literary texts, Kendall Walton argues, may be considered as bringing into existence games of make-believe in which the reader becomes a participant, at least insofar as he is there *as an observer*, having taken the text as a collection of props. The reader employs props, which in reading are textual indices (transformed into discrete images within the constructed fictional world), to enable the imagination in creating make-believe.⁹ Walton's argument claims that the

8 *Hamlet*, if it is granted its textual complexities, demands a semiotics that can analyze its plurally infolded possibilities, based less upon the assumption of actual-world referents (the normal assumption, it would seem, in reading fiction in the tradition of realism, but also, as the methods of historical allegory make plain, most other texts as well) than upon the possibilities of conceivable alternatives to the actual world. Hamlet, as Doležel writes, is, not being an actual man, "a possible individual inhabiting the fictional world of Shakespeare's play" (1988, 482). *Hamlet* demonstrates both the necessity, and the fruitfulness, of having a possible world semiotics of the kind that Doležel and Pavel have worked towards.

9 Kendall L. Walton develops his model of reading as playing a game of make-believe through several articles (esp. "Fearing Fictions," "How Remote are Fictional Worlds from the Real World?"). Walton develops the basis in general for his positions in "Pictures and Make-Believe." In *Mimesis*, he defines "props" as "generators of fictional truths, things which, by virtue of their nature or existence, make propositions fictional" (37). Like Maitre's, Walton's is a "weak" version of reading's interiority based upon analytic philosophy. A "strong" version might be founded upon phenomenology. However, Maitre

7 The point that time-sequences must be spatialized, but spatial dispositions temporalized, in order to be cognitively grasped has been recurrent in recent literary theory. It derives from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (see Gellie 472-74). Baxtin calls the interactive perception of space and time in literature a "chronotope."

semiotic features of the text, such as deictics and descriptive passages, are taken, in reading, as props for a more or less complex game of make-believe and, for the duration of this game, they are accepted as real. The duration of reading corresponds to the duration of play and, for however long it lasts, the make-believe, made possible by the text, is experienced as real. Pavel provides the following scholium to Walton's account:

Now when a group of children play with mud, they simultaneously touch globs of mud — in the real world — and offer one another tasty pies in the world of make-believe, which is real within the game. Running away from tree stumps in the real world becomes, for the same children, a flight from dangerous bears in the world of make-believe. (1986, 56)

Aspects of the text are transformed into the experience of space, time and action (direction, distance, size, volume, co-existence, duration, sequence, order, frequency, agency, personality, even selfhood), and ultimately, in their intricate totality, into the experience of a world bearing some degree of completeness and self-enclosure.

A fictional world raises several problems that a merely possible ("could-be-actual") variant of the actual world does not. In the first place, a fictional world may be bizarrely impossible.¹⁰ It may not be accessible, by

knows that the strong version does exist. She refers to Sartre's analysis of the imagination in *L'Être et le néant* and cites Edward S. Casey's *Imagining*. Pavel, though he acknowledges the relevance of phenomenology, largely pursues the weaker version of imagination found in Walton.

- 10 A major difference between Doležel and Pavel in the semiotics of possible/fictional worlds arises from their dissimilar attitudes towards the status of fiction that either undercuts its own authority or permits contradictions. Pavel exercises greater tolerance. Doležel identifies a class of fictional texts which he calls "self-voiding" (including *skaz* and self-disclosing, or metafictional, narratives) that abuse the felicity conditions of an illocutionary fictional speech act. Fictional worlds that are constructed through self-voiding narratives, in Doležel's view, "lack authenticity." They are merely "games with fictional existence" (1988, 493). The insistence upon authenticity has long been a hallmark of Doležel's semiotics. (See "Truth and Authenticity") It clearly privileges both realism and *Er-form* narrators and, conversely, makes it difficult for his possible world semiotics to deal adequately with recent European and American fiction (not to say much canonical fiction from periods, such as the Renaissance, that have valued fables, popular tales and yarns, as well as modes of reflexivity). Impossible worlds, bearing contradictions within their narrative structure, are no less inauthentic. In "Mimesis" Doležel cites O. Henry's story, "Roads of Destiny," as an example of a contradictory "world structure" (492) since it poses its readers the conundrum of incompatible endings. (One can only reflect gloomily on his probable reactions to such fictional texts as Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, Barth's *Lost in The Funhouse* or Sorrentino's *Mulligan Stew*.) On the other hand, Pavel observes that avant-garde texts, *nouveaux romans*, postmodern fiction, "all capture antithetically the difficulty of perceiving, of making sense out of the

normal lines of inference, from the actual world. In the second place, the minimal size of a fictional world is a problem. How much does the reader need to know in order to experience the text as a world? In the third place, one can ask how much coherence a fictional world requires. Such worlds are "harmonious," Barth writes, but then one begins to ask how many notes make up a harmony. (The normal contemporary, or at least postmodern, intuition about texts, and hence fictional worlds, would appear to be that they are incomplete, discontinuous, and fragmentary.) Furthermore, texts often postulate worlds that are, by actual-world criteria at least, non-coherent. A reader must somehow "be" within them and accept their often heterogeneous conventions as axioms or, as Pavel prefers, as "maxims":

