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"Noble Deeds and the Secret Singularity": *Hamlet* and *Phèdre*

Hamlet enters the play that bears his name, a play in which Shakespeare is uncharacteristically parsimonious with names,[1] only to tell his mother that he will not act:

> Seemes Maddam, nay it is, I know not seemes,
> Tis not alone my incky cloake good mother
> Nor customary suites of solembe blacke
> Nor windie suspiration of forst breath
> No, nor the fruitfull riuer in the eye,
> Nor the deiected hauior of the visage
> Together with all formes, moodes, shewes of griefe
> That can denote my truely, these indeede seeme,
> For they are actions that a man might play
> But I haue that within which passeth showe
> These but the trappings and the suites of woe. (2 232-42)

"To be" is here implicitly defined as pure interiority, the thoroughly privatized self-possession of "that within which passeth showe." Actions that a man might play, explicitly theatrical and publicly accessible constructions of identity, are dismissed as so much dross. Hamlet conceives of himself — and there is a sense in which the fatherless son is very much attempting to "conceive himself," to originate his own existence — in opposition to the corporeal, the external, the visual, which is also the order of the spectacle, the theatrical.[2] Play and character share a name, then, but reluctantly so, at

1 There are, for example, two patronymic sons in Hamlet, Fortinbras and Hamlet; the latter, of course, shares his name with the play. For a reading of Hamlet as a drama of nomination, to which my own paper is indebted, see Calderwood *passim*.

2 The corporeal is also the order of the maternal and the feminine in terms of the sexual politics of the play. That is, the subjectivity that Hamelt claims for himself is gender specific. "Now mother, what's the matter" (11 2222) Hamlet asks at the beginning of the closet scene, which, as Margaret Ferguson has suggested, makes explicit the association of ideas in another of his remarks: "[b]ut to the matter, my mother you say" (9 2040). Cf.

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least from the perspective of character. Not for Hamlet the kinetic consummations, the being-through-action, of theatrical self-definition. Not for Hamlet the publicly accessible surfaces, the "incky cloaks" and "customary suites," of theatrical appearances.

Not for Hamlet and not for us, for there is a sense in which the Prince who would originate his own existence also originates ours:

> With Falstaff as with Hamlet (and perhaps with Cleopatra) Shakespearean representation is so self-begotten and so influential that we can apprehend it only be seeing that it originates us. We cannot judge a mode of representation [or, in the case of the passage cited above, a sweeping dismissal of a mode of representation] that has overdetermined our ideas of representation. (Bloom 85)

Harold Bloom's celebration of the proleptic power of Shakespearean representation finds its most compelling example in the figure of Hamlet. Certainly the Prince has few rivals (and even these, as Bloom suggests, would be Shakespearean) in terms of the influence he has exerted on the construction and representaion of subjectivity, in determining our position within what Foucault calls "l'aventure de l'individualité":

> Et si depuis le fond du Moyen Age jusqu'aujourd'hui "l'aventure" est bien le récit de l'individualité, le passage de l'épique au romanesque, du haut fait à la secrète singularité, des longs exils à la recherche intérieure de l'enfance.... (195)

The passage "de l'épique au romanesque" might here read from drama to novel, as drama, at least in its Aristotelian form, is predicated on the priority of action to character, praxis to ethos, "the noble deed" to the "secret singularity":

> For tragedy is an imitation not of men but of a life, an action [praxis], and they have moral quality in accordance with their characters [ethe] but are happy or unhappy in accordance with their actions; hence they are not active in order to imitate their characters, but they include the characters along with the actions for the sake of the latter. Thus the structure of events, the plot, is the goal of tragedy, and the goal is the greatest thing of all. (Aristotle 1450a15-24)

Hamlet, who is something of a character in search of a different generic dispensation, resists these Aristotelian priorities, and thus anticipates, more or less *avant la lettre*, a novelistic or discursive mode of subjectivity, which the novel, in its turn, would be only too pleased to grant him. But what the novel would belatedly grant the Prince, the play itself refuses: against the

Ferguson 295.

incipient modernity of Hamlet's claim to a theatrically inaccessible interiority, *Hamlet* insists on a properly theatrical life for its eponymous hero. And if this is to make of Shakespeare something other than a harbinger of our modernity — or to make of Hamlet something other than the mirror in which we find an idealized relflection of our interiority — it is precisely the celebration of "Shakespeare-our-contemporary" that I intend to challenge.

It is a celebration that frequently makes use of the example of Racine, the better to highlight the modernity of Shakespeare. The comparison, at least outside the Francophone world, is almost invariably structured as the dispensation of a large and comprehensive soul, Shakespeare's and all things Shakespearean, over and against the impoverishment of a codified theatrics, Racine's and all things neoclassical. And in what follows, I too make use of the familiar comparison: against *Hamlet*, I juxtapose another play that shares a name with its central character, another play, moreover, that is now little more than a showcase for a single performer: *Phèdre*. But where the conventional comparison tends toward the binary — a Shakespeare who is little more than an abundant interiority, a Racine who is little more than the constrictions of form — my own project attempts to mediate between the two, in the manner implied or facilitated by my quotation from Foucault. For if what follows is essentially a study of a generic dispensation, it is informed by a concept of genre that allows both for an analysis of individual texts within the history of literary forms, what Foucault calls "le passage de l'épique au romanesque," and the history of the social construction of subjectivity, what Foucault calls the passage "du haut fait à la secrète singularité." The former, which is for my purposes the passage from drama to the novel, I relate to the founding gesture of genre criticism, Aristotle's *Poetics*. I am concerned with the eclipse of the cultural centrality of drama, its displacement by the novelistic, which is at once a formal dispensation and an historically specific construction of subjectivity. It is this displacement, I argue, that *Hamlet* resists, and that *Phèdre*, in a rather curious sense, awaits.

I have suggested that the literature of psychological complexity was eager to claim Hamlet for its own, but there is a sense in which the Prince always was eager to be claimed. "Be as our selfe in Denmarke" (2 278) enjoins Claudius, but it is precisely because Hamlet will not be "as" the King of shreds and patches, which for Hamlet is "Of nothing," that he implicitly defines "to be" in terms of a theatrically inaccessible interiority. "For the apparrell oft proclaimes the man" (3 485), proclaims Polonius, to which Hamlet, for whom all the world is not a stage, implicitly responds no. Claudius may prepare a kingly face to meet the faces that he meets, but for Hamlet the mask, the persona, is not the self. Yet if all the world is not a stage, neither is Claudius's success in a role "that a man might play" all of

theatre, although Hamlet implicitly treats it as if it were. The conflation of what might be characterized as Claudian theatrics with the theatrical itself is typical of the scholar-Prince, who tends, like the scholars who will come after him, to translate the particular into the general, the historically specific into the metaphysically ineluctable. Stanley Cavell, for example, is clearly of the party of the Prince and his universalist proclivities:

> Hamlet's extreme sense of theatre I take as his ceaseless perception of theatre, say show, as an inescapable or metaphysical mark of the human condition, together with his endless sense of debarment from accepting the human condition as his (which is terribly human of him); as if his every breath and gesture disjoin and join him, from and with mankind. (187-88)

The perception of theatre as an inescapable or metaphysical mark of the human condition is indeed Hamlet's, as his sense of being thereby debarred from participating in it. The question remains, however, if the movement from the perception to its apparently logical consequence, from "all the world is a stage" to the authentic self is estranged from it, is best characterized as "terribly" and therefore ahistorically "human." True, the gap that opens up in Hamlet between the inner life of the subject, experiencing itself as "that within which passeth showe," and an inauthentic exterior, the degraded spectacle of the world's "seemings," seems itself the "inescapable" condition of our own schizophrenic subjectivity: ours is a life both governed and diminished by the oppositions inner/outer, soul/body, private/public. It may be, however, that the oppositions are to be periodized as distinctly modern, not accepted as "terribly human." Francis Barker, for example, argues that in this "opening there begins to insist, however prematurely, the figure that is to dominate and organize bourgeois culture" (35).[3] This is to suggest, however, only that the "inescapable or metaphysical mark" of our own lives is rather more novelistic than theatrical, the realist novel, the novel of psychological depth, being, of course, the definitive literary accomplishment of bourgeois culture.

