Catherine Lisak, « Staging the Doubting Conscience : From *The Conflict of Conscience* to *Richard III* »,
« Theta VII, Théâtre Tudor », 2007, pp. 67-88,
mis en ligne en 13 février 2007, <https://sceneeuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta7>

## Theta VII
est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,
dirigé par Marie-Luce Demonet,
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

## Responsables scientifiques
André Lascombes & Richard Hillman

## Mentions légales
Copyright © 2007 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

## Date de création
février 2007

Thêta VII – Théâtre Tudor
Catherine LISAK
CESR, Tours
p. 65-86

# *Staging the Doubting Conscience :* *From* The Conflict of Conscience *to* Richard III[1]

Catherine Lisak
Université Bordeaux III

## *Reconstructing Character*

Our renewed sense of the significance of character in Renaissance drama has recently sparked off a general reappraisal of dramatic characterisation. Character had been relegated to the past as post-structuralism weighed in with an argument that shook literary criticism at the grass roots: it claimed that by flattening historical complexities, this category of criticism muddied the waters to the point of becoming ideologically reprehensible. Such studies as A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) came directly under fire. The effect of his enquiry into character study had been so debilitating that to this day, over a century later, critics like Laurie Maguire still feel the urgency to show up Bradley's "intrusively inventive character study" to undergraduate students, playgoers, novices,

1. This paper was written following the 2004 ISC seminar on "Shakespeare's Characters", in which I took part, and I am much indebted to all that was said during that working session. I would like to acknowledge two contributions, especially, which I found extremely helpful for the writing of this article: Laurie Maguire's paper on "New Realism" and Camille Wells Slights's paper entitled, "When is a Bastard not a bastard? Character in *King John*".

and admirers alike. Bradley's general approach, as illustrated by his analysis of Gertrude in *Hamlet*, "serves no critical function", Maguire argues, "not least because, as the tell-tale tense of 'drunkenness is disgusting' shows, it confusingly conflates subjectively moral judgment with analytical criticism" (p. 4).[2] However, in assessing the impact the revisionist process has had upon character criticism, Maguire also draws the conclusion that the swing of the pendulum may have gone too far:

> innovative critical schools brought with them new discoveries but also new dangers: their specialist vocabularies have made Shakespeare criticism less accessible to the ordinary reader and playgoer, and their theoretical basis has, as Alan Sinfield puts it, threatened to "make character a wholly inappropriate category of analysis" [p. 58]. Heather Dubrow writes that "character has virtually become a dirty word" [p. 17]. Once alerted to this creeping marginalization of what is dramatically essential, we can reach an accommodation which retains much of the new territory won by the theoreticians, for character is partly created, affected, and altered by the power structures and cultural contingencies (i.e., situation) to which the new scholarly *isms* have taught us to be attentive. The blunt reality of dramatic characterization remains. (p. 4)

In a bid to revitalise this long-disregarded analytical category, literary criticism is once again engaging in the revision of certain criteria to grasp anew the implications of dramatic characterisation. Most interesting is Alan Sinfield's *Faultlines*, in which the critic elaborates a definition of *character* by considering those instances where characterisation has not been achieved. Rather than determine the moment when an agent acquires character, the basis of Sinfield's reasoning is articulated in the negative. Specifically, he identifies substance and meaning in a category of analysis by disqualifying all that might not apply, because it somehow falls short of the mark. He thus asks, "When Is a Character Not a Character?" (p. 52).[3] When does a character fail in his attributes? When is the critic's use of

2. Bradley's study of this character, which Maguire quotes (p. 3), went as follows: "The Queen was not a bad-hearted woman, not at all the woman to think little of murder. But she had a soft animal nature, and was very dull and shallow. She loved to be happy, like a sheep in the sun; and to do her justice, it pleased her to see others happy, like more sheep in the sun. She never saw that drunkenness is disgusting till Hamlet told her so; and though she knew that he considered her marriage 'oer-hasty' . . . she was untroubled by any shame at the feelings which had led to it. It was unpleasant to sit upon her throne and see smiling faces round her" (p. 167).
3. "When Is a Character Not a Character? Desdemona, Olivia, Lady Macbeth and Subjectivity" is the title of Chapter Three of *Faultlines*.

the word unwarranted? The conundrum, if anything, requires we reassess the confusions the English language instils between different kinds of agents in a play (the actants or *dramatis personae*) who are, or not, endowed with *character*. It might prove useful to refer back to Aristotle's own interpretation of character, which first and foremost designates a quality of mind that is revealed to the audience at a moment of moral choice (*proairesis*). As Hollis Rinehart points out in his study of the peripatetic conception of character,

> Aristotle sharply distinguishes between the agents of the play (*prattontes*) [Aristotle, *Poetics*, vi, 5][4] and character (*taethe*). In English the same word does for both the agents, or *dramatis personae*, and the qualities of mind of those agents. In Aristotle the distinction is quite clear: he even has different words for the two concepts. In fact it is quite possible, in Aristotle's view, to have tragedy without character (vi, 14), although not without agents. That is because all action is performed by agents, but not all action stems from character. Character, as we have seen, involves moral choice, but not all action stems from moral choice. It may also arise from thought (*dianola*), when the choice is obvious, or when it proceeds from reasoning alone.

Alan Sinfield draws a similar distinction; indeed, he explores a set of contra-distinctions, by marking off those *dramatis personae* who, being devoid of certain attributes, simply serve as backcloths to a plot or ideology. Hence, "a character is not a character when he or she is needed to shore up a patriarchal representation" (p. 54). This leads him to formulate what he believes to be the prerequisite condition for character construction—that there be "an impression of subjectivity, interiority or consciousness, and a sense that these maintain a sufficient continuity or development through the scenes of the play" (p. 62). What we have here are in fact two requirements, the first resting on the dramatic manifestation of an inner self, the second, on this manifest impression being sustained for the sake of the audience—two criteria which call for further consideration.

