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Direct Address and Double Dealing: A Study of Subversive Stage Convention

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Monologic discourse must be as old as the history of drama itself. Even today, in storytelling cultures such as Africa and elsewhere, the singular performer is a commonplace. As a singular performer he, and it is more usually a "he", demonstrates a capacity to transform himself from narrator into character, commentator, animal, god, spirit and even, sometimes, into a natural event. In the Tudor period, one can also point to a multiplicity of forms of such modes of discourse in the drama as prologue, epilogue, soliloquy, aside, message—a kind of solo narrative—and to figures like Rumour, Time and Chorus. Most often these kinds fall into the category of direct address to the audience, the aspect of performance with which this paper is concerned. Problematically, it is vital also to recognise that such discourses are communicated as much through the attitude, body and voice—the style—of the performer as through the mere verbal content of the message. These we can, of course, only recover hazily from the written evidence of the texts which we have inherited. Furthermore, although our own practice may usefully inform such hypothetical "restoration", one of the limitations of an article is that even this restorative practice can only be made manifest at a further remove, through written description. However

well fashioned, such description will, like the chewing gum on the bedpost, offer even less flavour of the effect, affect or indeed effectiveness which may be adduced from such monologues when performed. With this reservation in mind, and making an earnest appeal to readers to recover memories of the experience of actual performances as best they can, this paper will embrace the task of representing what purports to be a theatrical, that is, a performed convention.

To begin with an example, here are the opening nine lines of Hamlet's first soliloquy:

> O that this too too solid flesh would melt
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
> Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God! God!
> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. That it should come to this! (I. ii.129-37)

The most familiar notion of soliloquy is that it is a private musing, overheard by the audience, and intended to reveal something of a character's inward state of mind. It is thus a convention which dramatises the internalised debate, the thought process, the emotional truth otherwise submerged beneath the demands of social propriety. Manfred Pfister goes so far as to interpret Hamlet's soliloquies as a specific, possibly deliberate reflection of character, of, as he puts it "his sense of isolation, his problematic individuality, and his tendency to indulge in introspection" (p. 134). A convention of writing and performance has become itself an indicator of an inferred psychological condition.

If, then, we interpret soliloquy as synonymous with interior monologue, let us imagine it performed instead as direct address. Immediately expectations are subverted. Direct address shifts our perception and reception of the words; they acquire a more direct import for us. As members of the audience we will feel ourselves shifted from spectatorship, from a somewhat distanced, reflective and rather judgemental perception, to one of nearer engagement, a position in which, phenomenologically, we become more closely aligned with the character's predicament. That is, although the words remain the same, and our sense of the character's inward struggle remains intact, the meaning is experienced differently; a disturbance of our perception occurs which gives greater scope to

the power of the imaginary world of the play. Our positioning as audience is less secure. The distance from the character and the action on stage has been subverted in favour of greater involvement. Direct address also gives greater authority to the character and, and perhaps especially, to the performer, who, to their mutual advantage, achieve power over the audience. It is to examine the scope and scale of this power as it may have been exercised in drama of the sixteenth century that this paper aspires.