Now Hamlet does seem a harbinger of this discourse of the secret singularity, and certainly no character in the history of dramatic literature has proved as significant to the development of "well-rounded," "three-dimensional" character of novelistic fame as the melancholy Prince. In Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, for example, Wilhelm distinguishes

3 My essay owes a great deal to Barker, although I ultimately disagree with him. He argues, for example, that "Hamlet's promised but unfilled interiority ... is unacceptable to bourgeois ideology because it is not sufficiently fixated" (39). I argue, on the contrary, that *Hamlet* finds Hamlet's protobourgeois ideology of interiority unacceptable, despite the fact that this same ideology has claimed Hamlet for its own.

between drama and the novel in terms that recall Aristotle's distinction between tragedy and epic, but only to assimilate *Hamlet* to the novelistic:

> Im Roman sollen vorzüglich Gesinnungen und Begebenheiten vorgestellt werden; im Drama Charaktere und Taten. Der Roman muß langsam gehen, und die Gesinnungen der Hauptfigur müssen, es sei auf welche Weise es wolle, das Vordringen des Ganzen zur Entwickelung aufhalten. Das Drama soll eilen, und der Charakter der Hauptfigur muß sich nach dem Ende drängen, und nur aufgehalten werden. Der Romanheld muß leidend, wenigstens nicht im hohen Grade wirkend sein; von dem dramatischen verlangt man Wirkung und Tat. (5 7 330)

For Wilhelm, *Hamlet* has something of the expansiveness ("von dem Gedehnten") that is for Aristotle both the defining characteristic of the epic and the mark of its inferiority to the tragic. Hamlet himself, moreover, has only "Gesinnungen," and it is only "Begebenheiten" that affects him. "Der Romanheld muß leidend ... sein." The novel hero must be suffering, no doubt from what came to be diagnosed as that most Hamlet-like of afflictions, the burden of an exquisite sensibility. Certainly Hamlet himself seems to suffer from his generic dispensation, although in the opinion of at least one nineteenth-century reviewer it never really was his:

> Yes, Hamlet is truly a man of these present times. It is thou Werther, thou Lara, thou Obermann, it is, above all, thou immortal René, in whom we see the sons and daughters of Hamlet ... It is to our own age that Hamlet belongs; it is our age that has discovered him ... and Hamlet himself has grown to maturity in the midst of the psychological literature in which we have all been nourished.[4]

Thus does the literature of psychological complexity, the culture of the book, claim the Prince for its own.

Northrop Frye speaks of the ordered society in Shakespeare's plays, which is manifestly not our own, as "ecstatic" in Heidegger's sense of the term: "its members are outside themselves, at work in the world, and their being is their function" (29). Heidegger's "ecstatic" society resembles, however, nothing so much as feudal society, and the commercial theatre comes into being in England only as feudal social structures were disintegrating. Certainly there are few characters in the history of drama less "ecstatic" than Hamlet, less, as it were, exogenous. Or, to reverse the perspective, there are few characters in the history of drama more incipiently novelistic, more, as it were, endogenous. For in eschewing any role that a

4 See *The Stage* 13 Jan. 11 1845, quoted in Spencer 192-93. Hamlet is placed in the company of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774), Byron's *Lara* (1814), Étienne de Senancour's *Obermann* (1804), and Chateaubriand's *René* (1802).

man might play, which is also any positionality, social or familial, that the world as stage avails him, the world as stage imposes upon him, Hamlet effectively defines the conditions under which novelistic characterization will be thought, perhaps even can be thought. That is, the protagonists of nineteenth-century realist fiction will follow Hamlet's lead in defining themselves not "ecstatically," but oppositionally, in relation to the world, however much it may be with them. In a terminology that would not be fully comprehensible to the unhappy Prince, but which he nevertheless anticipates, "psyche" rather than "property," internalized self-possession rather than external attributes, defines the essence of "to be."[5] The condition of novelistic subjectivity is characteristically self-possession, interiority, over and against which the world is experienced as objective. "I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count my selfe a King of infinite space" (7 1186-87): Denmark may be a prison, but the mind can make a heaven, a thoroughly interiorized and privatized heaven, of an objective hell. Such, in any case, is the broad premise of a novelistic construction of subjectivity: freedom from the determination which, in its explicitly aesthetic form, assumes the priority of plot to character, praxis to ethos.

But this is not, of course, the whole story: "I could ... count my selfe a King of infinite space" Hamlet continues, "were it not that I haue bad dreames." And the bad dream that impinges on this thoroughly imaginary freedom is determination by plot, praxis, role, the structural determination that the ghost of an unquiet father imposes on his patronymic son. The man who had previously eschewed any role that a man might play, who had defined himself in opposition to the demands of dramatic self-definition, is suddenly propelled into the most creaking and archaic of revenge plots. And given his cue for action, Hamlet subordinates, in proper Aristotelian fashion, ethos to praxis:

> ... while memory holds a seate
> In this distracted globe, remember thee,
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> Ile wipe away all triuiall fond records,
> All sawes of bookes, all formes, all pressures past
> That youth and obseruation coppied there,
> And thy commandement all alone shall liue. (5 714-20)

5 Stephen Greenblatt argues that in Renaissance drama "the traditional linkages between body, property, and name are called into question ... One can glimpse the early stages of the slow, momentous transformation of the middle term from 'property' to 'psyche.' But that transformation had by no means already occurred; it was on the contrary the result (not yet perfectly realized in our own time) of a prolonged series of actions and transformations" (221).

Johnson said of Shakespeare that "his story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men" (103).[6] With the second entry of the ghost, however, the story requires a revenger, and Hamlet initially thinks only on the deed, on determination or definition by praxis. Appropriately, then, Hamlet defines himself in opposition to an earlier and implicitly textual self ("Ile wipe away all triuiall fond records, / All sawes of books"), which is also an earlier and radically decorporeal self:

> O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolue it selfe into a dewe,
> Or that the euerlasting had not fixt
> His canon gainst sealfe slaughter. (2 285-88)

Had this "too too solid flesh" in fact resolved itself into a dew, Hamlet might have achieved the purely discursive status of novelistic existence: translated from theological to generic terms, Hamlet's first soliloquy begs release from the most fundamental condition of theatrical existence, physical embodiment. The Hamlet who labors under a properly dramatic imperative, however, acknowledges both his own and the world's physicality: this "distracted globe" is at once Hamlet's head (a reference to the body, not the internal operations of consciousness), the theatre in which *Hamlet* was first performed (the motto of the Globe was *totus mundus agit histrionem*, which translates roughly as all the world is a stage), and the world itself (the figure of Hercules shouldering the globe, what Rosencrantz calls "Hercules & his load" [7 1291], was on the flag that signalled performaces at the Globe). "Hamlet's extreme sense of theatre" is indeed an "inescapable mark" of the world's condition, and the "condition," the "globe," is "distracted." But far from being debarred from participating in it, as Cavell would have it, Hamlet is under an obligation to it, bound or "borne to set it right" (5 807). The secret singularity that allegedly is Hamlet — allegedly, because in *Hamlet* the name "Hamlet" is not singular, not a unique appellation reserved for the presence of a unique subjectivity — becomes Hamlet the agent of his father's will. The genealogical tangles that characterize Hamlet's first utterances in

6 Paul H. Fry argues that Johnson overthrows Aristotle on character by realigning Aristotelian terms: "Whereas for Aristotle the mere accidents of a character reside in his idiosyncratic nature, for Johnson they are constituted by his role or office — by his assigned place, in short, in the plot. Thus Shakespeare willingly flouts the Aristotelian *muthos*: 'His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men'" (27). Historically, challenges to the Aristotelian subordination of character to plot tended to be allied to the study of Shakespeare; it is by no means certain, however, that Shakespeare, or at least the Shakespeare of *Hamlet*, can be claimed for the anti-Aristotelian party.

the play — "A little more then kin, and less then kind" and "I am too much i'th'sonne" — are no longer in evidence. Commitment to the noble deed (and there is no suggestion here that revenge for regicide and patricide is not noble) has as its axis of individualization the ancestral, the genealogical. Hamlet the unique self gives way to Hamlet the patronymic son: *Hamlet* the play, Hamlet père, and Hamlet fils are, for the moment, one.