The first precondition—the translation of such characteristics as "subjectivity, interiority or consciousness" into external signs—suggests that a character comes into his own when he displays inwardness and thought. Perhaps, what Sinfield's choice of words does not make clear is whether "subjectivity, interiority or consciousness" imply mere thought (where the choice is obvious and only requires reasoning [*Poetics*, vi, 25]) or whether it includes a moral choice (*Poetics*, vi, 24) that cannot be taken for granted. If both ideas invoke the notion of inward-

4. All citations of Aristotle's work follow the system applied in Fyfe's edition, viz., first citing the chapter (in Roman numerals) then the sentence (in Arabic numerals).

ness, thought alone does not stand as a sufficient attribute in Aristotelian terms for an agent to become a (tragic) character. The process of introspection implies there be a more complex, moral grounding for the agent to acquire the status of dramatic character proper. Are we to assume that the idea of a moral stance is inherent to such concepts as "subjectivity, interiority and consciousness"?

From these first remarks, there arises another difficulty. Studying the links between inwardness and theatre in the Renaissance, Katharine Eisaman Maus demonstrates that "inwardness as it becomes a concern in the theatre is always perforce inwardness displayed: an inwardness, in other words, that has already ceased to exist" (p. 32). This implies that all interiority, when staged, looks outwards as a testimony for the audience to see and hear, and, to various degrees, operates as a theatrical display that rules out interiority as it simultaneously enacts it. As Stephen Greenblatt similarly observes, "The task of conveying an inner life is an immensely challenging one in drama, since what the audience sees and hears is always in some sense or other public utterance" ("The Death of Hamnet", p. 43). Such thought-provoking comments give us the measure of the inherent antagonism that exists on stage between that which is contained—subjectivity, consciousness or conscience—and that which is displayed. We will further argue that it is precisely such dynamic interplay that activates the process of dramatic characterisation. If, *in fine*, "the chronic doubts of what can be seen tend to make theatre an art of incompletion: a form of display that flaunts the limits of display" (Maus, p. 210), might we not go so far as to say that the construction of character as a form of dramatic mediation becomes a theatrically anxious experience, as much for the actor as for the audience? This in turn would suggest not only that to witness characterisation in the making is both the most problematic and the most gratifying of dramatic experiences a play might have to offer, but also that character construction is intricately linked with audience reception.

The second criterion Sinfield formulates is that manifest inwardness be sustained. Character consistency also constitutes Aristotle's fourth and final aim. The notions of continuity, consistency or sustained subjectivity invite us to take into account not only the audience's expectations[5] but plot requirements as well.

5. Rinehart argues that consistency is an aim which "stems not from the requirements of the plot, as do 'usefulness' and 'appropriateness', but, like 'likeness', from the needs of the audience. For the audience not only needs to see visible signs of character, but needs to see them consistently, in order to establish the probability that the character will continue to make the choices which the plot requires. This need for probability is the real source of the need for consistency".

"When is a character not a character" is a question that also focuses on timing and plot, for it invites us to consider at what point in a play a character should be expected to have acquired character. Is it crucial that dramatic characterisation occur early relatively in the play, or might an agent acquire *character* and thereby become a fully-fledged character as far into the play as the climax? Can character construction coincide with—even mark—the highest point of dramatic tension that leads to the main conflict finally being resolved? What if a character comes into being at the final stages of a play, for a matter of an instant, as he struggles to make his moral choice, but does not sustain the required attributes to the last? Can it be said that no dramatic characterisation has taken place? Can a character revert back to being a simple agent? In other words, is characterisation an irreversible process? Once a character has acquired character, can that character come undone, fall apart at the seams, on the early modern stage, for all the audience to see?

This paper proposes to use these different yet complementary lines of thought to explore the development of characterisation as it occurs within two apparently very different plays: Nathaniel Woodes's relatively obscure hybrid morality play, *The Conflict of Conscience*, printed in 1581, and Shakespeare's notoriously popular history play, *King Richard III*, which was composed over a decade later (1592-93). In both cases, I will focus on the conflict of conscience that takes place—in Act IV, Scene iii of *The Conflict of Conscience* and Act V, Scene iii of *Richard III*. In a study especially concerned with the way certain scenes serve to display the making, or unmaking, of a character with depth and a moral sense of self, it seems appropriate to focus on the staging of a conscience in turmoil, because, as Anne Ferry argues, conscience was the term and concept which, in the sixteenth-century English understanding, came closest to evoking continuous internal awareness (pp. 45-46), an indispensable attribute that enables an agent to be regarded as a character proper. Moreover, the fact that both scenes occur near the end of the play—and correspond, in dramatic terms, to scenes of recognition (preceding the final catastrophe)—will lead us to interrogate the accepted assumption that character must be sustained. My final aim will to be to suggest that the hero's speech in Act IV, Scene iii of Nathaniel Woodes's play might very well have served as an additional springboard, or possible *source*, for Richard's soliloquy in *King Richard III*. I will venture to argue that Shakespeare's play could be considered, in this respect, as belonging to the same transitional dramatic tradition as *The Conflict of Conscience.*