The specific point where the present proposal differs from other suggestions already present in the field is that according to his proposal, a plot is split into *more than one* narrative domain, and is accordingly divided into several distinct sets of propositions or maxims. The nature of these propositions is heterogeneous. (1985, 45)

The dimensions of fictional world and fictional text are asymmetrical and mutually independent. Short texts, incorporating few details may be experienced as vast, but other texts, packaged with the gigantism of naturalistic detail, may be experienced as relatively truncated, narrow and spatially cramped. *Hamlet's* world seems large, radically partitioned and infolded, not because it is a "long" play (which it is), but because it is semiotically complex, possessing many intersecting and overlapping domains. *Richard III*, a text of similar length (3602 lines as against 3776), evokes a comparatively simple and homogenous world. The fictional world of Borges' "The Approach to al Mu'tasim," Pavel writes, "may exceed in size the worlds of *Remembrance of Things Past*." Quantity of detail does not bear a direct correlation to the experiential size of a fictional world. Indeed, sheer detail may work to limit the imagination and to cause cognitive blockage. The "opacity to inference," in Pavel's phrase, which readers may encounter in imagining fictional worlds does not seem to constitute an obstacle to imagining merely possible variants upon the actual world (1986, 94-95). In the latter case, one would assume that a world differing from the actual world in only a single detail (in possessing a blue Notre Dame de Paris, say, or talking donkeys) would contain all of the actual world's indefinitely greater detail. Fictional worlds are largely empty (as are, of course, the

world; their disquieting incompleteness follows from equally disquieting (albeit possibly different) qualities of our universe" (1986, 108). A fully adequate theory of fictional worldhood, if one is ever available, will have to account for *all*, and not merely certain exemplary, textual kinds.

fictional characters who inhabit them and who often possess no physical traits at all), but they can be experienced as open, vast, immeasurable.

The problem of coherence seems inescapable. Things hang together (or they do not), but not usually in terms of laws or explanatory models derived from actual-world experience. As the consideration of texts such as the *Faerie Queene* make clear, they often hang together despite evident departures from any of the explanatory models available for determining the coherence of the actual world. (What conceivable zoological model would account for Spenser's Blatant Beast with its thousand poisonous tongues?) Many texts, such as the *Faerie Queene* or *Hamlet*, contain embedded, but independent, worlds: narrative domains that have sufficient properties of worldhood to be experienced as self-enclosed. Hence there is frequently a problem, not merely in the coherence of the primary world of the text but, in the *intra*-textual coherence of plural worlds. Despite the (often) minimal development of such intra-textual worlds, they can be experienced as coherent and can even be experienced as belonging coherently within the primary fictional world that contains them. Maitre argues that a fictional world is "seen as a totality, a coherent whole: it satisfies certain *coherence* criteria, as does the actual world, and in our attempts to understand it we employ certain plausibility criteria" (29). Neither the plausibility criteria nor the consequent coherence needs to be actual-world dependent.

Worldhood results from surprisingly little. Incompleteness (which may be both a lack of completeness, as in a refusal to develop a character, or an indeterminacy in the text) qualifies all fictional worlds. It is sometimes not merely an inevitable defect of conceptual constructs, but a deliberate and, as Pavel notes, even a "major distinctive feature of fictional worlds" (1986, 107).¹¹ Completeness itself seems more a property of imaginative experience than of texts. Texts can be thought of as necessary conditions, or even as props, in Walton's term, but they are not sufficient conditions for the experience of worldhood. For that the reader must bring to bear the resources of the mind's-eye: a fund of presuppositional knowledge, a capacity

11 Doležel also argues that the incompleteness of fictional worlds, if a logical deficiency, is also "an important factor in their aesthetic efficiency" (1988, 486). However, he might not, given his analysis of contradictions in narrative structures, find a place in his thinking for the incompleteness, deriving from intentionally (or playfully) co-positioning incompatible alternatives or from abruptly shifting ontological levels, that often occurs in both postmodern, or "self-disclosing," and in Renaissance fiction. *Hamlet* projects this mode of incompleteness (co-positioned incompatibles) forcefully. For an instructive account of incompleteness and contradiction in the ethnographic construction of cultures (but "worlds" also), see Rodney Needham, *Exemplars*. Needham's chapters on George Psalmanazar (75-116) and Carlos Castaneda (188-218) possess particular interest for the theory of fictional worlds.

to suppose causes and connections, the skills required to draw inferences and, above all, the imaginative power to project lines of development. It is one thing to assert that texts are "open," but quite another to be able to experience them in their openness. *Hamlet* insists upon its openness, its deep textual indeterminacy, but generations of critics have read it as closed.