But again, this is not the whole story: Hamlet's "perception of theatre" as the "inescapable mark" of his own condition, his sense of obligation to the "distracted globe," is rather more problematic than I have acknowledged. For if Hamlet initially resolves to "wipe away all triuall fond records, / All sawes of bookes," he proceeds to lodge the ghost's "commandement ... / Within the booke and volume" of his "braine / Vnmixt with baser matter" (5 714-21). That is, the explicitly theatrical reference to "this distracted globe" becomes the radically textual self of "the booke and volume of my braine": from the corporeal to the discursive or the textual, from the body to the internal operations of consciousness, from the theatrical to the novelistic. Even as Hamlet identifies himself as the agent of a dramatic imperative, his language belies his commitment to the dramatic, to the body, which is punningly reduced to "baser matter." Enjoined to action, Hamlet responds by revising, editing, and expurgating a self conceived of as text.

A self conceived of as text, moreover, in the context of a play that insistently thematizes the discrepancy between text and performance, script and acting. *Hamlet* the play dramatizes Hamlet's theoretical pronouncements on drama, for example, as practical advice to travelling players, although the attitude dramatized is itself antidramatic, antitheatrical, at least given the context of Elizabethan theatrical practice. More specifically, Hamlet advises "those that play your clownes" to "speake no more then is set downe for them" (9 1764-65): the scholar-Prince argues for the priority of *ratio* to *oratio*, text to performance, the better to preserve the integrity of the written word from the accidents and aberrations of performance. And this too is an aspect of the Prince's incipient modernity. For if it is not until the nineteenth century that Hamlet achieves a purely discursive or novelistic existence, there is a sense in which the textual bias of his position finds a more immediate historical fulfillment: the publication of Jonson's *WORKES* in 1616, which was very much an attempt to establish the authority of play-texts, *ratio* uncontaminated by *oratio*, would doubtless have met with the scholar-Prince's appproval. Yet the oxymoronic publication of plays as *WORKES* (for it was so experienced by Jonson's contemporaries), specifically literary works, was historically unprecedented. Clearly the cult and culture of the book, with its implicit transference of textual and intellectual authority from the communal structures of the court, theatre, and audience to the private domain of the author, text, and reader, was on the historical

horizon.[7] Indeed, for Shakespeare, on the not too distant horizon, his now almost unimaginable indifference to the published fate of his dramatic "works" notwithstanding: the posthumous publication of the Folio of 1623, which was itself modelled on the Jonson Folio of 1616, was clearly a seminal moment in the history of the textualization of the bard. *Hamlet* itself, which is an intensely "bookish" play, full of references to "incky cloaks," texts, tablets, letters, forgeries, and the like, seems to anticipate this historical development, and its central character, who enters one scene "reading on a Booke," seems to want to hasten it. The play that adumbrates or anticipates this historical development, however, remains resistant to it.

Hamlet characterizes "Aeneas tale to Dido," the speech he requests from the players, as "cauiary to the generall" (7 1368-69): aesthetic worth is construed as inversely proportional to popular theatrical success, to performance. ("I heard thee speake me a speech once," Hamlet says, "but it was neuer acted": *oratio*, yes, but hardly performance; the speech Hamlet requests is in fact predominantly narrative, not dramatic.) Appropriately, or at least not unexpectedly, the man who characterizes himself in terms of a privatized and inaccessible interiority also defines himself in opposition to the collective experience and judgement of a theatrical audience. Indeed, the critical bias implicit in Hamlet's fondness for the speech, which is in no way troubled by "some necessary question" of the dramatic integrity of the play from which it is taken (his own theoretical standard), anticipates the critical gesture that will come to lift, say "To be, or not to be" from its larger dramatic context. And thus robbed of dramatic integrity, the great soliloquy, indeed any passage of particular "beauty" or "power," will come to be celebrated as an instance of the "literary" in the modern sense, and thus as an occasion for privatized aesthetic consumption. Yet even Hamlet, who can hardly be characterized as an apologist for the specifically theatrical or performative, recognizes that drama is necessarily a combination of discursive and non-discursive elements: "sute the action to the word, the word to the action" (9 1744-45). Discourse and deed, deed and discourse, are said to form an unbroken circuit. Hamlet's own deeds, however, belie the reciprocity of his purely discursive formulation.

Hamlet the producer of a play, for example, is not Hamlet the theoretician of drama: theatrical practice contradicts theoretical strictures, even as theoretical strictures seek, at least in part, to protect play-texts from contamination by theatrical practice. Thus, although Hamlet the theoretician argues for the priority of text to performance, Hamlet the producer violates the integrity of the former (he inserts "a speech of some dosen or sixteene lines" into "the murther of *Gonzago*") the better to ensure the affective

7 On this theme, see Timothy Murray, 95-6, passim.

power of the latter. Thus, although Hamlet the theoretician explicity castigates "inexplicable dumbe showes" (9 1739), Ophelia experiences the "miching Mallico," the dumb show that precedes *The Mousetrap*, as in need of explication. Clearly the practices and pragmatics of performance fail to conform to the strictures of theory, at least in the aristocratic, neoclassical form they assume with Hamlet. True, Hamlet's purpose in staging *The Mousetrap* is to expose Claudius's "occulted guilt," and in this he is successful: Claudius's "seeming" is indeed exposed, his guilt given visible and public manifestation. The play catches the conscience of the king, however, by reduplicating appearances, not by penetrating depths. Thus, even that most familiar of definitions for the "purpose of playing, whose end both at the first, and nowe, was and is, to holde as twere the Mirrour vp to nature" (9 1747-49), tells against Hamlet, as a mirror by definition knows only "seems." The concealed inside is not, after all, of a different order from the external.

Yet Hamlet refuses to acknowledge or accept the continuity, the lesson implicit in his theatrical success with *The Mousetrap* notwithstanding: "Why looke you now how vnwoorthy a thing you make of me, you would play vpon mee, you would seeme to knowe my stops, you would plucke out the hart of my mistery" (9 2079-2088). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are here acting as Gertrude's "instrument," confront a Hamlet who, immediately after the play within the play, again declares his secret and inaccessible singularity. But as with the earlier declaration, the public and thus oxymoronic insistence on a private interiority, the self-dramatizing and thus oxymoronic denigration of the dramatic, this too proves highly problematic. It is difficult to know, for example, how the hollow form of a "pipe," the "being" of which is literally its instrumentality, can suggest the metaphysic of the soul, the plenitude of an internalized self-possession, that Hamlet apparently intends. Indeed, as if fleeing, Claudius-like, the implications of his theatrical success, Hamlet utterly denies the continuity between internal and external, the profound (and thus from the perspective of all things modern, oxymoronic) superficiality that obtains in the world as theatre, the theatre as world. Hamlet denies, however, but the play confirms: in the two carefully juxtaposed scenes that follow shortly after the play within the play, the prayer and closet scenes, the play asserts itself over and against Hamlet's novelistic propensity for excavating depths.