## *The Indeterminacy of Character and Genre*

Nathaniel Woodes's *The Conflict of Conscience* partakes of the transitional drama of the 1580s and 1590s. Its originality resides to a large extent in its wavering generic claims and the effect such hesitation has on characterisation. There were in fact two versions of *The Conflict of Conscience* that appeared within a single edition. The dichotomy partook of a central tension that not only typified such transitional drama, generally speaking, but reflected the play's specific hesitations in intention. It was, indeed, trying to negotiate the representation of a specific historical biography, the "lamentable Hystorie" of an Italian Protestant converted to Catholicism, Francesco Spira, or "Frauncis Spira" in Woodes's play (first issue, title page), with an exemplary figuration of man—the "lamentable example" of the idealised figure called "Philologus" (second issue, title page) who, like Everyman, would be blessed with endgame redemption.[6] Thus, depending on the version, the play presents itself as being either "dolefull" or "joyfull" (l. 2411 in each issue), that is, either tragic or comic. The intriguing fluctuation in genre had repercussions on character construction and deconstruction—in Act IV, Scene ii, especially. It was William Carew Hazlitt who, in 1744, first pointed to the fact that by "looking merely at this list [of *dramatis personae*], which we have exactly copied, it does not appear in what way the performance bears even a remote resemblance to tragedy or comedy." The critic found that the strange inconsistency in characterisation clouded the issue of genre in the extreme.

The conflicting generic tendencies of the play find one explanation in the use that was made of a great diversity of source materials. Nathaniel Woodes borrowed from the specific though remote biography of an Italian recusant, the representative stories of martyrdom in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, the allegorical tradition of the morality, and the conventional structure of psychomachia (especially, the alternation between good and evil). One can see how this diversity in sources might affect characterisation. Again, Hazlitt remarked that

> The names read like an enumeration of such personages as were ordinarily introduced into the Moral-plays of an earlier period—indeed, one of them seems to be derived from the still more ancient form of Miracle-plays, frequently represented with the assistance of the clergy. We allude to Satan, who opens the body of the drama by a long speech

6. This led the author to introduce slight variations within the title pages, the Prologue and the *Nuntius* of the final scene. See, in particular, Hazlitt, ed.; Campbell; Spivack, pp. 238-39; and Bevington, pp. 245-51.

> (so long that we can hardly understand how a popular audience endured it) but does not afterwards take part in the action, excepting through the agency of such characters as Hypocrisy, Tyranny, and Avarice, who may be supposed to be his instruments, and under his influence and direction. Nevertheless, a real and, as he may be considered, an historical, personage is represented in various scenes of the play, and is, in truth, its hero, although the author, for reasons assigned in the Prologue, objected to the insertion of his name in the text.[7]

Hazlitt consequently argues that *The Conflict of Consicence* like *The Tragical Comedy of Appius and Virginia*, were plays that formed "a class by themselves", because in them, "characters both abstract and individual [were] employed in the same performance". What transpires from Hazlitt's various comments is that character determines the agent, the nature of his performance, as well as the generic claims of the plot—a working assumption also formulated in Aristotle's *Poetics*. As Rinehart explains: "It is character, then, which gives a quality (*poias*) to the agents and through them to the action which they perform (vi, 7-8). . . it is through his or her character that the plot will take on a tragic quality or not". *The Conflict of Conscience* not only brings together on the same stage different sorts of *dramatis personae* that represent either fact or fable, reality or allegory, individuality or abstraction, the exemplary or the historical; it also succeeds in fusing these different (dare one say, opposed) attributes within a single character—Philologus. In his own analysis of the play, David Bevington suggests that the configuration of this character relies on and varies with the play's competing generic claims: "Woodes… is able to portray the life of an historical personage who is also a universal type, and whose career is potentially either tragic or glorious" (p. 247). Bevington seems to be making the same point Hazlitt had been making two centuries earlier, except that his causal analysis between character and genre actually works in the reverse. He goes on to argue:

> In *Conflict of Conscience*, it is the struggle between the impulse toward biography and the impulse toward generic representation that produces the two endings. One may imagine that Woodes originally conceived of his work as an edifying spiritual biography; but in adapting his historical source to a moral structure he perceived that the organization of events, and the whole weight

7. Bevington offers a different explanation of the change of genre: "In *Conflict of Conscience*, it is the struggle between the impulse toward biography and the impulse toward generic representation that produces the two endings. One may imagine that Woodes originally conceived of his work as an edifying spiritual biography; but in adapting his historical source to a moral structure he perceived that the organization of events, and the whole weight of tradition behind that organization, impelled him to an idealized ending in place of the historical one." (pp. 250-51).

> of tradition behind that organization, impelled him to an idealized ending in place of a historical one. It is this tension between what is or was, and what ought to be, that produces a very real excitement in the play (despite its mediocre style) up to the final scene. It is inescapably true that Philologus could be saved or damned until the last moment. The author's final decision in favour of a happy ending is not one of caprice or arbitrary use of *deus ex machina*, but stems from the central conflict in transitional drama between secular fact and religious ideal. (pp. 250–51)

Bevington suggests that hesitancy around genre and plot accounts for belated character construction (or determinacy). If it is true that the hero of the play "Philologus could be saved or damned until the last moment", the impression that is being sustained, and which characterises the hero, is not one of subjectivity so much as of indeterminacy or of some potential yet to be realised or declared. The implication of this remark is that an agent might manifest only late in the play an ability to act upon his own potential, construct his own sense of self through moral choice, and even gain insight into his position in the play as a dramatic character proper.

I would further argue that in the case of *The Conflict of Conscience*, character construction (by which I mean when the agent gains *character*) occurs at a critical stage in the plot—the moment of Recognition, before the play finally sways towards tragedy or comedy. This marks the moment when Conscience definitively leaves the stage as an allegorical figure and returns, as a voice within a voice, within the protagonist's speech, thus enabling a process of introspection and moral choice-making. As a consequence, the protagonist is faced with his own, internal ambivalence, where impulses converge and a conflict of conscience is acted out. The agent grows into a more complex, subjective and moral *persona*, if only for an instant, as he wrangles with his divided urges and struggles to make a final decision. We witness the hero become increasingly self-aware. Such a gain of awareness, it should be noted, is often expressed in the shape of a speech that only approximates an internal monologue or soliloquy.