Consider the following hypothesis: Texts are experienced as worlds when, and only when, narratees, as readers or as auditors, are brought within texts and experience their sign-systems from within and accept their conventions as having the force of axioms (or "maxims"). Conventions are not axioms in a rigorous sense, of course, any more than they are rules, but within the experience of a fictional text they exert the force of axioms in making conceivable the incomplete, but clearly thinkable, worlds of fiction. They function, in effect, as pseudo-axioms in being at once flexible and open to countless permutations but also, since they guide the readerly construction of fictional worlds, in being normally experienced as powerful constraints upon the possible (Wilson 1990, 176-84). Given the immense density of physical detail in the actual world (leaving aside the psychological detail implicit in the human subjectivities that inhabit that world) and the complexity of models required to explain it, the sheer minimalness necessary to constitute fictional worldhood seems astounding. From what is demonstrably little, much, in many successive variations, can be constructed.

This minimalness might be compared to a primitive kind of theatre in which the inadequacy of the props, whether actors or setting, is evident and the conventions are unmistakably bare. A puppet show, or a dumbshow, may be realistically primitive, but still possess the power to entrap its audience. The audience need not be composed merely of gullible children (a statement that an adult reader can test simply by watching a puppet show): sophistication in dealing with literary texts does not necessarily prevent readers or viewers from being caught up in the illusion of primitive textual forms. Shakespeare's plays frequently contain plays-within-the-play, ranging from the complexity of *The Taming of the Shrew* (all of which, after the Induction, is viewed as a play by characters within the frame) to the sparseness of the pageant of the Worthies in the fifth act of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Each play-within-the-play, but paradigmatically "The Mousetrap" in *Hamlet*, however primitively enacted, draws its viewers, like the on-stage (or in-world) narratees who listen to the embedded narratives, into its illusion. Even "The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby" which the hempen homespuns perform in the final act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, its conventions ludicrously bare, draws into its complex illusion both the performers, who accept the reality of its discourse, and the aristocratic viewers, who accept the tragic potential of the largely transformed story-matrix. The viewers, rather like Hamlet commenting upon

the actors who perform "The Mousetrap," also are drawn into the workings of the conventions as an object of critical attention. However, the most striking example from Renaissance literature of this paradox occurs in *Don Quijote* (II 26) when the Knight again meets Ginés de Pasamontes, the galley slave whom he had freed in the First Part. Ginés, disguised as maese Pedro, runs a puppet-show which the Knight attends. Fully aware that he is watching a puppet-show, capable of intervening to offer severe criticism of its failures in verisimilitude, the Knight nonetheless is swept away by its textual self-enclosure, its internal hanging-togetherness, and attacks with his sword the Moors who are (in the puppet-show) pursuing the hero, Don Gaiferos, as he attempts to rescue the beautiful Melisendra.

The Paradox of the Puppet-Show underscores not merely the audience's relation to a text or its performance, but, as well, a fundamental property of all fictional worlds. An excess of textual detail, or "gradual opacity to inference," may obscure the capacity to experience a fictional world, but a contrasting deficiency of detail does not seem to prevent a world's imaginative reconstruction. The mind's capacity to enter into fiction, fragmentarily and discontinuously presented, and to experience it as a whole, entire and continuous, constitutes one of the recursive themes of Renaissance literature.¹² The paradigmatic mode for the textual incorporation of this theme is the ekphrasis: a verbal description of a work of fine art which tells a story. Treating the ekphrasis as an instance of the descriptive mode in narrative, merely "une pause et une récréation dans le récit," Genette lucidly remarks that sometimes "la description y tend à s'animer et donc à se narrativiser" (58). An ekphrasis in the Second Part of *Don Quijote* (II 71) makes the point. On their way back to their village, the Knight and Sancho lodge in a room the walls of which are decorated by poorly painted hangings upon which are depicted the stories of the rape of Helen and of Dido's love for Aeneas. The paradox of the Puppet-Show functions in this scene as well. Don Quijote both comments upon the inadequacies of the depictions and enters into the experience that they make possible. He remarks that he could have prevented the two women's sorrows simply by killing Paris. The boundaries that divide the ekphrases from the containing world of *Don Quijote* enclose classical worlds and exclude the Knight, but they also permit him to cross the distance (the sheer conceptual

distance) that looms before him. More elaborate ekphrases, such as those in the *Faerie Queene* or in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* (1366-1568), all instance the same theoretical proposition: the necessary conditions (or props) for fictional worldhood may be few; the interior experience of that worldhood, vast.