The first of these, the prayer scene, opens with a soliloquy: a now Hamlet-like Claudius, unwitnessed by the character he has temporarily come to resemble, engages in an act of internalized and privatized self-recognition: "O my offence is ranck, it smels to heauen, / It hath the primall eldest curse vppont" (10 2156-57). Claudius, who is characteristically the most public of

men, turns inward. The gesture is of the essence of Hamlet, yet here the subject's experience of itself proves continuous with the external:

> My fault is past, but oh what forme of prayer
> Can serue my turne, forgiue me my foule murther,
> That cannot be since I am still possest
> Of those effects for which I did the murther;
> My Crowne, mine owne ambition, and my Queene;
> May one be pardond and retain th'offence? (10 2167-76)

There never can be a purely internalized act of self-recognition or transformation — one cannot be pardoned and retain the material "effects" of the crime — for there is finally no interiority innocent of visible, external, or material manifestation. "In the corrupted currents of this world," where one may smile and smile and be a villain, the truth of the appearance of things may not be immediately apparent. Yet the very man who occasions the crisis in signification, who "corrupts" ocular intelligibility, also comes to acknowledge its ultimate and inevitable rectification: "but tis not so aboue, / There is no shufling, there the action lies / In his true nature, and we our selues compeld / Euen to the teeth and forhead of our faults / To giue in euidence" (10 2176-80). Claudius's final hope, "All my be well" (2188), translates the spatial above, the place "where action lies / In his true nature," into a temporal prospect, the final judgement from which he begs deliverance. But all will not be well. The temporal unfolding of dramatic action will expose action in its true nature, and the truth of the world's appearances will be vindicated. Significance will then be radically corporeal, exogenous. The body, "Euen to the teeth and forhead," will bear, will in fact be, "euidence."

It is precisely the "euidence" of the body, however, that Hamlet, who happens upon the kneelng Claudius, misconstrues: the Prince who knows not seems confuses the physical disposition of the praying body with the spiritual efficacy of prayer. And as Hamlet's purpose, which is clearly in excess of the ghost's injunction, is to damn his uncle's soul, not merely dispense with his body, he fails to act. There is a sense, however, in which the spiritual efficacy of prayer cannot be separated from the dispositon of physical "effects," the enjoyment of material goods. For prayer fails Claudius not because of some deficiency of spirit or soul, but because he is unwilling or unable to renounce "Those effects" for which he committed the crime. Here it is property rather than psyche, praxis rather than ethos, that defines the essence of "to be": to be forgiven, to effect an internal transformation, is to renounce possessions, property, external paraphernalia. Thus, the irony reverberates against Hamlet, as the play "reads" the character who fails to "read" aright the "euidence " of the body. In the closet scene, moreover,

Hamlet's dramatic "deed," the killing of Polonius, renders ironic his attempt to "read" the recesses of Gertrude's soul.

Once again Hamlet would hold a mirror up to nature, human nature, his mother's: "You goe not till I set you vp a glasse / Where you may see the inmost part of you" (11 2233-34). Here, however, the glass allegedly does penetrate depths, and the nature it takes as its object is patently psycho-sexual: in this scene of compelled self-examination, mimesis assumes an implicitly novelistic, or at least explicitly non-Aristotelian, form. Hamlet's novelistic deployment of the "glass" does find an explicitly dramatic analogue or manifestation, as the psychological sounding of depths, the probing of psychic interiors, becomes a properly dramatic thrust of a sword, the literal penetration of a surface. But because it is a misdirected thrust — Hamlet mistakes Polonius for his better — it is an analogue that belies the claim to psychological probity. And what the thrust of a sword belies, the ghost explicitly interdicts: "this visitation / Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (2315-16). Hamlet's novelistic "purpose," the psychological inquisition that culminates in Gertrude's anguished cry, "Thou turnst mine eyes into my very soule" (2294), is itself turned, redefined in non-psychological, non-novelistic terms, as the ghost enjoins Hamlet to come between his mother and her fighting soul. Appropriately, Hamlet no longer compels introspection; rather, he recommends a course of action, a role that a woman might play, an explicitly theatrical construction of identity:

> Assume a vertue if you haue it not.
> That monster custome, who all
> sence doth eat
> Of habits deuillish, is angell yet in this
> That to vse of actions faire and good,
> He likewise giues a frock or Liuery
> That aptly is put on.[8]

Hamlet's parting advice to his mother recalls his earlier polemic against "seems," but only to reject its metaphysic of depth, its conflation of being and interiority. Virtue is here precisely "that which does not pass show," which is other than pure interiority. Not the internal transformation of

8 The lines beginning "That monster custome" (II 2366-71) do not appear in F1, which is the copy text for Wells's and Taylor's *Hamlet*. For reasons that I trust my essay makes clear, I am not concerned with the integrity of any given play-text. I therefore feel free to raid Q2 to suit my own purposes (Wells and Taylor give Q2 readings that are rejected by F1 in an appendix). I chose not to use an edition that follows Q2 for the simple reason that all such editions modernize spelling and punctuation. Shakespeare, for reasons that I trust my essay also makes clear, is not our contemporary.

consciousness, but the public deployment of the body, the "fashioning" of virtue that is "aptly" and indeed only "put on" in praxis, in the theatre of the world.

Now there is a sense in which nothing that transpires between Hamlet and Gertrude, indeed between anyone in Claudius's Denmark, remains "within," for there is virtually nothing that escapes surveillance. Paradoxically, however, Denmark is a world of "lawful espials" (8 1570), of eyes behind behind every arras, in which spying accomplishes nothing. The Polonius who observes Hamlet and Gertrude, for example, learns nothing of significance, least of all where "truth is hid, though it were hid indeede / Within the Center" (7 1089-90); like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he cannot pluck out the heart of Hamlet's mystery, if mystery and truth are in fact so located. Polonius is, of course, something of a blunderer, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are no match for Hamlet's verbal dexterity. Yet the incompetence of the spies cannot explain the failure of an activity that remains, despite its ubiquity, an epistemological impossibility. For if the truth of the appearance of things cannot be circumvented, as Claudius acknowleges in the prayer scene, neither can things be excavated for their hidden interiority, as Hamlet unwittingly attests to in the same scene. "Inner" and "outer," private and public, are not structurally discontinuous, but only temporarily out of joint. There is, therefore, no possibility of keeping a secret, at least permanently, nor any possibility of discerning a secret, at least prematurely. Hence, the futility, the epistemological impossibility, of spying.

Yet if inner and outer are not structurally discontinuous, there remains an apparent discontinuity within Hamlet himself, a much noted caesura between the figure who is deported and the figure who returns. And it is a discontinuity that troubles, precisely because it lacks obvious psychological motivation or explanation. Rather than "the maturation or development of 'character' that we have been taught to look for in Shakespeare," Barker argues, "there is a quasi-Brechtian discretion" between the pre- and post-England Hamlets (39). And so there is, which is precisely the point. For the "discretion" is not a deficiency in the play's design or execution, but the necessary consequence of transformation that is itself the displacement of "character," at least in the sense of privatized self-possession, from its sovereign position. Because the critical preoccupation with the development of ethos, with the continuity of the self in and through time, betrays a Shakespeare already thoroughly textualized, already fully assimilated to the novelistic, it cannot explain a "discretion" that is itself the assimilation of ethos to praxis:

> there's a speciall prouidence in the fall of a Sparrowe, 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 well come, the readines is

all, since no man ha's ought of what he leaues, what ist to
leaue betimes . (19 3433-38)

The unwittingly oxymoronic declarations of the earlier Hamlet — the public insistence on a secret singularity, the self-dramatizing refusal of the dramatic — become the fully conscious paradox of a willed abandonment of the volitional. Character remains an operable category, but henceforth it knows or manifests itself only through praxis, the action to which it consents but does not originate. The axis of individualization, as Hamlet learns from a riddling grave digger, is genealogical, and it implies structural determination, indeed providential determination, by birth, role, plot: "our last king Hamlet o'recame Fortenbrasse" on "the very day that young Hamlet was borne" (18 3112; 3115). One discontinuity, in a sense, resolves another, for if there are now two Hamlets, the Hamlet who is deported and the Hamlet who returns, there is no longer an implicitly novelistic subject, self-defined in opposition to the dramatic, and a properly dramatic imperative to action.