## *The Staging of Conscience*

Conscience appears at only one point in *The Conflict of Conscience*: in Act IV, Scene iii. Like Spirit, and Suggestion, his adversary, he is an allegorical figure who stands up to his adversary with counter-arguments in an alternating dialogue over good and evil. From the outset, Philologus has been witness to this

spiritual tug-of-war, which has progressively unsettled him in his convictions. After the opening scene, in which Satan lauds the Pope (I, i) and plots the overthrow of Christ's ministry on earth (II, i-ii), Philologus resolves with Mathetes (a force of good) to endure martyrdom in the name of truth (I, ii). There ensues a monologue, the only one he speaks in the play, in which the hero expresses apprehension as he considers the prospect of looming Roman tyranny (III, i). During a long and climactic episode that runs from Act III, Scene ii, to Act IV, Scene i, he is subjected to an inquisition. He successfully answers questions from such awesome figures as Cardinal, Cacon, and Tyranny, but finally avows that he is torn by a fundamental dilemma. Thus, speaking to Suggestion, he says:

> For I will heere you with hartes delectation:
> Because I would gladly to your doctrine consent,
> If that I could so my conscience content.
> But my Conscience crieth out and bids me take heede
> To loue my lord God aboue all earthly gaine,
> Whereby all this while, I stande in great dread,
> That if I should Gods statutes disdaine,
> In wretched state then, I should remaine:
> Thus cryeth my Conscience, to mee continually,
> Which if you can stay, I will yeelde to you gladly. (IV.i.1379-88)

Though Philologus has trodden the path of indeterminacy and indecision all through the play, it is only now that he presents us with a case study of his divided self. He acknowledges that he is turmoil inside, being both drawn to worldly pleasures and suppressed in his ways, as by the tyrannical rule of his conscience. As he rests his destiny within the hands of external forces, Philologus continues to cast himself in the role of an agent with no character, that is, devoid of all self-determinacy. He perceives conscience as an oppressive driving force, whereas Suggestion is portrayed as a reliable figure he may count on to keep all excesses of conscience in check. In his increasing confusion of values, the hero reverses the moral role of each allegorical figure, seeing evil in good (Conscience) and good in evil (Suggestion).

Conscience is, undeniably, an unsettling figure. This nagging internal voice, which had remained all this while contained and unheard, is now beginning to break through Philologus's speech, as it "crieth out" to awaken the hero to an awareness of his own subjectivity. The result is that Philologus's lines seem to impersonate Conscience's cries in a manner that verges free indirect speech,

metatheatrically punctuated by such expressions as "But my Consicence crieth out" and "Thus cryeth my Conscience, to mee continually". This creates a superimposition of voices within a single speech, which suggests that a complex construction of self is taking place. Spirit attempts to show Philologus the way to salvation (IV, iv) by driving home a sense of self and prompting the hero to take responsibility for his motives and actions:

> Thou art yet free Philologus, all torments thou maist scape,
> Onely the pleasures of the world, thou shalt awhile forbeare,
> Renounce thy crime, and sue for grace, and do not captiuate
> Thy Conscience unto mortall sinne, the yoke of Christ doo beare,
> Shut up these wordes within thy brest, which sound so in thine
> eare:
> The outwarde man hath caused thee, this enterprise to take,
> Beware least wickednesse of spirit, the same doo perfect make. (IV.iv.1699-1705)

Spirit's counsel is grounded on the commonplace theological argument that behind many a man's apparent composure there lurks a misguided relationship with his quarrelsome conscience. In Nicholas Ling's *Politeuphuia. Wits Common-Wealth* (1598), there are several quotations listed under the heading of "Conscience" which point back to this idea. Thus, "He that frameth himself outwardly, to doe that which his conscience reproveth inwardly, wilfully resisteth the law of God" (sig. C2v). Observations on the notion of conscience were often construed around the opposition between the world without and the world within—a conflict, contrast or contradiction that needed to be negotiated. As Ling's collection of citations illustrate, a man's conscience could work itself as deep as a worm "that bindeth and never ceaseth", and yet be brought out into the open, by way of some denunciation or accusation: "none is more guilty than hee whose conscience forceth him to accuse himselfe", while "to excuse ones selfe before he is accused, is to finde a foul crack in a false conscience" (sig. C2r-v). Evidently, Spirit dramatises this very division, which attends those who have not learnt to manage the tensions that oppose the "outwarde man" with the being that lies "within". As the play draws to an end, Theologus, one of Philologus's sons, who will not manage to save his father from his fate, concludes that Philologus's fault lies in not having managed to negotiate the boundaries between inside and outside, between self and other. In an exhortatory address to God, he remarks: "The outwarde man doth thee not please, nor yet, the minde alone,/But thou requireth both of us, or els regardeth none" (V.iii.2389-90).

The value of Spirit's counsel resides in the mode of conduct to be followed if Philologus is to secure a sustained sense of self and interiority: "Shut up these wordes within thy brest, which sound so in thine eare" (IV.iv.1703). If we look more closely at the framing structure of this line, we note that it is hemmed in by "Thy conscience" in the previous line and "The outwarde man" in the following. The basic effect is one of ambiguity: the words to be shut within his breast could be either those of his Conscience, or those of Suggestion—the outward man. Accordingly, the interpretation of Spirit's advice varies. He could either be pressing Philologus to safeguard his conscience by letting his teaching sink in, or inciting him to capture, enclose, withhold, or suppress the outward man's worldly pleasure principle, maintaining it within a deep-seated part of the self by an act of self-appropriation, a process which would imply his taking in society's discourse.