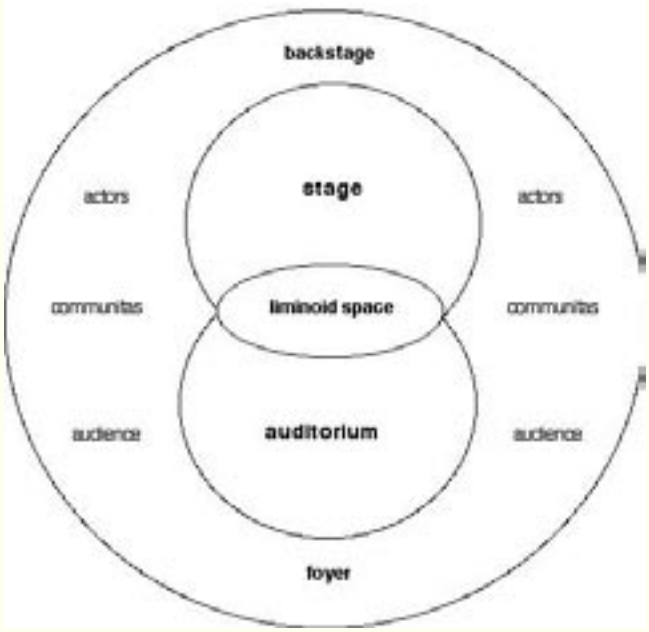
Now, I freely admit that the genesis of this paper was a performance given at Warwick Arts Centre of Peter Brook's *La Tragédie d'Hamlet*. Amongst a great number of significant surprises, the play set off from the soliloquy cited above. The production, therefore, dispensed with the opening scene on the battlements, the first appearance of the ghost, and the whole of Claudius' *apologia* for his and Gertrude's "o'erhasty marriage" (II.ii.57). Furthermore, the soliloquy was transformed in its function and meaning, as I have previously tried to indicate, by the fact that William Nadylam, the black Hamlet, delivered it as direct address to the audience. Thus the erstwhile "soliloquy", the internal monologue, introspective device, was transformed into a dynamic interplay with the audience. The whole process of the question of Hamlet, to borrow Harry Levin's engaging title, took on a very different meaning as it progressed. The audience found themselves as much the subject of the questions raised as did the characters. This was especially true even in the ending, when all the dead rose up again from the floor, advanced upon the audience and, directly addressing them in one voice, pronounced the key first question of the play, not abandoned, as we had imagined, but re-visioned: "Qui est là?". In light of this, my main point would be that direct address had played a significant part in foregrounding not only issues of the moral and consequential notions of appearance and reality, mother/son/lover relationships or revenge, but also, in the experience of the performance, the way we had understood the relationship between the performance and ourselves, the way that the idea of *communitas* had been incorporated within the experience of theatre. In his *The Shifting Point*, Peter Brook makes this clear:

> The theatre must get away from creating another world, beyond the fourth wall into which the spectator can escape. It must attempt to create a more intense perception at the heart of our world. If one wants the actor to be on a level with the world of the spectator, a performance has to become a meeting, a dynamic relationship… Theatre only exists at the precise moment when these two worlds—that of the actors and that of the audience—meet. (pp. 235-36)

And within that statement is encapsulated another belief of Brook's, mythical perhaps, that the Tudor theatre in general and Shakespeare in particular somehow embodied this principle, a principle which has, in the course of history, been lost and which Brook himself has sought to recover.

The subversive nature of the convention of direct address relates to the theme of "outsiders within" most directly when confronting this idea of *communitas* in theatre. Erving Goffman promotes his analysis of social performance through the use of a theatrical paradigm, and borrowing from him we can imagine, first, a diagram with a containing circle (Fig. 1). The outer circle represents the larger concept of *communitas*, the embracing concept of a "culture" which, with all its loopholes and adventitious occurrences, is where we may be said to belong. Contained within the outer circle are two smaller circles overlapping in the manner of a Venn diagram, which can be a model for that singular event which we call theatre and which may be interpreted as a microcosm of the larger *communitas*. One circle is the actors' space; the other belongs to the audience. Each has two divisions, what Goffman would call a "front" and a "backstage". The audience once in the auditorium follow the conventions of spectatorship; the actors on their stage follow conventions of performance. In their respective "tiring rooms" they return to more relaxed and familiar social interactions, no less rule-determined, perhaps, but separated from each other and thus free from the theatrical conventions described above.