But what Hamlet means by "to come" in the most immediate sense — and to this too he consents, although his heart misgives — is the duel with Laertes. Claudius carefully scripts and stage manages the spectacle, and Hamlet obligingly plays his part. An earlier Hamlet might have attempted to discern hidden stratagems, to plummet hidden depths. Now, however, he plays his part, despite forebodings, in a script of unknown outcome. Or an earlier Hamlet might have attempted to revise the script, to recast, say, *The Murder of Gonzago* as *The Mousetrap*. Now, however, he consents to Claudius's plot, to the player king's deadly earnest player duel. Between the two there is again the transformation that is the trip to England, which is also the last of Hamlet's explicitly textual revisions or interventions:

Being thus benetted round with villainies,
Or I could make a prologue to my braines,
They had begunne the play, I sat me downe,
Deuisd a new commission, wrote it faire,
I once did hold it as our statists doe,
A baseness to write faire, and labourd much
How to forget that learning, but sir now
It did me yemans seruice. (19 3297-3304)

Hamlet's revisions to Claudius's letter, this not altogether earnest attempt to "forget that learning," recall his initial response to the ghost, the not altogether successful attempt to "wipe away all triuall fond records, / Alle sawes of bookes." Here, however, Hamlet's relation to the textual is explicitly theatrical or performative, not opposed to it, and the text is signed in the name of the father, not the unique self. That is, Hamlet seals the letter that sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death, a text that is effectively

a script, with his father's signet, the possession of which he experiences as providential. The assimilation of ethos to praxis is also the assimilation of words to deeds, texts to performance, the unique self to the patronymic son. What remains for Hamlet is only to consent to what is "to come," the duel with Laertes.

Claudius assures Laertes that Hamlet, who is "Most generous, and free from all contriuing" (17 2912), will not scrutinize the foils. And while this is manifestly not the Hamlet who stages *The Mousetrap*, there is a sense in which Claudius is right: Hamlet does not examine the foils because he has abandoned the futile attempt to discern hidden stratagems, to excavate secret depths. And what Hamlet no longer seeks to accomplish or discern by virtue of his own volition, the play accomplishes in and of itself: in the duel in which Hamlet is characterized as "fat" (and I insist that here "fat" means fat),[9] as body rather than consciousness, meaning itself becomes exogenous. The king of shreds and patches stages his most explicitly theatrical event, only to find that the theatrical, which had hitherto sustained him, now betrays him. All plotters are hoist on their own petards, and all the hidden stratagems are revealed in the common light of day. The corpses that litter the stage at the close of *Hamlet* are bodies that have given themselves up "in euidence," as evidence, as a vindication of the truth of theatrical appearances.

Now only one body litters — or, better, graces — the stage at the end of *Phèdre*: Phèdre's own. And death comes to her with the lyric gentleness that she requests from it: "J'ai voulu ... / Par un chemin plus lent descendre chez

9 The critical ingenuity that has gone into denying what seems to me the obvious meaning of the word is worthy of a paper in itself. Unfortunately, only two strategies can detain me here; one because it might have been developed by Hamlet himself; the other, because it is still very much with us. Of the first, Steevens's conjecture, which is based on Roberts's contention (1729) that the same actor who played Henry VIII played Hamlet, is representative: "fat" refers to the actor playing Hamlet, not Hamlet "himself." Later critics advance various candidates for the original Hamlet — Collier, in his *Memoirs of the Principal Actors in the Plays of Shakespeare* argues for Burbadge — but the point itself remains constant. The play-text, the ideal *Hamlet* and Hamlet, is thus rescued from the accidents and aberrations of performance and performers. Hamlet's advice to the players has apparently not gone unheeded (see the note on "fat" in Furness 446). The second strategy, the one that is still very much with us, could not be simpler: "fat," we are told, does not mean fat. The editor of the Arden edition, for example, glosses the word as "sweaty," as does the editor of the Riverside; the editor of the Signet gives it as both "sweaty" and "out of shape." These glosses are not, of course, totally arbitrary, as the *OED* does give "charged with moisture or odors" as a possible meaning for "fat," although never in relation to a person or character, which none of the above editions notes. And while this in no way argues against Shakespeare so using it, it does raise the possibility that the word may mean what an "untutored" audience invariably takes it to mean: Hamlet is fat.

les morts" (5 7). The body that might have littered the stage, Hippolyte's "corps défiguré" (5 6), appears only in the form of Théramène's *récit*:

> L'intrépide Hippolyte
> Voit voler en éclats tout son char fracassé;
> Dans les rênes lui-même il tombe embarrassé.
> Excusez ma douleur. Cette image cruelle
> Sera pour moi de pleurs une source éternelle.
> J'ai vu, Seigneur, j'ai vu votre malheureux fils
> Traîné par les chevaux que sa main a nourris.
> Il veut les rappeler, et sa voix les effraie;
> Ils courent. Tout son corps n'est bientôt qu'une plaie. (5 6)

The *bienséances* that relegate the body *in extremis*, be it extreme suffering or passion, to this discursivity are clearly non-Shakespearean. Nothing, in fact, more immediately signals the distance from Shakespeare, let alone the spectacular physicality of late Jacobean drama, than the decorums that govern the disposition of the body on the French neoclassical stage. "Cette image cruelle" will be a perpetual source of tears for the Théramène who witnesses Hippolyte's death, and "la sanglante image" (5 7) will forever haunt the Thésée who is responsible for his death. There is a sense, however, in which *Phèdre* itself eludes "la sanglante image," precisely by rendering it discursively.

Phèdre guards itself, then, against the possibility of a monstrous showing, very much in the manner specified by Aristotle:

> Now it is possible for the fearful or pathetic effect to come from the actors' appearance, but it is also possible for it to arise from the very structure of the events, and this is closer to the mark and characteristic of a better poet. Namely, the plot must be so structured, even without benefit of any visual effect, that the one who is hearing the events unroll shudders with fear and feels pity at what happens: which is what one would experience on hearing the plot of *Oedipus*. To set out to achieve this by means of the masks and costumes is less artistic, and requires technical support in the staging. As for those who do not set out to achieve the fearful through masks and costumes, but only the monstrous, they have nothing to do with tragedy at all. (1453b1-12)

For Aristotle, any direct recourse to *opsis* or spectacle on the level of content is the mark of an inferior poet: the more immediate the presentation of the fearful or the pathetic, the more "monstrous" the result. The *opsis* that Aristotle bans on the level of content, however, he celebrates as the essence of form: elsewhere in the *Poetics*, he compares a beautiful plot to a "single complete creature" (or as some translations have it, "the picture of a living creature," as Aristotle's term, *zoion*, can mean either a "unified living creature" or a creature's "inorganic structure") that is neither

tiny nor huge but is of a size that "can be taken in in a single view" (1451a5).[10] Aristotle subjects the excessively small to the same censure as the excessively large, but it is clearly the latter, the spatially uncontained, that he experiences as the most urgent of aesthetic threats. It is because of its relative brevity, for example, that tragedy is judged superior to epic: "For the more concentrated is more pleasurable than what is diluted with a great deal of time" (1462b3). Drama is not to participate in what Goethe calls the expansiveness of the novel, which, in Aristotle's terms, could only be the mark of its epic rather than dramatic inheritance. The *Poetics* does entertain the possibility of recasting the dramatic in the epic mode — Aristotle speculates on the effect of rewriting *Oedipus* "in as many verses as the *Iliad*" (1462b4) — but only as if the absurdity of the idea were self-evident. There is a sense, however, in which Aristotle's own example suggests otherwise.