However we choose to read these ambivalent lines, Spirit's consideration of how to manage the outsider within reveals the remarkable degree of awareness early modern society had of the many hidden, tacit and obscured strata that in fact made up a human being and a character. Philologus is being compelled to negotiate his identity by internalising Otherness, while externalising the self. Both Suggestion and Conscience stand on stage as externalisations of Philologus' troubled self, as well as emblems of all that should be self-contained, for better or for worse. In identifying the external matrices that exert this "enterprise" of "captivation" on Philologus, Spirit seeks to show the hero how to turn subjection ("The outwarde man hath caused thee") into subjectivity. He is, in short, teaching Philologus how to reverse the process of alienation. Thus, the explicit mention of "outwarde" implicitly appeals to the notion of *inwardness*, while "caused", in this reversal of logic, similarly incites the hero to realize his potential to be a character endowed with free will.

The three figures of Suggestion, Spirit and Conscience play a remarkable dramatic role, as emblematic agents, for they position Philologus at the threshold of characterisation. They occupy the stage as mediations that may construct Philologus as either an Everyman or a fully-fledged character, depending on the way the protagonist chooses to address the notions of within and without. Having each had their say, they leave Philologus to ponder on the moral choice that awaits him and take stock of himself in this dramatic moment of Recognition. The spiritual struggle between external provocations, to which Philologus simply stood witness, has now turned into a personal tussle with his own internal knowledge:

> Ah wretched man, what shall I doo: which doo so playnly see,
> My flesh and Spirit to contende, and that in no small thing,
> But as concernyng the euent, of extreame miserie:
> Which either studie to auoyde, or els upon me bring,
> And which of them I should best trust, it is a doubtfull thing.
> My *Conscience* speaketh truth mee think, but yet because I feare,
> By his aduice to suffer death, I doo his wordes forbeare.
> And therfore pacyfy thy selfe, and doo not so torment,
> Thy selfe, in vaine I must seeke some meanes for to eschew,
> These griping greefes, which unto mee, I see now imminent.
> And therefore will no longer stay, but bid thee now adue. (IV.iv.1891-1902)

Philologus speaks these lines to himself. The allegorical figures surrounding him are silent, as they now stand witness to another's conflict. It is no longer the emblematic agents who convey to the audience information about Philologus's state of mind and heart or motivations. The alternating dialogue has been internalised so that Philologus holds an internal dialogue between "My Conscience" and "Mee", between the moralising, universal vision of a "wretched man" and the individualised personal pronoun "I". Awakened to the responsibility of a decision he had repeatedly disclaimed, Philologus internalises Conscience, which he had till now cast as an outsider. For an instant, the allegorical figure coalesces with the protagonist. He is self-reflexive ("mee think") yet addresses himself as he would another person, in the second person singular ("And therefore pacify thy selfe"). In this duplication of self through different modes of address, he plays the part of two potential participants in an internal dialogue which dramatically emulates the internal workings of his mind. As his name suggests, Philologus displays the love of talk, to the detriment of God's word, by talking about himself to himself. He plays all roles in his internal dialogue, in which he is embodied in the first, second and third person singular. Within the interstices of this dialogue, doubt is maintained long enough for the agent to gain in autonomy sufficiently to make a moral choice.

Self-awareness is enacted in a different mode, no longer voiced by some exterior force but contained within the speech of the protagonist, who speaks in no other voice than his own. For the first time, Philologus is presented as determining his self (if not yet his fate) by passing from doubt to decision, thus staging his own, interiorised drama of the self. The conflict of conscience is now taking place within the single character. The notion of competing wills is contained in the word "contende", while the idea of negotiation between contraries is expressed in such words as "concerning" and "conscience", particularly in the

shared prefix, which signifies togetherness. This was the very definition William Perkins gave of *Conscience* in his 1590s lectures in Cambridge. Commenting on the etymology of the word—"con" ("jointly"), and "science" ("knowledge")—he argued that conscience "signifieth a knowledge, joined with a knowledge.... First because when a man knows or thinkes any thing, by means of conscience, he knows what he knows and thinkes. Secondly, because by it, man knows that thing of himself, which God also knows of him" (2: 11).[8] It would appear that by the end of Act IV, Philologus is ready to gain in *character* and become a character by an applied effort to "studie" his "self" and the "event" or outcome to his final decision.

However, his internal dialogue which constructs an impression of subjectivity is short lived. As the final lines of his speech reveal, he freely chooses to relinquish his conscience and bids him farewell in scurrying flight ("And therefore will no longer stay, but bid thee now adue"). Conscience becomes once more an exterior presence ("thee") not the force he was beginning to process and assimilate. Far from investing the hero's speech, Conscience now stands powerless. He attempts to halt him in his stride and call him back, but his exhortations are in vain. Philologus leaves the stage in company of Suggestion, while Conscience summarises the poor role Philologus has chosen to play, before leaving the stage once and for all:

> Oh cursed creature, O frail fleshe, O meat for wormes, O dust,
> O blather puffed full of winde, O vainer then these all,
> What cause hast thou in thine own wit, to have so great a trust:
> Which of thy selfe canst not espie, the euils which on thee fall,
> The blindnesse of the outward man, Philologus shew shall
> At his returne, unless I can at last, make him relent,
> For why the Lord him to correct, in furious wrath is bent. (IV.iii.1909-15)

It seems that during this brief moment, there transpires an "impression of subjectivity, interiority and consciousness". In becoming a character in his own right, Philologus might have run the risk of being like "the foxe, which caught in snare, and scapt with loss of tale" (IV.iii.1792), had lost at his hind end what he'd gained in mind. But self-reflexivity has proved unsustainable and Philologus hastens to extinguish all conscience gained. Struck by "the blindness of the outward man", he reverts to his "undiscerning" self (V.ii.1974), "which of thy selfe canst not espie"

8. I first encountered this quotation by William Perkins in Camille Wells Slights's paper, "When is a Bastard not a bastard? Character in *King John*".

the "causes" of his "wit". As an agent without character, or with failing character, he is reduced to the state of an empty vessel "puffed full of winde". A lightweight character cannot be a character if sustained by occasional gusts of wind.