Figure 1



However, if audience members behave in a way which diverges from the conventions of spectatorship, as Erasmus pointed out, they outlaw themselves and deserve either to be restrained or forcibly removed. By the same token it could be argued that an actor who steps out of the spectacle to engage the audience with direct address is guilty of a similar solecism, transgressing the agreed order of the theatre. The actor becomes, in that sense, an outsider, however momentarily, to the performance. He inhabits what Victor Turner terms a liminoid

space betwixt and between the performance and the audience, where the rules, if they exist at all, will be ill-defined, a space in which, potentially, anything could happen. In stepping outside in this fashion, the actor/character becomes a double dealer, apparently subverting the performances of his fellow actors and pretending to fellowship with the audience, even acting as a sort of go-between. Yet there is, even in this, an underlying dishonesty, because direct address most often appears founded upon the assumption that audiences will be powerless to respond in contravention of the conventions of spectatorship. So direct address asserts a certain relationship of power, in which the actor/character is privileged to a high degree, in contrast to the audience and to his fellow characters/actors. Paradoxically, in these circumstances, the actor usually retains sufficient residue of his fictional self for the audience to accept his duality, his double dealing, his subversion of the fictive "truth", and his fellow actors often seem to behave as if they hadn't even noticed. All of which would seem to indicate that this double dealing must be regarded by everyone involved as in some way acceptable and fulfilling a function which is both allowed and sustaining of the larger frame of the performance. While it has to be admitted that not every play exhibits this convention of direct address, a review of a few select examples from the Tudor repertoire will give support to the general point and also demonstrate how it may have been differently put to use with different implications in a range of different theatrical environments.

Beginning, then, near the very end of the historical period, there is a strong reason for looking at the case of Iago. He is given a very special place of privilege in relation to the audience, and his moments alone with them provide a significant amount of plot material, as well as character self-presentation. In Act I, Roderigo and the audience hear from Iago that he is not what he is. In his first monologue at the end of Act I, the audience is presented through Iago with his intention to lead the Moor by the nose. The character confirms for us how he makes "my fool my purse" (I.iii.381), how he can gain advantage of Othello, who "holds me well" (388) and has "a free and open nature" (397), how his planned revenge is gradually formulating, and how "Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (402). Early in Act II, he rehearses and amplifies this theme for the audience:

> That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it;
> That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit:
> The Moor, howbe't that I endure him not,

Is of a constant, noble, loving nature;
And I dare think, he'll prove to Desdemona
A most dear husband: now I do love her too,
Not out of absolute lust, (though peradventure
I stand accountant for as great a sin)
But partly led to diet my revenge,
For that I do suspect the lustful Moor
Hath leap'd into my seat, the thought whereof
Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards,
And nothing can, nor shall content my soul,
Till I am even with him, wife, for wife:
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor,
At least, into a jealousy so strong,
That judgement cannot cure. (II.i.281–97)

It is not difficult to accept that these monologues are in fact directly addressed to the audience. We are given information, our understanding of the situation is led along, that information is inflected in ways which suit the character, for sure, but also operate through the duality of an exchange between the play-world and the world of the performance: Iago is intermediary to our developing perception of the fictive world which he inhabits. The character is speaking behind the backs of the other characters and opening up a sphere of action which we are invited to watch as it unfolds. The frequently asserted parallel between Iago's behaviour and that of the sixteenth-century Vice figure adds to this impression. Iago's duplicity is both a character trait and a subversive element in our viewing of the play.

A second example from Act IV shows how this becomes, in the course of the play, extended into an assumption of the audience's complicity in his plots and actions:

Iago. Now will I question Cassio of Bianca;
A housewife that by selling her desires
Buys herself bread and clothes: it is a creature
That dotes on Cassio: as 'tis the strumpet's plague
To beguile many, and be beguil'd by one.
[*Enter* Cassio]
He, when he hears of her, cannot refrain
From the excess of laughter: here he comes:
As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad. (IV.i.93–100)

By this point in the play, he behaves as if he can assume that we, the audience, are prepared to go along with this act of deception. He acts as an obliging Master

of Ceremonies introducing us to a performance which will lead Othello forward to the extremity of his jealousy. Through the means of direct address, the character of Iago is able to draw the audience into the toils of the murderous situation which has been created by him. The audience is, one might say, abused by this behaviour, and their capacity to judge Othello is subverted. Through the infringement of the liminoid space between stage and auditorium, the audience has been gradually and almost innocently, yet irresistibly, drawn in as accessory to the plot to bring Othello down.