For there is a curious blindness in Aristotle's celebration of *Oedipus* as the type of the "beautiful plot" or "concentrated effect," a blindness to the obvious fact that the play itself is finally about the "breakup of relations that are too closely established," too concentrated (Fry 43).[11] The play may indeed be "of a size to be taken in by the eye," as Aristotle maintains, but the "concentrated effect" also literally costs Oedipus his *kukloi* or (eye) balls, as Aristotle fails to note. Or *Oedipus* may achieve its formal perfection, as Aristotle maintains, by virtue of its conflation of recognition and reversal, which bends sequence back upon itself. The transformation of the linear into the cotemporal, however, which bends the sequence of generations back upon itself, is precisely the source of Oedipus's tragedy, and this too Aristotle fails to note. There is a sense, then, in which Aristotle's celebration of form as *opsis* or the spatially contained, which necessarily involves an emphasis on likenesses and affinities, on the praise of the craftsman who has an 'eye for resemblances,' paradoxically tends to "ensure the coming to light of just the sort of unruliness that the observance of proportion is meant to suppress" (Fry 12). Certainly if *Oedipus* were less concentrated, less easily "taken in by the eye," its tragic content could not be so easily conflated with its formal perfection. And what is true of the Aristotelian celebration of form in relation to Sophocles's *Oedipus* is no less true of the neoclassical "règles du poème dramatique" in relation to *Phèdre*. Seventeenth-century French dramatists tended to speak of *la tragédie*, not *le tragique* (a distinction not fully operable in English): tragedy was primarily a matter of form, of a certain elevation of style and characterization, rather than any essence of "tragicalness." There is a sense, however, in which *Phèdre* effaces the

10 See Else's note on the term *zoion* (152).

11 This portion of my argument takes a great deal from Fry's chapter on the *Poetics*, "Aristotle as Oedipus," (11-46).

distinction between the two. I have argued that *Hamlet* seeks to guard itself against any conflation of being and interiority, despite the fact that the novel, which fully realizes the conflation, claims Hamlet for its own. *Phèdre*, I now want to argue, seeks to guard itself against the threat of a monstrous showing, a monstrous imbrication of form and content (to repeat the familiar example: any direct presentation of Hippolyte's defeat by the dragon-monster of Neptune would itself be monstrous). It succeeds, however, only in identifying its own generic dispensation, its own formal self, as the monstrous.

"Le dessein en est pris," Hippolyte declares in the opening line of *Phèdre*, "je pars, cher Théramène, / Et quitte le séjour de l'aimable Trézène" (1 1). But Hippolyte does not depart. "Madame, avant que de partir, / J'ai cru de votre sort vous devoir avertir" (2 2), Hippolyte tells Aricie after learning of his father's supposed death. And still he lingers. "Théramène, fuyons" (2 6) he enjoins his friend after learning of Phèdre's illicit love. And still he remains. Each of these aborted departures is, of course, open to a psychological reading, and each responds to a specific contingency of plot. All are equally open, however, to the identical formal explanation. For as the first word of the first line of the play suggests, the "dessein" is already fully in place, and "le dessin" in its explicitly aesthetic sense (up until the end of the eighteenth century, *dessein* included the meanings that modern usage specifies in *dessein* and *dessin*)[12] involves the unity of place, which by definition prohibits any Hamlet-like departure for distant shores. Trézène is in fact a prison, much more so than Claudius's Denmark, and there is no exit. Thésée is temporarily absent and presumed dead, but, like the ghost of old Hamlet, he returns, although with disastrous consequences. Hippolyte, like Hamlet, is exiled, but he travels no further than the periphery of Trézène. The exile is his second, and it is telling that it is inefficacious. For if once Phèdre enjoyed a respite from the burden of Hippolyte's presence — she is the agent of his original exile, which, like his death, enters the play only as narrative, not event — *Phèdre* itself admits of no egress from the burden of physical proximity.

No egress from proximity, yet no possibility of physical contact, for if the unity of place begets the former, *les bienséances* prohibit the latter:

> Voilà mon coeur. C'est là que ta main doit frapper.
> Impatient déjà d'expier son offense,
> Au-devant de ton bras je le sens qui s'avance.
> Frappe. O si tu le crois indigne de tes coups,

12 For a reading of the play based on the interchangeability of *dessein* and *dessin*, see Phillips 411-20.

> Si ta haine m'envie un supplice si doux,
> Ou si d'un sang trop vil ta main serait trempée
> Au défaut de ton bras prête-moi ton épée.
> Donne. (2 5)

Nowhere is the prohibition against men and women touching each other on stage more palpable than here, in the threat of its violation: in lieu of the hand that Hippolyte withholds, Phèdre grasps the sword that she hopes will become the instrument of her death. The dramaturgical restrictions that govern Racine's stage are fully operable, and they serve him well. In Seneca, for example, who labors under no such restrictions, the encounter degenerates into farce: Phèdre more or less assaults Hippolyte, who demands she remove her wanton hands from his chaste body. In Racine, however, hands never quite touch the body, although the sense of a taboo nearly violated, contact nearly made, accounts for the intense erotic energy of the scene. But the question remains: precisely what taboo? The prohibition against incest, and thus a psycho-sexual taboo? Or the prohibition against touching on stage, and thus a theatrical taboo?

For there is a sense in which the one is homologous with, if not indistinguishable from, the other: both the incest taboo and the neoclassical stage involve a relation of physical proximity and physical prohibition, a nearness that begets desire and a restraint that demands distance. In his Preface to the play, Racine is at pains to assure his "lecteurs" that "les passions n'y sont présentées aux yeux que pour *montrer* tout le désordre dont elles sont cause" (my italics). His purposes are overtly didactic and they presuppose the most rigid of demarcations: the "désordre" that is "shown" on the level of content is not to be confused with the ethical status and efficacy of dramatic showing. It is difficult to separate, however, the "désordre" that the play dramatizes, the tension between Phèdre's desire and her moral restraint, from the conventions that govern dramatization itself. The play's primary figure for "désordre" is the word that appears some eighteen times in the text, *le monstre*. And it is, of course, only the word that does appear, for if Racine is to avoid "monstrous spectacles," a monstrous imbrication of content and form, actual monsters (there is in fact only one) can appear only in the form of *un récit*. But as with the "désordre" that is the threat of incest or incestuous desire, which tends to blur the distinction between form and content, the monstrous is perhaps best considered not only as a primary figure in the play, but as a primary figure for the play, the demonic counterpart to Aristotle's "beautiful plot" or "well-proportioned beast." The word *le monstre* is etymologically related to *montrer* — *le monstre* once meant,

among other things, a spectacle or representation[13] — and what is finally monstrous about *Phèdre* is the play's own signifying medium, theatrical accessibility itself.

The etymological connection that binds *le monstre* to *montrer*, the monstrous to visuality or visibility, implicitly informs Thésée's response to his son's supposed transgression — for Thésée, Hippolyte is precisely the *monstre qui se montre*: "Perfide, oses-tu bien te *montrer* devant moi? / *Monstre*, qu'a trop longtemps épargné le tonnerre, / Reste impur des brigands dont j'ai purgé la terre" (4 2; my italics). Thésée spends his life purging the world of monsters only to see in his son one more figure of the monstrous. Or, better, Thésée sees in his son's willingness to be seen, to show himself, the very essence of the monstrous. He thus banishes him from his sight, and calls down upon him the monstrous death that will overtake him at the periphery of the play's geographical locale. The hitherto absent father, the monster killer, and the newly exiled son, who will be killed by a monster, exchange positions in the play's radically confined and confining structure of representation. Exchange positions, in fact, twice, for the Thésée who returns only to banish his son ultimately calls down upon himself an analogous fate. And what Thésée found most monstrous in Hippolyte, his willingness to be seen or show himself, becomes for Thésée the punishment of being seen:

> De l'univers entier je voudrais me bannir.
> Tout semble s'élever contre mon injustice.
> L'éclat de mon nom même augmente mon supplice.
> Moins connu des mortels, je me cacherais mieux. (5 7)

Thésée's punishment is that he will be forever "taken in by the eye": even as he leaves the stage proper, he acknowledges that henceforth all the universe will be witness to his injustice.