The figure of Conscience does not so much depart as change faces. The figure that warned and admonitioned Philologus has taken on the more threatening aspect of "Horror". If Philologus esteemed that Conscience "ruled" him "like the common sorte" (V.2.1941), and though Hypocrisie congratulated him for having "dispatched cleane,/Of all the griefes which unto him, did seem so dangerous" (V.i.1921-22), a new figure of Conscience comes to haunt him:

> *My name is calde Confusion and horror* of the mynde,
> And to correct impenitents, of God I am assigned. . . .
> Nor couldst betweene *Suggestions* craft, & *Conscience* truth
> discerne
> Behold therefore, thou shalt of mee an other lesson heare . . .
> The peace of *Conscience* faded is, in stead whereof, I bring
> The Spirit of Sathan, blasphemy, confusion and cursing. (V.ii.1968-69, 1975-76, 1982-83)

In turning against Philologus, Conscience literally turns into a noose: "Philologus by deepe dispaire hath hanged himselfe with coard (V.iv.2412); "And his own hand, now at the last, hath wrought his endless paine" (2424). In Nicholas Ling's *Politeuphuia*, the same metamorphosis of Conscience is evoked: "Conscience, generally is the certaine and assured testimony which our soules carry about with them, bearing witnesse of what we speake, thinke, wish, or doe: it is to the wicked an accuser, an Iudge, a hangman, and a rope; to the godly, a comfort, reward and ayde against all adversitie" (sig. C2$^{r}$). Philologus does not understand that conscience is still working his way within him, and not without, though not with the aim to save him, but to damn him. He is under the false impression that he is rid of Conscience, and does not realise he has in fact become a character with subjectivity, with substance. His suicide, however, testifies to both these facts, for it is his tormented conscience which ultimately motivates him to commit his final act of desperation. Up to the end, Philologus will have mismanaged the outsider within. Woodes's play shows that character is a quality that can be fostered to the last, but once it takes shape on stage, it is no longer possible to suppress or erase without the character being destroyed or self-destructing altogether. As we learn in *Politeuphuia. Wits Common-Wealth*, "conscience is easily gotten, but hardly worn out!" (sig.C2$^{r-v}$).

## *Richard's Troubled Self*

It has been argued that Nathaniel Woodes's play represents, "with or without direct connection… an important link in the dramatic tradition between *The Longer Thou Livest* and *Faustus*" (Bevington, p. 245),[9] between William Wager's 1558 morality play and Christopher Marlowe's 1590 tragedy. Bevington argues that in the case of transitional drama, the sudden change of focus in the final scenes of the play had a decisive effect on the generic outcome of a play:

> The alteration is symbolic of the manner in which the entire body of Psychomachia drama was able to adapt itself to a tragic pattern, simply by terminating its usual progression of spiritual downfall and recovery before the final phase. The earliest of Psychomachia drama contained in its phases of comic and grotesque degeneracy the materials for a tragic resolution. The phenomenon developed in plays like *The Longer Thou Livest* and *Conflict of Conscience*, and reached its fullest maturity in the comic degeneracy of Doctor Faustus' own decline.

This also implied that changes in dramaturgy reflected the evolving tastes of an ever-changing audience; they also modelled, modified and processed the audience's expectations. It might be said that spectators progressively detached themselves from the heroes' tragic lot, perhaps because end-of-the-century plays no longer required that they relate the moral or existential downfall of a hero to their own personal fates. The spectators' response to characters evolved as dramatic characterisation increasingly weighed in the determination of the play's generic perspective. Transitional drama was no longer "the product of a culture" anymore, "in which the difference between an individual and a group has not become highly charged", as Maus observes of morality plays (p. 88):

> As Bernard Spivack writes, "The human situation… is treated from some partial point of view, and restricted to the vices characteristic of some mode or station of life" (p. 207). This particularizing tendency begins to confound the rather simple kinds of identification between character and spectator that Renaissance defenders of the theatre take for granted. (Maus, p. 88)

9. Thus, Bevington explains, "The question of Marlowe's direct indebtedness to Woodes's play is controversial" (p. 245). Campbell finds little evidence of Marlowe's having known the earlier play. Spivack, on the other hand, cites "general and specific similarities" (p. 245), though it is suggested that the similarities reveal that Marlowe may have been familiar with Woodes's source, the autobiographical narrative of Francesco Spira, rather than with Woodes's play.

In this final part, I would like to analyse Shakespeare's *King Richard III* (written two or three years after Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*), and more specifically, Richard's monologue, in Act V, Scene iii—a scene where Richard awakens from a nightmare and struggles with his doubting conscience—in the light of Philolgus's own conflict of conscience. My aim will be to demonstrate that Shakespeare's history play partakes of this same tradition of "transitional drama", in which the moment of Recognition and the dramatic characterisation that ensues mark the decisive generic turning point in the play.