Borges's short fiction, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," casts a light upon the Paradox of the Puppet-Show. Tlön is an entire world in the sense of being a planet, but it is also a fictional world, the source of all stories told in the country of Uqbar (which, of course, is also a fictional world). Finally, it is a fictional world, as is Uqbar, in being the collaborative construct of a conspiracy. The forty volumes of the First Encyclopedia of Tlön (twice the length of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, it will be "la obra mas vasta que han acometido los hombres") are to provide no more than the basis for a more complete version which will be written "no ya in inglés, sino en alguna de las lenguas de Tlön," the fictional planet/world itself (32). The immense scope of the project is staggering, though clearly not altogether impossible. Yet the First Encyclopedia of Tlön does not exist. Tlön, in the richness of its Berkeleyan idealism and its outrageous materialities, arises wholly upon the slender narrative spine of Borges' fiction. In order to be imagined, Tlön does not actually require the First Encyclopedia, only the minimal adumbrations that Borges provides. As Pavel argues that the world of "El acercamiento a Almotasim" might be far vaster than the world of an empirically longer and more detailed narrative, such as Proust's *roman fleuve*, so the fictional world of Tlön might be imagined as vaster than even the imaginary First Encyclopedia itself. Similarly, *Hamlet*, partitioned and infolded, its heterogeneous domains interknit yet mutually alien, seems clearly to be a semiotically diverse, multi-layered text, but the reading experience that it quickens into life, as the vast bibliography of its scholarship and criticism indicates, is indefinitely more complex. A narrative's power to engender interior experiential complexity exceeds, by an immeasurable factor, its textual detail. Like that of a game, the potential interiority of a text is inevitably, if strangely, boundless.

III

Hamlet begins with a twofold action: men peer into the darkness and they ask questions. Knit together, peering and asking questions recur throughout the play. The sheer number of questions seems remarkable. It is, as Mack remarks, a play in the "interrogative mood." Harry Levin observes that in the 322 lines of the Graveyard Scene (5 1), there are "seventy question marks"

12 The fascination with fiction as "second nature," or as a kind of world in opposition to the actual world, based upon the human mind's power to imagine, characterizes Renaissance attitudes towards fiction (Levaio). The conviction that the imagination is constitutive and constructive can be found everywhere in the literary theory of the period. Shakespeare provides many textual examples: the imaginative reconstruction of Troy in its final hour, at Priam's death (*Hamlet* 2 2), discussed below, is only one.

(19).¹³ There are *more* than four hundred grammatical questions in the play, and this number does not include the various integrated series of questions that are governed by single question marks, such as Marcellus' five queries (1 1 73-82) or Polonius' three-part question to Claudius which he reiterates three times:

But what might you think,
When I had seen this hot love on the wing —
As I perceived it, I must tell you that,
Before my daughter told me — what might you
Or my dear Majesty your queen here think,
If I had play'd the desk or table-book,
Or given my heart a winking mute and dumb,
Or look'd upon this love with idle sight —
What might you think? (2 2 131-9)

There is also the by-play on "inquire" between Polonius and Reynaldo (2 1 4-15) that is followed by seven questions all of which Polonius then explicitly describes as this "drift of question" (10). Nor does the number of actual grammatical questions indicate the many questions that are not put as questions: the aporia, the puzzles, the enigmas, the mere (and many) riddles. Nor does this number reveal the complex use of the word "question" itself, as when Horatio refers to the royal dead, which Fortinbras has just called a "quarry," as "this bloody question" (5 2 380). Still less, does the extraordinary number of questions begin to suggest the intricacy of Hamlet's use of "question" in his third soliloquy (3 1 56). The word, which, Levin notes, occurs "no less than seventeen times, much more frequently than in any of Shakespeare's other plays" and concludes "Hamlet's most famous line," may well be "the key-word of the play" (20).

One might answer a question by giving an exposition, or even an argument, but a narrative must also seem to be an obvious response, even if it is not the only one. For example, Horatio narrates two stories in reply to questions during the first scene. In the first, he answers Marcellus' query by telling a story (1 1 83-100) in which an important element in the play's background is unfolded. The story that he tells is further developed in Voltemand's narrative (2 2 60-79) which intersects with Horatio's to complete the background exposition. (This is only one of several instances of collaborative story-telling in *Hamlet*, all of which demonstrate the

important narrative principle that *stories* have many routes of access.) Horatio's analeptic narrative sets up a boundary that divides what it encloses, the immediate background for the current warlike preparations, from the dramatic action, but the distance between what it encloses and what it excludes does not seem far. During the course of the play many replies to questions, such as Horatio's, come in the narrative mode. The word that Francisco speaks in the second line, "unfold," evokes the action of narrating, and it anticipates the Ghost's two uses of the same word (1 5 6, 15). Darkness, problems, queries and the demand for narrative dominate *Hamlet's* opening, as they do its close.

In *Hamlet*, there are several examples, some obvious, some oblique, of Shakespeare's command of narrative effects. One narrative that illustrates numerous complexities, including both recursiveness and reflexivity, and which particularly exemplifies the world-creating powers of narrative, occurs when Hamlet asks the Player King (2 2 426-45) to recite Aeneas's tale of Troy's last hours. The Player King's "speech" (as it is normally called, slighting the initial twelve and one half lines of the total fifty-seven that Hamlet speaks) has been, until comparatively recently, largely overlooked and under-read. The *Variorum* has little to say. Bradley, agreeing with Coleridge that the lines as epic narrative "are superb," gives it a lengthy appendix in *Shakespearean Tragedy* in which he locates resonances of its language in other plays, but that degree of attention seems to be the exception (413-19). Dover Wilson says only that it is a "rather bombastic passionate speech from a *Dido and Aeneas* play" (154). Recent interest in the narrative, in so far as there is any, can be said to date from Levin's extensive discussion in 1959. Yet "Aeneas's Tale to Dido" exemplifies a wide range of specific narrative techniques and it raises, in great depth and with considerable power, the problem of narrative's inherently distinct effects within drama. A boundary divides the world of Aeneas's tale from the dramatic context that surrounds and calls it into being and, unlike Horatio's first narrative, the distance that must be crossed seems very great. Beyond the boundary that the tale establishes, the narrative traveller discovers a different time, a different space and different characters (playing roles dissimilar to any that the world of *Hamlet* itself contains). Aeneas's tale illustrates the problem of fictional worldhood with paradigmatic clarity.