Prior to taking the stage, however, prior to his return to Trézène, all the universe bore witness to his heroism, to what Hippolyte terms "ses nobles exploits" (1 1):

> Ne pourrai-je, en fuyant un indigne repos,
> D'un sang plus glorieux teindre mes javelots?
> Vous n'aviez pas encore atteint l'âge où je touche,
> Déjà plus d'un tyran, plus d'un monstre farouche
> Avait de votre bras senti la pesanteur;

13 On the figure of the monster in classical French aesthetic theory, see Merlin 179-93. On the specific connection between *le monstre* and *montrer* in *Phèdre*, and Hippolyte's status as *le monstre qui se montre*, see Czerniecki 1012-30.

> Déjà, de l'insolence heureux persécuteur,
> Vous aviez des deux mers assuré les rivages. (3 5)

Hippolyte is here suing for Thésée's permission to quit Trézène, albeit for reasons, among which is Phèdre's confession of love, that he fails to acknowledge. Yet if one were to take Hippolyte at his word — "Souffrez," he enjoins his father, "si quelque monstre a pu vous échapper, / Que j'apport à vos pieds sa dépouille honorable" (3 5) — there is a sense in which the world no longer affords opportunities for "noble exploits." For Hippolyte, one noble deed, the slaying of even one monster, might excuse all: "Dans mes lâches soupirs d'autant plus méprisable, / Qu'un long amas d'honneurs rend Thésée excusable, / Qu'aucuns monstres par moi domptés jusqu'aujourd'hui / Ne m'ont acquis le droit de faillir comme lui" (1 1). But unlike Thésée's multiple "failings," his wildly profligate life, Hippolyte's single "failing," his forbidden love for Aricie, lacks the justification of an otherwise heroic existence. There is a sense, then, in which the passage from the father, whose fame is "ses nobles exploits," to the son, who is known for what Aricie calls "un courage inflexible" (2 1), is also the exhaustion of a certain form of heroism.

Hippolyte cannot emulate his father's noble deeds and Racine cannot present them directly: indeed, all praxis or action, tends to gain access to Racine's stage only in the form of a "récit de ses nobles exploits," as Hippolyte terms Théramène's stories of his father. Or if action there must be, it is delegated to the servant class, to, say, an Oenone, who, in her effort to protect Phèdre, brings the false accusation against Hippolyte. Racine explains this departure from the source — in Euripides's *Hippolytos*, Phèdre herself makes the accusation — in terms that conflate the ethical and the social:

> J'ai même pris soin de la rendre un peu moins odieuse qu'elle n'est dans les tragédies des Anciens, où elle se résout d'elle-même à accuser Hippolyte. J'ai cru que la calomnie avait quelque chose de trop bas et de trop noir pour la mettre dans la bouche d'une princesse.

But what seems truly incompatible with Phèdre's sublimity is any vulgar jockeying for practical advantage (Auerbach 384), any commitment to the life of action, which, as in Yeats, is best left to servants. And it is here that Racine is both deeply faithful to and deeply in conflict with "les tragédies des Anciens," at least as explicated by Aristotle. Faithful, because for Aristotle "role," be it construed in social or dramatic terms, enjoys priority over "character," and for Racine the role of Princess, the status of Princess, is itself a full explanation of motives. But also in conflict with "les tragédies des Anciens," because the praxis that is for Aristotle the heart of any plot,

the plot that is the heart of any tragedy, becomes in Racine so much getting and doing, an impurity that is to be admitted only as narrative or undertaken only by servants. Both in *Phèdre* and for *Phèdre* the life of heroic action, the histrionics of the noble deed, belong to a not very distant past: the heroes of Racine's older rival, Corneille, like Racine's own Thésée prior to his entry onto the stage, have the universe for their witness in a positive sense, and whatever sacrifice their theatrical visibility entails, it is more than compensated for by the admiring glance that the world returns to them.[14] But not so in *Phèdre*. The Thésée who was once an heroic cynosure quits the stage with the knowledge that henceforth his visibility, his theatrical accessibility, will be the condition of his punishment.

Thésée quits the stage, that is, as Phèdre enters it:

> Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent!
> Quelle importune main, en formant tous ces noeuds,
> À pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux?
> Tout m'afflige et me nuit, et conspire à me nuire. (1 3)

This is Phèdre's second sustained utterance in the play, and like Hamlet's polemic against "incky cloaks" and the like, it too is metatheatrical, concerned with the external and explicitly theatrical paraphernalia of identity. Like Hamlet, moreover, Phèdre only reluctantly acquiesces to this paraphernalia, the "voiles" that are the condition of her access to theatrical representation, which, as Oenone complains, she both seeks and eschews:

> Vous-même, rappelant votre force première,
> Vous vouliez vous montrer et revoir la lumière.
> Vous la voyez, Madame, et prête à vous cacher,
> Vous haissez le jour que vous veniez chercher? (1 3)

Phèdre's oscillation between the desire to reveal and conceal herself is ultimately irrelevant, for *Phèdre*, no less than *Hamlet*, admits of no secrets, no hidden interiority. As Hippolyte says, "Le dessein est en pris," and "le dessein" provides no egress from theatrical accessibility. Or as Phèdre might have said, "les noeuds" are ineluctable (*le noeud* is a familiar seventeenth-century term for a complication of plot), and *les noeuds* provide no secret spaces, psychic or social. Hippolyte will imagine "un plus noble dessein" (5 1), marriage with Aricie, and Phèdre will place Hippolyte in her own "dessein" (2 5), the descent into the labyrinth. Phèdre's plan is very much a search for a secret or private place — she proposes to descend with

14 I am more or less paraphrasing Jean Starobinski (71) here.

Hippolyte and without her sister's guiding thread, and hence with virtually no possibility of returning — but it succeeds only in exposing her as a "monstre" (2 5) in Hippolyte's eyes. Oenone intervenes to protect Phèdre from a generalized exposure — "Évitez des témoins odieux; / Venez, rentrez, fuyez une honte certaine" (2 5) — but by definition "une honte certaine" cannot be escaped. Phèdre's most characteristic question is "Où me cacher?" but as she herself acknowledges, "tout l'univers est plein de mes aieux" (4 6), which means that the only possible response is nowhere. Indeed, even before she takes the stage, her body, "atteinte d'un mal qu'elle s'obstine à taire" (1 1), bears witness to what Racine's Preface calls "la seule pensée du crime," to an interiority already effectively exposed. Or as Claudius might put it, Phèdre's body is already given up "in eudience," as evidence. For in *Phèdre*, all the universe seems to exist only to observe, and in observing condemn.