But moving on from consideration of this late manifestation of the Vice, we can see in earlier examples how the principle of direct communication with the audience may be put to similar use. *Arden of Faversham*, for instance, gives good examples of this in practice. Alice has two monologic speeches in the opening scene. They each exhibit a clearly expressive function and might be considered soliloquies. She is certainly revealing the "set" of her character to the audience—her animosity and murderous intent towards Arden himself and her passion for Mosby. However, the writing of the speeches suggests that the actress is expected to share the words with the audience rather than speak them for herself. The second speech is especially interesting:

> [*Exit* Adam]
> *Alice*. Do, and one day I'll make amends for all.
> I know he loves me well but dares not come
> Because my husband is so jeal[i]ous,
> And these my narrow-prying neighbours blab,
> Hinder our meetings when we would confer.
> But if I live that block shall be removed,
> And Mosby, thou that comes to me by stealth,
> Shalt neither fear the biting speech of men
> Nor Arden's looks. As surely shall he die
> As I abhor him and love only thee. (i.132-40)

Occurring as it does in an interval between one character's leaving and another's arriving, the speech is almost like an aside, a secret revelation to the audience of a subtextual message. Despite this invitation to interpret this "aside" as a version of interior monologue the first five lines seem, on the contrary, to suggest direct address, particularly the use of the indicative reference to "he", "my husband" and "these my narrow-prying neighbours". The use of "he", "my" and "these" seems to locate Alice almost physically between the audience and these signifi-

cant others in her life. Similarly, her apostrophe of Mosby in the last four lines acquires a more dynamic meaning as an experience shared with the audience rather than as an expression of a personal and interiorised state of mind.

The significance of this is made more evident when considered beside other uses of monologue within the same play. In Scene iv, Franklin offers the audience an image of Arden in a state of "fretful jealousy" (iv.41). He paints a living portrait of his friend's physical and mental torments. "What grievous groans and overlading woes / Accompanies this gentle gentleman" (42-43), he says, following with an itemisation of actions suited to Arden's mood: the shaking of "his care-oppressed head", his eyes cast up "towards the Heavens" seeking "redress of wrong", his words involuntarily cut off as he is reminded of "his wife's dishonour" (44-51). All of this arrives at the summary, "So woe-begone, so inly charged with woe / Was never any lived and bare it so" (54-55). It has the power of a messenger speech whose only recipient can be the audience. The playwright is pleading sympathy for the victim of a murder still to be committed. The pull of the *communitas* to which I have referred is here powerfully present, and by this means the audience is recruited to Arden's cause. It is most surprising, therefore, that two lines later, after Franklin has retired, this sympathetic portrait is followed by a monologue from Michael:

> Conflicting thoughts encamped in my breast
> Awake me with the echo of their strokes;
> And I, a judge to censure either side,
> Can give to neither wished victory.
> My master's kindness pleads to me for life
> With just demand, and I must grant it him;
> My mistress, she hath forced me with an oath,
> For Susan's sake, the which I may not break,
> For that is nearer than a master's love;
> That grim-faced fellow, pitiless Black Will,
> And Shakebag, stern in bloody stratagem—
> Two rougher ruffians never lived in Kent—
> Have sworn my death if I infringe my vow,
> A dreadful thing to be consider'd of. (59-72)

In this evocation of "conflicting thoughts", there is an expository principle at work which is not altogether dissimilar to Franklin's previous portrait of Arden. We see here a sufferer in person juxtaposed with the previous image of a sufferer, and yet the character's suffering is manifested through the logical representa-

tion of a series of apparently inescapable obligations. Incrementally demanding, they climax in a vision of terror in which Michael foresees not only the murder of Arden but also his own demise. He conjures the ruffians' "ruthless hands" and "daggers drawn", and Arden himself "pleading for relief" yet "mangled by their ireful instruments" (73-78). The previous picture of Arden's pathetic state has been extended through Michael's speech to encompass his murder. The audience, in other words, while being asked by Michael to engage with his personal moral entanglement, is in fact being worked upon as observers and judges of the anticipated crime against Arden. As well as foregrounding empathy for Michael's terror and revealing an interest in his state of mind, the monologue, despite its development into a waking dream, operates rather to enhance in the audience the fear of violence and the sympathy to be accorded to its victims. Achieving this sense of immediacy in the event through the medium of direct address—an effect no doubt reinforced by the topicality of the piece when it was first performed—foregrounds once again the significance of theatre as a microcosm of the larger *communitas*.