Immediately, as Hamlet, stumbling provocatively over the "Hycanian beast," begins to recite the narrative, he initiates a number of extremely

13 The empirical counting of question marks is uncertain since editions vary. Harold Jenkins' Arden edition of *Hamlet* has 295 lines for the Graveyard Scene and fifty-eight question marks, though there are several passages of multiple questions (47-101 [5], 183-5 [4], 270-1 [6]). All references to *Hamlet* will be to *The Arden Shakespeare*.

subtle narratives within a tightly concatenated dramatic action.¹⁴ (Only Hamlet and the Player King speak, though Polonius interjects commentary, but between them they create, at its darkest moment, the matter of Troy.) First, the Player King's tale, evidently paralleling the Second Book of the *Aeneid* and any number of other retellings, in drama or narrative, appears to be in a style other than Shakespeare's: a bombastic flow that has struck critics, such as Dover Wilson, as (presumably) a parody of earlier declamatory styles in English drama. Second, the narrative does not appear to have been written by anyone other than Shakespeare himself. "It is strange," Harold Jenkins notes, "that distinguished critics have ever seriously maintained that Shakespeare lifted from some old tragedy, his own or another's, a speech so manifestly designed for the place it has in *Hamlet*" (479). Third, the narrative is performed in two voices, Hamlet's and the Player King's. Like the disjunctive narrative that Horatio and Voltremand tell, or like the tale left hanging by Touchstone and then completed by Jacques (*AYLI* 2 7 12-43) in his tale recounting the Seven Ages, it is a narrative with two narrators, a double narration. It also anticipates the interrupted narrative, recounted in both writing and speech (one narrator, but two voices), that Hamlet tells Horatio concerning the events at sea (4 6 12-28; 5 2 36-62). Furthermore, in its narrative flexibility, the shifting, broken pattern of citation and sharing, it suggests the tale that Ophelia tells in splintered citations from songs and, again interrupted, in two parts (4 5 21-74, 164-96). The double narration calls reflexively to mind an important narrative principle: anyone can tell and retell old stories and narrative can speak through any reading voice. Anyone can read, and renarrate, anyone else's story.¹⁵

14 Hamlet's false start must be read as a conscious strategy. Aeneas may not employ the "Hyrcanian beast" as an epithet for Pyrrhus, but Virgil gives it to Dido as one to describe Aeneas, and Robert Greene, as Levin notes, flings it at Shakespeare himself. Whatever the verisimilitude of the false start, and it may be naturalized on that level alone, its significance to the narrative is great: how the beast, Levin writes, "goes ramping through Elizabethan drama, as the proverbial embodiment of hardness of heart, a glance at any concordance will show" (149). As a rhetorical move, the false start seems to combine functions of two traditional figures, *apostrophe* and *epanorthosis*, without exactly corresponding to either. By whatever designation, it is a narratively rich move.

15 In the more or less piratical universe of stories ("il y en a tant et tant eu," Roland Barthes remarks [9]), anyone can appropriate, but no one can claim, a story. *Hamlet*, created out of the story-materials given in numerous prior tellings, has been retold many times. These include countless dramatic versions, prose retellings (as that for children in Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*), reductions (Stoppard's *The Fifteen Minute Hamlet*) or radical revisions of the story-line (Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, for example, itself radically revised for the 1991 film version). Kowzan observes correctly that in texts which "reprentent la matière" of *Hamlet*, such as

"Aeneas's Tale to Dido" exemplifies, but does not exhaust, the extremely self-conscious narrativity that pervades *Hamlet*. Narratives set scenes, build worlds, entrap narratees, may be borrowed or transferred, falsify and delude (as Claudius, in poisoning ears, illustrates) as well as point towards absent truths, but they also mark the distance between themselves and the stories that they tell. There is always, in every narrative, a covert reflexivity (at least) in the way that discursive procedures, however subtle or naive, mark the difference from the story-matrices.¹⁶ The transformation of story-matrices, by expansion, deformation, contraction or any other mode of technical variation, constitutes (as every Renaissance writer understood) the realm of rhetoric. *Copia* is nowhere more evident than in the conceptual distance between a narrative and its story. Story (what can be told) is invariably both more abstract and larger in potential scope than discourse (how it is told) and highly complex narrative effects can be created by playing upon this distinction.¹⁷ The Ghost's narrative (1 5 9-91) demonstrates the extent to which narrative craft depends upon the power to suggest a larger potential than can be actualized in a particular narrative.

