John Marston's The Fawn, *the "Other" Self, and the Problem of Belief*

Donald BEECHER

Carleton University

> "To know the people well one must be a prince,
> and to know princes well one must be,
> oneself, of the people"
> (MACHIAVELLI, *The Prince*)

JOHN MARSTON's *Parasitaster* or *The Fawn* is what it is, a competent, entertaining duke-in-disguise plot—formulaic, but not to a fault, if a good theatre troupe were to take on the challenge. The work is convention-laden to be sure, but for that very reason it is the perfect literary laboratory for reinvestigating the mind-teasing topic of "personhood" in dramatic representations. Personhood denotes that quality of ontological status our minds accord to agents manifesting complex states of belief and desire as a precondition for assessing those states. This play has been chosen because the protagonist passes through contrasting mental and social modes as insider and outsider in relation to the action, thereby creating dissonances in the representation of the self. The topic under investigation is not whether we believe him to be a real person—much of what he does of a formulaic nature reminds us that he is not—but the qualities of personhood typically invested in him as a condition for assessing his intentional stances. The question is a "tease" because minds receive characters simultaneously

as artistic and performative constructs and as representations of psyches, the states of which are understood according to the limited cognitive resources available to human minds—including categories of an ontological kind.

Ferrara's Duke Hercules is a schematic depiction of the ruler on holiday, anxious to flee the burden of office with all its constraints in exchange for a life of freedom, passionate spontaneity, and self-actualization at the neighbouring court of Urbino. To adapt the words of Machiavelli, he was a prince who knew his people too well, and therefore chose to become one of the people, not only to punish them incognito, but to know himself better through these new experiences. To assess this character is tantamount to examining the design of the play because of the efficiency with which he imposes his will and point of view upon the entire action. In making the move to another court, Hercules redesigns his social strategies, turning himself into "Fawn", a flattering courtier who ingratiates himself with all those in his adopted entourage while working his way into the inner circle of Duke Gonzago. As his new name implies, his *modus operandi* will consist largely of encouraging others in their respective follies, the better to hail them before the court of public opinion and its reproving laughter. Fawn thereby becomes the play's agent satirist, its trickster-*animateur*, and a master of deceptive language. The action moves toward a ceremonial closure, as he draws the entire court into a compromising theatrical inset through which all are indicted as fools. Then, at that potentially dangerous moment, Fawn escapes all retaliation by staging a discovery scene in which he returns to his former princely self.

Such theatrical transformations—through the conventions of disguise whereby protagonists generate inside-outside relationships to society—are well-known in the plays of the period. The "selves" of such protagonists are plastic and adaptive, as conventions dictate. Hercules is a "schematic" duke and a mediating figure of whose machinations we are entirely conscious. Nevertheless, it is through the bonds we make with such figures as "persons" through memories of their previous modes of existence that the norms are established against which the outsider escapades are measured. The study to follow pertains not only to the adventures of Marston's duke, but to the cognitive mechanisms whereby we represent him as a cogent person to our own minds—as seemingly we must—while at the same time remaining cognizant of the artifice and play of a self-constructing agent. That, of course, is to have it both ways concerning the reception of character—namely by acquiescing, at least partially, to what has been called "the anthropomorphic fallacy", which is "the tendency

to treat dramatic characters as 'real' people rather than highly mediated representations" (Traub, p. 4). This hermeneutic "sin" has been replaced by "cultural negotiations" played out at social sites in which characters are mere ciphers. But there may exist, nevertheless, those default operations of mind that interpret all human representations possessing a modicum of interiority as persons rather than ciphers, in or out of literary representation. Marston's play is a "workshop" because his Duke Hercules exists, arguably, on the cusp between such mediated representations and an interiorized person whose belief states can be read only through the operations of "folk psychology". This response to personhood may, in fact, be dictated by our own phylogenetic human nature—a response that remains fundamental to our orientation within environments constituted of other minds.

The informing "idea" of this play, the product of several years of experimentation in the Elizabethan theatre, is a compound structure in which the trickster operator enjoys high social station, yet moves throughout the play's society in complete anonymity, now as the duke-in-disguise. Hercules is a product of that moment in the history of English drama when certain "pattern" characters were enjoying experimental upgrading to more complex states of psychological agency and inner thought, without shedding their residual typologies, and placed in more fully realized contemporary social settings. The formula invests a stock trickster figure with both a public and private identity, bouncing the audience's attention between the concerns of a suffering ruler and the machinations of a social prankster, thereby linking political with social issues, and doubling the representational perspective of the protagonist because he seeks flight from one draft of the self in order to invent another. Such plays call upon our capacities to distinguish between the conduct patterns of modified social levels, between minds in confessional modes and ironic play modes, and, more challengingly, to differentiate between characters who simulate psychological competence and those who enact structural paradigms, and to determine whether such characters represent ontologically distinct categories to the spectator.