Retreating further into the century, the tragedy of *Cambyses, King of Persia* offers further examples of interest with regard to direct address. The play may stand for a range of similar productions of the mid-century, and its possible performance at Court in 1560/1 places it within what might be termed, tentatively, a "tradition". Thomas Preston's play has in the course of history received more than its fair share of critical abuse because it is not Shakespeare, either in its poor command of verse forms, its awkward plotting of tragic and comic episodes or its shallow drawing of character. However, both in, and partly because of, such "weaknesses", it helpfully reveals something of how the period understood the relationship of an audience to its plays. The opening Prologue, for instance, while showing the characteristics of a varsity author, with its classical "authorities" and moralising lessons for an aspiring monarch, ends with a supplication to the audience craving "patience". The performance thus represents a kind of intrusion, however welcome, upon the time of the audience who are asked to give it welcome. The Prologue's final line, "I take my way. Behold, I see the players coming in" (35-36), reinforces this sense of the invasion of an existing situation by an alien group. The performance space, most probably a hall, then becomes a temporary environment shared between these two groups, the alien players and the insider audience. The existing community is given for a while a new dimension and dynamic.

This proposition can be tested further when the character of Ambidexter makes his appearance. Much has been written about the Vice figure, not least about his assumed relationship of intimacy with the audience, but there are a number of significant elements in the representation of Ambidexter which give insight into the contribution this figure makes to the overall effectiveness of performances of this earlier period. He announces himself, for instance, with "Stand away, stand away, for the passion of God!" (l. 126). This is unlike the more familiar "Make room", and we quickly understand why. Ambidexter proceeds to show off his grotesque armaments—the stage direction gives an indication of the style with an "old capcase on his head, an old pail about his hips for harness" (ll. 125-26) and so on. We can only imagine the no-doubt extravagant gestures with the "rake on his shoulder", for which space would be needed on the floor. The audience, of course, have also to be protected in some measure from the violence of the succeeding fights between Ambidexter and Huf, Ruf and Snuf. But my point is that the injunction to "stand away" makes sense only if the audience is understood to be within range of the action. This is, as I have indicated, most likely to be the case in the relatively informal audience arrangements of performance, where the stage space and the audience space would have been coterminous, that is in an aristocratic, school or university hall, and even at Court itself.

It is also clear from the text that Ambidexter will establish direct links with his audience. By turns he invites admiration for his absurd soldiership, complicity in his schemes to deceive other characters, sympathy for his discretion in face of the violence of Meretrix. He often provides a kind of moral commentary upon the action which has just passed or an introduction to that which is to come. His role, one way or another, is to put the audience wise, to oil the wheels of the performance as it proceeds. This is most apparent in his second main entrance, when he introduces himself with "Indeed, as ye say, I have been absent a long space" (l. 602). It is the "as ye say" which gives the game away, and the unspoken thought, "how clever of you to notice". Could the writer have known that the audience would respond in this way? Possibly not, unless the text succeeded the performance. But the main issue is that if such a response to the reappearance of the popular figure of the Vice is probable, that is, to be expected, then his function may be somewhat different from that which may be inferred from an interpretation only of character or theme in the play. The context must be that we are concerned predominantly with peripatetic companies of actors. Each performance, therefore, is undertaken in circumstances close to those to which I have

referred. The players as "strangers" are invited into an existing community to perform. For their performance to be effective, in the sense of getting its message across, they have to establish very quickly a rapport with their host group. Such a rapport for Ambidexter comes about through his direct address.