The Ghost's narrative begins with the request that Hamlet "Lend thy serious hearing / To what I shall unfold" (5-6). The word "hearing" resonates

Stoppard's revision to create the point-of-view of the two courtiers/spies, it is a question of imposing "une optique différentielle" (226). Kowzan provides a valuable analysis of *Hamlet*'s fate within a subsequent intertextual field (that it has itself generated). *Hamlet* exemplifies the way in which an intricate, semiotically diverse classic text fecundly provides the story for any number of later versions.

16 It is difficult to imagine a narrative that would not reflexively indicate the difference between its procedures (discourse) and its matrices (story). One would have to suppose a narrative that merely listed, in chronological order, the story's narremes and restricted existents to bare deictics and simple agential functions. The text that Umberto Eco chooses to exemplify his analysis of possible worlds, Alphonse Allais's *Un drame bien parisien*, seems to illustrate both how close a narrative may come to this zero gradation of difference and how impossible it is to collapse fully the distance (200-60, 263-66). Reflexivity becomes a factor in analysis when the narrative calls attention to the conceptual distance between itself and its story. Reflexive acts, in commenting upon themselves, are "always to some extent significantly 'meta': an extra semiotic dimension that alerts an audience to the conventionality of the act being performed" (Wilson "Narrative Reflexivity" 774).

17 Jonathan Culler argues that story is only a "heuristic fiction" (170). Lodge considers that it is a "conceptualization" (56). This would appear to be the orthodox position in contemporary narrative theory. Still, the extent to which story may be more than a "heuristic fiction" (a discoverable prototype, an archetype, a set of colligatory motifs, say) is one of the optional, though vexed, problems in literary studies. Shakespeare, it seems, recognizes the force of untold stories. That which the Ghost clamorously describes, but refuses to tell, must remain empirically, and perhaps conceptually, obscure: only the powerful affects of alluding to it are plain.

in the double repetition of the words "hear" and "unfold" repeated within ten lines. The Ghost's narrative skills are striking: he commands attention by describing the affects of the story that he could tell ("I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood ..."), and then closes the narrative before he tells it with the remark that it cannot be told "To ears of flesh and blood" (23). The Ghost then urges his narratee to listen, with a three-time reiterated use of the word "list," to a different tale. It is clear both that the Ghost understands the fundamental narrative imperative to command attention and that he knows how much the prosperity of a narrative lies in the ear of him who hears it. Shakespeare invests the Ghost with compelling narrative techniques, but they are not essentially different from those which other narrators, such as Othello casting a narrative spell over the Venetian Senate, Jachimo destroying the exiled Posthumus's love for Imogen, or Prospero recounting for Miranda's ears the dark backward of their domestic story, command. Elizabethans, it is sometimes claimed, went to the theatre to hear, not to see, plays: ears are always noted, their presence assumed, and their attentiveness conjured.¹⁸

The Ghost's narrative plays upon the distinction between what and how, between a story and its narrativization. It makes a number of meta-narrative comments in calling attention to the effects of narrative discourse, in stressing the importance of the narratee's role ("List, list, O list!"), and in noting the poisonous potential of narrative falsification. Furthermore, the Ghost's narrative is unmistakably reflexive since the act of narrating and the discourse of narrative are self-consciously evident. The Ghost's tale, once it is told, initiates a recursive series of variants upon the basic story materials that run, like the flashes of an intrusive code, through the dramatic action. The Ghost builds the scene, elsewhere and elsewhere, with a number of explicit details: in the garden, at a certain time, a precise kind of poison, a precise method of delivery ("in the porches of my ears did pour / The leperous distilment ..."), and a vivid account of consequent effects.

Often the embedded narratives in Shakespeare's plays turn inwards in such a manner that the scene and the events being narrated are focalized by a character that exists within the embedded narrative only. In the Ghost's narrative, an inward turn occurs strongly but in an unusual way. The expanded scene in the garden is focalized by the Ghost's own experience, but as a ghost not as the King. He has been killed instantly by the hebenon that, "swift as quicksilver," had coursed through his body, barking his body with

a "most instant tetter" (66-71). Instantly killed, no witnesses other than Claudius (who never explicitly confirms the accusation), Old Hamlet nonetheless knows the details and can build the scene. The focalization requires splitting off the powers of perception from the swiftly dying body, but this is no more than the concept of a ghost normally entails. Finally, the scene, made vivid and internally focalized, fills Hamlet with an analogous experience of horror.