In Act V, Scene iii of *Richard III*, Richard awakens from a nightmare. Dramatic characterisation shifts when the protagonist addresses—and voices—his conscience for the first time. It has long been established that this scene found its sources in such pieces as Hall's account of the night before the Battle of Bosworth field in *The Union of the Two Noble . . . Families of Lancaster and York* (1548),[10] and the anonymous contemporary play, *The True Tragedy of Richard III*.[11] In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Stephen Greenblatt argues that

> Conscience in Hall's account is not simply a psychological element; it is an objective moral function, designed to produce (or at least to offer the opportunity for) repentance and hence to enable one to make a good end or alter-

10. The passage reads as follows: "for it seemed to him being asleep that he saw diverse images like terrible devils pulled and haled him, not suffering him to take any quiet and rest. The which strange vision not so suddenly strake his heart with a sudden fear, but it stuffed his head and troubled his mind with many dreadful and busy Imaginations. For incontinent after, his heart being almost damped, he prognosticated before the doubtful chance of the battle to come, not using the alacrity and mirth of mind and of countenance as he was accustomed to before he came toward the battle. And lest that it might be suspected that he was abashed for fear of his enemies, and for that cause looked so piteously, he recited and declared to his familiar friends in the morning his wonderful vision and terrible dream." (Hall, 3: 291)
11. *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, in Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 3: 338. Richard reveals that he has had some horrifying nightmares:
    The hell of life that hangs upon the Crown,
    The daily cares, the nightly dreams,
    The wretched crews, the reason of the foe,
    And horror of my bloody practise past,
    Strikes such a terror to my wounded conscience,
    That sleep I, wake I, or whatsoever I do,
    Methinks their ghosts come gaping for revenge,
    Whom I have slain in reaching for a Crown.
    Clarence complains, and crieth for revenge.
    My Nephews bloods, Revenge, revenge, doth cry.
    The headless Peers comes pressing for revenge.
    And every one cries, let the tyrant die.

> natively to confirm one's own damnation. Shakespeare uses many of the same materials but shapes them to a different end. (p. 178)

In fact, what drew late Elizabethan dramatists, and Shakespeare not least, towards the construction of complex characters, was that Conscience was "not simply" the reified allegorical abstraction encountered in earlier dramaturgy; it was being turned into a psychological element that constructed an impression of subjectivity, interiority and consciousness, which enabled agents to appear as individualised and naturalistic characters. When viewed from this angle, Shakespeare's scene comes much closer to Nathaniel Woodes's own staging of Conscience in the scene of Recognition (as a conflicting psychological element that constructs a character proper late in the play) than to Hall's mid-Tudor interpretation of conscience as some exterior force. Where Shakespeare also seems to join Woodes, and depart from Hall, is in the way Richard apparently "manages to harden his heart" (Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, p. 178), though his atheistic bravado (as is the case with Philologus) is, to the last, shot through with fear:

> Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls;
> Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
> Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe. (V.iii.309-11)

If we examine Richard's monologue (V.iii.178) with Philologus's lines (IV.iv.1891-1902) in mind, the possible similarities and associations quickly draw us to the striking differences that reveal the originality of Shakespeare's writing and investigation into character construction. Both speeches are spoken at the moment of Recognition as both heroes turn to their conscience in self-pity and spiritual turmoil. In a self-reflexive, rhetorical question, Philologus picks up on what Conscience has reportedly warned him against. Indeed, a few lines back, Philologus declared: "In wretched state then, I should remaine:/Thus cryeth my conscience. . . ." The voice of conscience speaks through him so clearly that it would seem, for an instant, that both characters merge. Thus Philologus exclaims: "A wretched man, what shal I doo".

Tormented by the haunting voices of his dead victims, Richard is awoken to the wretchedness of his state. This awakening is the trigger to a speech in which Richard conjures up his conscience. Richard's rhetorical question leads to an interior dialogue with his conscience: "O coward conscience, how thou dost afflict me!" (V.iii.180). Both characters claim to be distressed and wracked by their conscience.

Both speak their lines in an exclamatory and self-pitying mode, as they dramatically open themselves up to the audience with sharp awareness of their sufferance. But whereas Conscience speaks through Philologus in some singular, Other voice, Richard's voice of conscience does not merge imperceptibly with his own. On the contrary, it divides and breaks up: "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues…" (V.iii.194), shattering the character himself into fragments of many selves. If Philologus appears to be master of his fate because he believes he can ultimately choose to harbour or cast away his conscience, Richard's state of conscience commands Richard's fate and state of being as a character to the last.

For much of his speech, Philologus's sense of self filters through expressions of doubt, hesitation and fear, that are those of an awakening self-conscience. But as we witness Philologus deal summarily with his dilemma and just as quickly give up on his conscience, we also note how he twice addresses his "self" in the second person singular: "thy self". This reveals that his appropriation of the self is only partial, for it remains in his phrasing someone other. However close, the self stands as a false twin, with whom he is involved in sibling rivalry. This is fundamentally because Philologus chooses, undiscerningly, between his self and his conscience, as if they could be considered separately.

In contrast, Richard's self and conscience coalesce into the first person singular; fragmentation only underscores fusion, a state reinforced by the repetition of a same attribute—"Myself" or "I". Alternation only leads to misidentification, as the "I" of utterance is confused with the possessive pronoun "I". Thus, with fusion comes confusion: "Myself, myself confound", "I and I". Self-reflexivity is created through the impression of a subjective and self-inflicted vicious circle. Richard finally becomes aware that to impose any distinction is to be abused. To talk of one's self is but to misuse the very word and concept "self", as Elizabeth retorted to him in the previous act:

> *King Richard.* Then by my self—
> *Elizabeth.* Thy self is self-misus'd. (IV.iv.376-77)

In contrast with Philologus, Richard's state of doubting conscience is sustained throughout, and is all-consuming. Maus argues that "Everything Richard thought he had put outside himself keeps covertly returning", so that the character finds himself entangled in a relational mode. Indeed, because the character is unable to relinquish his conscience, inner conflict swells and drives him ever deeper into verbal and moral turmoil. Self-reflexivity and moral judgement, as

the combined manifestations of conscience, are both at work in Richard here, relentlessly denying him all self-pity: "I myself/Find in myself no pity to myself". At this specific point in the play, he is quite unlike Philologus, who, having forsaken his conscience, seeks to comfort himself by himself—"And therfore pacyfy thy selfe, and doo not so torment,/Thy selfe"—however mistakenly, as he recognises this will be "in vaine". Unable to withstand internalisation, he chooses delusion and seeks a way out. No more than Richard will he find one.