There is a sense, however, in which Claudius's term cannot be applied to *Phèdre*, for there is a sense in which there are no bodies on Racine's stage, or at least no bodies in possession of specificity or density. Phèdre is no doubt beautiful, but in the manner of what Barthes calls "une bienséance, un trait de class, non une disposition anatomique" (24). Certainly no "fat" or "sweaty" princes grace Racine's stage, although his characters do tend to betray a vestigial physicality: they blush. "Ah! s'il vous faut rougir," Oenone entreats Phèdre, "rougissez d'un silence / Qui de vos maux encore aigrit la violence" (1 3). But as Phèdre well knows, the body has already spoken what the mouth would repress: "la rougeur me couvre le visage: / Je te laisse trop voir mes honteuses douleurs, / Et mes yeux, malgré moi, se remplissent de pleurs" (1 3). And as Phèdre's body in relation to her love for Hippolyte, so Hippolyte's body in relation to his love for Aricie: "Le nom d'amant peut-être offense son courage," Ismène assures Aricie, "Mais il en a les yeux, s'il n'en a le langage" (2 1). In the most Hamlet-like of moments, Thésée bemoans the fact that in Trézène one can smile and smile and be a villain: "Et ne devrait-on pas à des signes certains / Reconnaître le coeur des perfides humains?" (4 2). But the signs are only too "certains," Thésée's obtuseness notwithstanding, and among them is to be counted the utter legibility of the body (a legibility that tends, in fact, to displace the specifically physical, to make of the body a pure sign). It is, then, thoroughly appropriate that the temple of the god who is fatal to perjurers and dissemblers should stand at the periphery of Trézène: *Phèdre* is itself proof against dissembling.

Proof against dissembling, however, not because "la seule pensée du crime y est regardée avec autant d'horreur que le crime même," as Racine's Preface would have it, but because "la seule pensée" simply as *pensée* is the very essence of "le crime," of guilt:

Dans *Phèdre*, les choses ne sont pas cachées parce qu'elles sont coupables (ce serait là une vue prosaique, celle d'Oenone, par example, pour qui la faute de Phèdre n'est que contingente, liée à la vie de Thésée); les choses sont coupables du moment même où elles sont cachées ... La culpabilité objective de Phèdre (l'adultère, l'inceste) est en somme une construction postiche, destinée à naturaliser la souffrance du secret, à transformer utilement la forme en contenu ... L'homme souffre d'une forme. C'est ce que Racine exprime très bien à propos de Phèdre, quand il dit que pour elle le crime même est une punition. Tout l'effort de Phèdre consiste à *remplir* sa faute. (122)

For Barthes, "la seule pensée du crime" is culpable not because of the specific nature of the crime it contemplates, "l'adultère, l'inceste," but because it betrays an interiority that is already and always guilty. The point is well taken, although the rather Dantean remark that Barthes ascribes to Racine, "pour elle [Phèdre] le crime même est une punition," is not exactly Racine's. The final line of the first paragraph of the Preface, which is where Barthes's note sends us, reads "son crime est plutôt une punition des Dieux qu'un mouvement de sa volonté," which is not quite the same thing as the punishment is the crime. Or perhaps Barthes has in mind the passage quoted above, "la seule pensée du crime y est regardée avec autant d'horreur que le crime même," although this too is not quite the same thing. Clearly the Preface worries the relation between "le crime même" and "la seule pensée du crime," praxis and ethos, although its precise nature seems uncertain, both within the Preface itself and between the Preface and play. A crime that is "plutôt une punition des Dieux qu'un mouvement de sa volonté," for example, is a destiny, not a psychology, although if the mere idea of a crime is to be regarded with the same horror as the crime itself, destiny must be bound to psychology. "Le crime même," moreover, proves to be only "une déclaration d'amour," which is hardly praxis in any Aristotelian sense of the term, and even this is a contingent transgression ("liée à la vie de Thésée"), at best tangentially related to ethos. The sublimity of the declaration is, of course, one of the great pleasures of *Phèdre* — Barthes is certainly right in arguing that the play is now received as an ensemble of discrete *tirades* (135), much as *Hamlet* has become a backdrop for the great soliloquies — there is a sense in which it is strictly redundant. For *Phèdre* is best characterized not as a play in which "la seule pensée du crime y est regardée avec autant d'horreur que le crime même," but as a play in which "la seule pensée" is already and always seen. "Importune," Phèdre pleads with Oenone, "peux-tu souhaiter qu'on me voie?" (3 1), but Phèdre has no resources other than to fulfill her transgression, which is to proclaim it, to make it be seen. Barthes is quite right in arguing that *Phèdre* proposes "une identification de l'intériorité à la culpabilité" (122). The very interiority that the play judges culpable, however, it also disallows. Phèdre is condemned for what she does not possess.

"O god Horatio," Hamlet speculates in his dying moments, "what a wounded name / Things standing thvs vnknowne, shall liue behind me?" (19 3565-66). And what in fact does "liue behind" or beyond Hamlet, the discourse of the secret singularity, the culture of the book, is nothing that *Hamlet* or finally even Hamlet would acknowledge as its or his own. But there is a sense in which nothing lives beyond or is generated by *Phèdre*, at least not for Racine as a secular dramatist: the rest, as Hamlet says, is silence. There is much to regret in Racine's silence, and no dearth of explanations for it. The most obvious of these — Racine was granted the post of historiographer royal — may well be the most compelling. Certainly explanations that impute explicitly aesthetic anxieties or motives to Racine, the most relentlessly careerist of men, seem somehow naive, although it is a naivete that I intend to risk. For to the extent that the neoclassical aesthetic labours to render representation rigorously adequate to its content, *Phèdre* can hardly be celebrated as the supreme accomplishment of the neoclassical stage. Far from ideally adequating the one with the other, *Phèdre* is a tragedy of form, of genre. For Barthes, this means that "la culpabilité objective de Phèdre ... est en somme une construction postiche, destinée à naturaliser la souffrance du secret, à transformer utilement la forme en contenu." A play that relentlessly transforms form into content, the better to naturalize "la souffrance du secret," may, however, also be a play in which content is in search of a different form, a different generic dispensation. The silence that follows *Phèdre* may, then, be said to await or beckon all that *Hamlet* resists, the discourse and culture of the secret singularity.

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Cervantes et Tirso face aux performatifs: *Don Quichotte* et *Don Juan*

Bien que *l'illusion* du caractère autonome du littéraire, tout comme de l'art en général, naisse du projet émancipateur des Lumières, dans sa tentative d'établir une science, une morale et un art qui n'obéiraient, respectivement, qu'à la seule norme scientifique, éthique et esthétique, c'est seulement à une époque très récente que les études littéraires ont commencé à isoler leur objet d'étude.[1] Telle était la force de l'historicisme (dans ses différentes modalités) et de l'identification des études philologiques avec ses objectifs et ses méthodes de travail depuis la Renaissance européenne. Ainsi, c'est au XX^e siècle — et sous l'impact exercé presque simultanément par le structuralisme linguistique, par la sémiotique et par le formalisme russe — que les études littéraires portent leur attention sur ce qu'on a appelé "la littérarité" ou sur les "formes" conçues comme *structures,* c'est-à-dire sur les principes de composition du "tout," du *texte,* plutôt que sur les composantes de celui-ci dans leurs origines et leur développement historique. Sémiotique et philologie se retrouvent donc face-à-face dans leur premier contact, comme deux ennemies irréconciliables. La première se donne comme *synchronie,* système de signes organisé selon des axes d'opposition (comme la phonologie saussurienne); la seconde cherche la *diachronie* d'éléments isolés et dont l'étude ignore la totalité dans laquelle ces éléments s'inscrivent (comme la *phonétique* — toujours diachronique — de Saussure). Une opposition mal comprise et incontestée entre diachronie et synchronie[2]

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2 Dès 1927, Juri Tynianov et Roman Jakobson dénoncent la synchronie saussurienne comme étant une "illusion" (cf L. Mateika et K. Pomorska); un an plus tard, Jakobson propose la transformation de la phonétique historique ("lois phonétiques" pour Saussure, comme pour les néogrammairiens) en une "histoire des systèmes phonémiques," projet que réalisera par la suite André Martinet dans son livre. Mais otte branche linguistique et son écho postérieur dans le structuralisme de Prague ne fut pas celle qui encouragea les structuralismes anthropologique, littéraire et même linguistique dans le reste de l'Europe

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