There are further complexities. "Aeneas's Tale to Dido" moves outwards from the immediate dark scene of Denmark to the archaic world of Troy and it does so with allusive force. Its delivery, Arthur Johnston writes, must be "powerful, but with a power distinct from that of any other scene in *Hamlet* as from a different world" (25). Pyrrhus, a son seeking revenge for his father and belonging to the same textual category (a protagonist in a Blood Tragedy, though only minimally conceived) as Laertes, Fortinbras and Hamlet, mirrors Hamlet's own situation. When Pyrrhus "makes malicious sport" (2.2.509) in killing Priam, he acts in the authentic spirit of Revenge. In providing yet another mirror for Hamlet's psychomachia, Pyrrhus widens the sphere of revenge in the play, but he does so as a form of "conditional parallelism," showing what Hamlet might have been capable of doing if he had shared Pyrrhus' nature.¹⁹

The narrative of Aeneas's tale to Dido, renarrated in a double voice, shifts attention (on stage and within the theater) to a remote elsewhere, the black final moments of Troy and the death of Priam. The deities of the narrative are explicitly marked: "When," "where," "Now" (3), "Then" (2), "Anon" (2). The time of the embedded action is made clear. Its internal sequence, moving precisely from the entrance of Pyrrhus to the grief of Hecuba, incorporates two analepses which shift backwards to the time prior to his entrance when Pyrrhus had been only "sable" (not yet "total gules" and "o'ersized with coagulate gore") and, at line 503, to the time when Hecuba had still worn her diadem (even, though indirectly, to the time when, in happiness, she had borne her children since the narrative explicitly describes her loins as being, in the present time, "lank and all o'erteemed"). The "when" joins Pyrrhus' arms, in the comparison, to the blackness of the night and to his purpose during the time, immediately previous to the narrative action, when he had lain in the "ominous horse" (450). The horse must be recognized, of course, before it can serve explicitly to locate the time and place of the action, but this probably would not have been an obstacle for Shakespeare's audience. For a Renaissance readership, there were many famous horses, often with their own unforgotten names, but only one horse

18 Harbage cites the Prologue to Dekker's *If It Be Not Good the Devil Is in It* which asks for a playwright who can call the auditor, driven away by too much hot violence with too little poetry, back to the theatre, "And tye / His Eare (with golden chaines) to his Melody" (118).

19 On "conditional parallelism," see Miller (255). Johnston uses the phrase to indicate Hamlet's relation to Pyrrhus (30).

deserved the epithet "ominous," portentous in its bearing upon the future, and in only *that* horse would anyone have lain "couched." Similarly, the proper names themselves, the use of "Greeks" and "Ilium" as well as the analeptic "antique" which links Priam's sword to the course of Troy's ancient history, all serve to invoke the narratee's presuppositional knowledge. That knowledge is available to Hamlet and Polonius; if it were not, as it might not be for a modern audience, then the narrative would remain (as just another tale of war and death), but it would be cut loose, allowed to float free, from its story-matrix. The recognition that a particular story is being actualized in narrative may not constitute a specific narrative effect, but "Aeneas's Tale to Dido" does seem self-consciously to play, as does the Ghost's interknitting between his two stories (one untold, one told), on the conceptual distance between the narrative and its recessed story-matrix.

A boundary establishes itself along the edges of the narrative. On the one side is the world of *Hamlet* (Denmark, Elsinore, even, pushing backwards towards still another boundary, the world of the Sagas); on the other, a time, space and action that are essentially different, whatever allusiveness they suggest. Abrupt shifts from one fictional world to another are always possible (though the mechanics of the movement are likely to vary considerably) and one such shift has already occurred in *Hamlet*. Horatio tells two stories in the first scene, both giving background, but the second (1.1.116-23) establishes an allusive elsewhere and elsewhere in the last moments of the Roman Republic, "A little ere the mightiest Julius fell" (117). Unlike his first, in replying to Marcellus's question, Horatio's second narrative evokes a greater distance: the differences are more marked; the boundary, a function of interior remoteness. The shift from the battlements of Elsinore to the streets of Rome, crowded by the gibbering "sheeted dead," is both swift and effective: a single phrase designating place and a phrase and a clause specifying time are sufficient for a successful passage.

The narrative boundary divides the action in Priam's palace from the world of *Hamlet*, but it has a double effect that is important to note. It also divides the action in Priam's palace from a larger story, which is not the story of *Hamlet*. The fifty-seven lines of the narrative are a fragment of, or perhaps a small peephole into, the vast story of Troy. Every schoolboy knew well the matter of Troy which, Levin writes, "Caxton had popularized, which English ballads celebrated, which poets and artists could draw upon as freely as the matter of England itself" (146). The narrative breaks into the action of *Hamlet* in an extremely exact manner, shifting the focus of the action to the distant elsewhere and elsewhere, but once attention has been transferred, then, like a bubble suspended in shadows, it becomes entrapped within a surrounding story-matrix. It is, to borrow a phrase from Roman Ingarden, as if a beam of light illuminated a part of a region, while everything else

"disappears in an indeterminate cloud but is still there in its indeterminacy" (218). The story-matrix, the shadowy, indeterminate cloud of potential narrative, is the matter of Troy, the tentacular accounts of Bronze Age Heroes, the netted networks of legendary materials. A vast number of fictional objects, not solely characters, immigrate into the apparently restricted narrative of Troy's final moments, crowding it with the significance of other tales.²⁰ If Ilium has been evoked, then its parts, even if not designated, are (in some sense) entailed. Outside the narrative, obscure yet available to recognition, are Pergamum, the Scaen Gate, and the Simoïs; Achilles, though left within the indeterminate cloud of the story-matrix, exerts a ghostly presence over Pyrrhus' revenge. A direct line of access opens up that allows readers and auditors to cross over into a distinctly different place, the dark claustral scene in Priam's palace, and from there innumerable paths open towards a larger fictional world. The problem of minimalness seems acute at this point: how much is actually required, once a fictional world has been constituted, to re-evolve it from within an alien discourse? The embedded narrative demonstrates, as perhaps *Hamlet* does as a whole, Pavel's proposition that world-complexity depends upon, not the length of a text, but the disposition of interior semiotic domains: it displays the maximal potential worldhood of a minimal text.