Given the context of an informal playing space such as a room set up for the occasion, however, the idea of the liminoid space must be revised. Whereas in a purpose-built theatre that space can be located easily between stage and auditorium, the hall situation elides these areas. In the absence of a distinct division, the space between audience and actor is everywhere and nowhere. More to the point, it can be transgressed wherever and whenever an actor/character chooses to do so. So the audience is vulnerable to this proximity of the actor and as a result lives in a state of enhanced excitement. Paradoxically, this relationship also leads to a kind of camaraderie, which could be seen as an essential ingredient in the reception of the travelling players and the play. The Vice emerges as a significant means by which the play may be made acceptable to the established *communitas* in a situation which might otherwise be inhospitable, even hostile. Ambidexter, by name and nature, is the perfect double dealer, both with regard to the other characters in the fiction itself and, perhaps to greater advantage, with regard to the audience he encounters as his accomplices and friends. Thus it is that his direct dealing with the audience serves to give the Vice an uncommon status and real power.

Retiring still further into the sixteenth century, we come to the plays of John Heywood, specifically *Johan, Johan*. It is well established that the play is a translation of a French farce which stays close in content to its source text. While the convention of direct address in this case derives as much from a French as from a native theatrical tradition, it seems to serve a similar purpose to that noted already. From the audience's point of view, it certainly privileges the speaker's version of events. In this case, that means that the audience are persuaded at first that Johan's indignation at his wife's misbehaviour may be well-founded. Within a very short space, however, his hesitations and alternating assertions as to whether he should or should not beat his wife for her misdemeanours persuade the audience that he is also part author of his own predicament:

> *Johan.* Beten, quoth a? Yea, but what and she therof dye?
> Than I may chaunce to be hanged shortly.
> And when I have beten her tyll she smoke,
> And gyven her many a[n] hundred stroke,

Thynke ye that she wyll amende yet?
Nay, by our lady, the devyll spede whyt!
Therefore I wyll not bete her at all -
And shall I not bete her? No, shall. (ll. 19-26)

This shifting indecision is spun out for over the first hundred lines of the play. It is a comic *tour de force*, with the character at every new turn drawing the audience further into his perception and experience of the world. The direct address fulfils the functions of personal confession, apparently unconscious self-revelation and direct appeal to the audience's consciousness of a wider world of folly and moral failing. It provides a unique opportunity for the playwright to satirise a gossip culture, shrewish women, lazy, corrupt and corrupting priests and so on. It also depends upon the skill of the performer in characterising Johan's indignation, frustration, jealousy and ineffectualness, and in achieving the comic timing necessary to deal climactically with the arrival of his wife Tyb:

Johan. And whan she cometh home she wyll begyn to chyde,
But she shall have her payment styk by her syde
For I shall order her for all her brawlyng
That she shall repent to go a catter wawlyng.
[*Enter* Tyb]
Tyb. Why, whom wylt thou beate, I say, thou knave?
Johan. Who, I, Tyb? None so God me save. (ll. 107-12)

The comic force of Johan's instant deflation in face of Tyb's arrival derives as much from the rapport which has been established between himself and the audience as from the sudden reversal effected by her entrance and her challenge to his bravado. In this case, the dramatic authority built up over the opening scene passes almost instantaneously to the new character. Tyb now rules the roost. However, Johan's relationship with the audience, so thoroughly established, is never abandoned, and the *sotto voce* aside, direct address in a particular form, is endlessly exploited, as he tries time and again wishfully to reassert himself. Most especially representative of the intimacy of a hall performance, however, is the episode in which Johan goes to take off his coat in order to fetch trestles for the dinner table:

Johan. Abyde a whyle, let me put of my gown.
But yet I am afrayde to lay it down,
For fere it shalbe sone stolen—
And yet it may lye safe ynough unstolen.

It may lye well here and I lyst—
But by cokkes soule here hath a dogge pyst.
And if I shulde lay it on the harth bare
It myght hap to be burned or I were ware,
Therfore I pray you take ye the payne
To kepe my gowne tyll I come agayne.