By renouncing his conscience, Philologus becomes a vacuum that crosses the stage under the delusion of a sense of self and integrity he has in fact also relinquished. On the contrary, King Richard collapses inward, caves in, precisely because his gain of conscience, his new self-awareness, threatens to destroy the character and the part he had till now played. As Richard Hillman argues, the hero self-implodes under the effect of his own judgement, accusation, and lucidity. Paradoxically, the dynamics that constructed Philologus for an instant as a figure of mediation—critical study of the self—are precisely the same that deconstruct the character of Richard. By obsessively reverting to his self, he finally self-destructs:

> There is plenty of precedent, including the precursor soliloquy in *The True Tragedy*, for self-interrogation as a rhetorical technique, and even Wolfgang G. Müller, for whom this speech marks a thorough internalizing of inner conflict, hence a development beyond the quasi-allegorical method of the morality plays, perceives only dialectic: "Das Ich ('myself') erscheint als Subjekt und Ojekt, Verursacher und Opfer seiner Not [The I ('myself') appears as subject and object, originator and victim of its distress]" ([Müller, p.] 322). I suggest that there are more than two sides to the question here—that, in fact, the question keeps shifting its ground, so that the standard pattern of conscientious self-division is transformed into an intensely solipsistic circularity, a search for self premised on, and productive of, self-absence. (Hillman, p. 148)

This comparative study has not sought to measure one play against the other. As Maguire teaches us, "if there is a difficulty with character study, it is that Shakespeare has set a standard by which other dramatists are measured and found wanting" (p. 9). In many respects, however, Richard's soliloquy reads as a response to the problem Philologus was putting to the audience concerning the construction of self on stage as Shakespeare as the issue to a same problematic is made to work in reverse.

These two opposing visions of self-conception suggest that the history of the subjective—and the construction of character—calls for either continuity (as Sinfield suggests), or else rupture (as encountered, in different ways, both in Woodes and in Shakespeare). Commenting on these two working fantasies of English Renaissance culture—continuity and rupture—Maus astutely comments: "These seem to be less contradictory notions, but again and again they are voiced together, so that they seem less self-canceling than symbiotically related or mutually constitutive" (p. 29). One might suggest that dramatic characterisation and subjectivity occur when the stage negotiates a shift inwards (whether dialectic or not) of vociferous humours and emblematic elements within an agent—a shift that may threaten at any time to implode, or explode, the vessel that discovers he alone holds them all together and justifies their presence.

## Bibliography


### *Primary Sources*

ARISTOTLE. *Poetics*. Trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe. Rev. ed. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

HALL, Edward. *The Union of the Two Noble Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548). *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. Ed. Geoffrey Bullough. 8 vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975. Vol. 3.

LING, Nicholas. *Politeuphuia. Wits Common-Wealth, Newly corrected and augmented*. London: I. R., 1598.

PERKINS, William. *The workes of that famous and vvorthy minister of Christ in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins: the first[-third and last] volume, newly corrected according to his owne copies, with distinct chapters and contents of euery booke, and two tables of the whole: one, of the matter and questions, the other of choice places of Scripture*. 3 vols. London: John Legatt, 1612-13.

SHAKESPEARE, William. *King Richard III*. Ed. Anthony Hammond. The Arden Shakespeare. Third Series. London: Methuen, 1981.

*The True Tragedy of Richard III*. *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. Ed. Geoffrey Bullough. 8 vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975. 3: 317-45.

WOODES, Nathaniel. *The Conflict of Conscience* (1581). Ed. Herbert Davis and F. P. Wilson. London: Malone Society Reprints, 1952.

### *Secondary Sources*

BEVINGTON, David M. *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.

BRADLEY, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. 1904; rpt. New York: Ballantine Books, 1983.

CAMPBELL, Lily B. "*Doctor Faustus:* A Case of Conscience". *PMLA* 67 (1952): 219-39.

Dubrow, Heather. *Captive Victors: Shakespeare's Narrative Poems and the Sonnets*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Ferry, Anne. *The "Inward Language": Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Greenblatt, Stephen. "The Death of Hamnet and the Making of Hamlet". *The New York Review of Books*, 51.16 (October 21, 2004): 42–47.

____. *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Hazlitt, William Carew, ed. *The Conflict of Conscience*. By Nathaniel Woodes. *A Selection of Old English Plays, Vol. VI, Originally published by Robert Dodsley in the Year 1744, Fourth Edition, annotated by W. C. Hazlitt, 1874-76*; http://www/html/pg/etext06/70ep610.

Hillman, Richard. *Self-Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama: Subjectivity, Discourse and the Stage*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 1997.

Maguire, Laurie. *Studying Shakespeare: A Guide to the Plays*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

Maus, Katharine Eisaman. *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Müller, Wolfgang G. "Das Ich im Dialog mit sich selbst: Bemerkungen zur Struktur des dramatischen Monologs von Shakespeare bis zu Samuel Beckett". *Deutsche Vierteljarhrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 56 (1982): 313–33.

Rinehart, Hollis. "Aristotle's Four Aims for Dramatic Character and his Method in the *Poetics*". *University of Toronto Quarterly* 69.2 (2000); <http://www.utpjournals.com/product/utq/692/692_rinehart.html>

Sinfield, Alan. *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Spivack, Bernard. *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.