"Aeneas's Tale to Dido" focalizes Hecuba's perceptions of the narrative scene, but it also creates a nest of external focalizations. The gods are invoked to share Hecuba's experience and the Player King feels it as if he, too, were an actual participant and not merely an accidental spectator. Hamlet also feels the profundity of Hecuba's grief, but he feels it through the secondary passion in the Player King, and he uses it, once the action has been returned to Elsinore, to contrast his own failure to respond to a death that has been an actuality, not a fiction. Levin comments that this multi-layered appropriation of Hecuba's passion, in which empathy is either felt or invoked from the gods downwards, through the narrative, to the play and through it to the audience, "links our outlook with a chain of being which sooner or later extends all the way from the actors to the gods" (162). Not only may old tales be told and retold, but their internal focalizations can be transferred from the character to the voice of the narrator (a voice which may be *played* only), to the narratee, and then to the audience (the

20 Terence Parsons distinguishes between "native" and "immigrant" objects. For example,

Sherlock Holmes is native within Conan Doyle's stories, but London is immigrant in the sense that it is already familiar and crosses the boundary into the text at many points. I employ the distinction to indicate the difference between characters "at home" in a certain narrative, such as Priam, Pyrrhus and Hecuba in "Aeneas's Tale to Dido," and those, crossing in from a larger fictional world (or fictional world-matrix), which cannot be excluded once the process of signification has been engaged (51-52).

always-necessary empirical ears) that hears, or overhears, the narrative being told.

Whether it is radically heterodiegetic as is "Aeneas's Tale to Dido" or more closely tied to the line of the dramatic action as is, say, the narrative that Hamlet tells, in two parts and two modes (letter and speech), concerning his adventures on the trip to England, an embedded narrative creates a different time-scheme. It invokes different scenes (a somewhere else, a someone else) and it does so in terms of another time (a somewhere else). Even when the narrative is supposedly contemporaneous with the action of the play, as in the cases of the Chorus in *Henry V*, the Gentleman's account of Lear's contention "with the fretful elements" (*KL* 3.1.4-15), or Scarus's summary of the battle of Actium (*AC* 3.10), the time, in being compressed and subjectivized, is different. The narratives are told from within distinct agential domains. The moment of narration, distant and apart, is underscored and, once made unmistakable, disrupts the dramatic action by its manifestation of the narrator's subjectivity.

The force of the embedded narratives simulates an anachrony within the plays. The dramatic actions of Shakespeare's plays are not in themselves anachronous, but the embedded narratives impose this effect upon them. By grafting another character, another place and another time, a shift (often radical) in focalization, into the play's action, Shakespeare perturbs, through interrupting, that action. Though the dramatic action is linear (however spatially diffuse), always an end-pointed story unfolding sequentially, the effect of the embedded narratives is to dissolve this movement. In each play, many times and places are juxtaposed: sometimes in contrast, sometimes in exemplary analogy, the world of the narrative, splintered, incompletely expressed, a textual fragment, emerges from within the play's action.

If the pattern of Shakespearean narrative within the plays is playful, disruptive and anachronous, then it must seem quite strange, since these are powerful effects, that Shakespeare's critics have not noticed them until recently. Or, if they have (as Dr. Johnson plainly did), then they have perceived them in a negative light as impediments to the dramatic action. In part, the explanation must be that only recent narrative theory has developed analytic tools sufficiently powerful to deal with the intricacies of Shakespearean narrative generally and the embedded narratives of the plays in particular. Breaking the illusion, promoted within a disciplinary ideology, that Shakespeare is a dramatist, and only a dramatist, who can be studied successfully only as a dramatist (or, worse, in terms of merely theatrical conventions), demands a theoretical model that can account for, without dismissing, the vast narrative dimension of the plays. It may well be that Shakespeare and his contemporaries, having been deeply educated in rhetoric and narrative, familiar with the capacity of either to incorporate

diversity, would have admitted the co-presence of distinct genres. From the standpoint of Elizabethan literary practice, the addition of narrative to drama should not have seemed perplexing: poetry and drama were ordinarily co-present and specific poetic forms (the sonnet, for instance) easily found a place within the blank verse norms of drama. One may even perceive that Shakespeare's plays, narrative saturating them, are both less and more than drama. "Aeneas's Tale to Dido" points towards a more comprehensive model of Shakespearean narrative: always a perturbation of/in the play's linearity, a conceptual disruption, a shift from dramatic action into narrative's plural worldhood.

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