But yet he shall not have it by my fay,
He is so nere the dore he myght ron away;
But bycause that ye be trusty and sure
Ye shall kepe it and it be your pleasure;
And bycause it is arayde at the skyrt,
Whyle ye do nothyng—skrape of the dyrt.
Lo nowe am I redy to go to Syr Johan… (ll. 242–58)

I make no apology for citing this negotiation with the audience at such length because it moves the discussion into the area of direct audience contact—a kind of extension, it may be said, of the principles of direct address. Examples of this kind of intimacy are a particular feature of play-texts of the early part of the century. With the performance space in such cases now condensed and shared between actor and audience, a necessary concomitant will be that there is more opportunity for such moments to occur. Inevitably, the play will be experienced as a more immediate event, in which theatrical time and actual time may be at any moment interchangeable. As Bert O. States remarks, theatre in whatever form "is not a matter of the illusory, the mimetic, or the representational, but of a certain kind of *actual*" (p. 46), but, I would argue, nowhere is this more so than in the circumstances of hall performance. Johan's speech about his coat and where to leave it safely is a clear example of this "ontological confusion" (p. 47), poised between the actual and the virtual. The audience perceives the coat as belonging to the character in the fiction. This perception is then challenged when the actor presents his coat to members of the audience as if it actually existed. The playful suggestion that the coat might be stolen—that is, that this audience is not to be trusted—and the subsequent interplay with the man near the door belong to Heywood's source. He has, however, added the lines which invite the person, as if he has nothing else to do while watching the play, to "skrape of the dyrt" with which the coat has become "arayde at the skyrt". It feels as if we have been granted a brief insight into the realities of sixteenth-century theatre practice. Heywood must have understood what his actors could manage. He could

confidently write in a piece of interactive business with which their experience and skill would be able to cope.

Such interplay, pre-scripted or improvised and recorded, might well derive from the fact either that a household troupe is performing for its home crowd or that a visiting troupe has done its homework and knows how to exploit insider knowledge about particular individuals in the audience. Such "goosing" of familiar audience members is most obvious in Henry Medwall's play *Nature*. There are a number of incidents of audience involvement recorded in this script, but one in particular stands out in Part 1. Pryde, chief sin in the play, who shows a remarkable likeness to successive Vice figures, arrives back on the scene after an absence. Rather in the manner of Ambidexter, he greets the audience like old friends and then proceeds to ask after the character Man, who has just gone off to the stews. After a brief exchange with Sensualyte and Slouth he turns to the audience and says:

> Now must I to the stewes as fast as I may
> To fech thys gentleman!—but syrs, I say,
> Can any man here tell me the way?
> For I cam never there.
> Ye know the way, parde, of old!
> I pray thee tell me, whyche way shall I hold?
> Wyl ye se thys horson cocold?
> I trow he can not here!
>
> Now yt were almes to clap thee on the crown! (II.400–8)

The approach to an individual (it all suggests someone of some seniority and dignity), the cheeky inferences made about knowledge of the stews, the obvious embarrassment and refusal to be drawn of the person so approached, the abusive "horson cocold", the accusation of deafness, and, what must be the final indignity, the ruffling of the hair or, more likely, the patting of the bald head of the poor object of the joke clearly illustrate a subversion of the accepted conventions of performance, which, even in the most risky circumstances of direct address, would normally keep the actor and audience at a secure distance from each other. When the liminoid space, with its potential as a place betwixt and between, in which anything could happen, is itself transgressed to allow such an invasion of audience space, then the theatre event itself would appear to be stretched to the limits of its own conventions. The actual, the liminal and the

virtual are challenged to maintain an equilibrium in such a circumstance, where the power of the actor becomes paramount. But it remains remarkable that, far from destroying the pleasure and efficacy of the performance—the worry that Erasmus expressed—such moments seem paradoxically to enhance the audience's engagement. The career of the character who has so transgressed is followed now with increased interest. His link with the audience is stronger than before.

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