The dual nature of this protagonist, as ruler and as trickster, was the byproduct of structural developments in the early English theatre. Marston's *The Fawn* appears at that very moment at which the configuration of elements constituting the duke-in-disguise plot reached its apogee. That date was 1604, and it coincides with the earliest productions of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and

Middleton's *The Phoenix*.[1] The inability to date these plays more precisely leaves the matter of priority and directions of influence beyond assured demonstration.[2] Given their differences, and the degree to which the generic idea of the disguised ruler was already established in the Elizabethan theatrical milieu, there is good reason to think that these plays may, in fact, have arisen independently of one another. Rulers enjoying an incognito status in order to go courting, or to escape the burden of office, or to spy first-hand on the affairs of ordinary citizens were already manifest in such plays as *Fair Em*, *A Knack to Know a Knave*, *George-a-Greene*, and the first part of *Sir John Oldcastle*. Of even greater pertinence, perhaps, is Barnabe Riche's *Adventures of Brusanus* (1592), which features a pioneering version of the motif. Riche's protagonist prince disguises himself as a merchant in order to examine in person the prevailing conditions of his realm, only to find himself falsely accused of treason. That the ruler against whom the alleged treason is committed is himself leads, of necessity, to a recognition and reversal scene, in which Brusanus reassumes his true identity before turning upon the maligning Gloriosus.[3] Shakespeare modifies this motif in *Measure for Measure*, making Lucio the epitome of the corrupted attitudes of citizens toward their rulers. Marston's duke, by contrast, does not fall prey to such a menace, and manages to work his satiric exposures in a more holiday atmosphere, although there are intimations

1.   Revealingly, the protagonist of this play is also a Duke of Ferrara who takes a travel leave, but unlike Hercules, and like Shakespeare's Vincentio, returns to his own court in disguise to examine all the ills and enormities there, before making a recitation of all he has seen at the play's end.

2.   In these matters I am relying on the critical introduction by Smith to *The Fawn* and the introduction by Lever to *Measure for Measure*. As Smith states, "*The Fawn* was first played sometime between February 4, 1604, and March 12, 1606" (p. xi), the first date the earliest that the acting company was called "The Children of the Queen's Majesty's Revels", and the latter date that of its registration for publication. Evidence that it was written during the 1604 season or just prior is merely circumstantial, as Smith explains. The first confirmed date for the acting of *Measure for Measure* is December 26, 1604, but "a number of allusions in the dialogue suggest that the play was composed and probably acted in the summer season of 1604" (Lever, p. xxxi) for reasons then explained in great detail, including the probability of James I's own incognito visit to the Exchange, or at least his attempt to make such a visit (on March 15, 1604). Lawrence concurs regarding the unlikelihood of establishing influences among these plays, "especially since the dates of composition and production are in most cases so uncertain" (p. 188).

3.   Lever mentions these and several other sources for "The Disguised Ruler" motif (pp. xliv-li), including the story of the Roman ruler Alexander Severus, prominent in Guevara's *Décadas de las vidas de los x. Cesares* (1539) and Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Image of Governaunce* (1541). Lever cites Marston's *The Malcontent* and *Fawn* in this regard, together with Middleton's *Phoenix*, stating that all three "presented fictitious Italian dukes who put off their conventional dignity with their robes of state and gave strident expression to the contemporary questioning of values" (p. xlvii).

of an awakening among his victims regarding his duplicity that could have led to reprisals. Hence, Fawn, too, under modest constraints, reverts to his former self at the play's end—to that residual and inviolate political identity that serves as diplomatic immunity for the duke as *eiron* (for which there is a definition to follow).

The English plays of that era—of which the duke-in-disguise plays were a subset—would have been greatly impoverished without these and related experiments with trickster protagonists cast in a variety of guises up and down the power echelons of society.[4] Not only was the character type instrumental in creating efficient episodic plots from within the action, but these crafty intellects were also inserted into a variety of cruel and competitive worlds to confront their own momentary blindnesses and sometimes to fall prey to superior intriguers, as in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* or Jonson's *Volpone*—two plays that bracket the historical period in which the formula was most experimentally developed. These plays, at the same time, form part of a continuum that originates in the slaves and lackeys of New Comedy and medieval folk pranksters, passes through the fore-period of *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, re-emerges in Chapman's gentleman knaves and salon intriguers, and comes to its apogee in the Jacobean revengers and usurpers in their respective political environments. Hamlet represents the final transformation of the trickster from tool character to western literature's epitome of the interiorized hero, the man of anguished deliberation, inner searching, and political disillusionment. Overwhelmed by his own vulnerability, this protagonist chooses strategic dissimulation but finds himself unable to sustain the role of Machiavellian practitioner inaugurated in his handling of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Duke Hercules, with his modest show of interiority, belongs to this same equivocal configuration of anxiety and escape through a disguise that requires all the competence and expertise of an alien self. If we entertain both Hercules and Hamlet as persons, one might wonder if there can be a qualitative difference between them. That is to say, the portrait of Marston's Duke Hercules may seem minimal in this regard, but in that very minimalism the problem of

---

4.   In order to move expeditiously through these preliminary points, I have taken the liberty of borrowing ideas from three of my own articles on these and related topics, articles containing fuller bibliographical information on the trickster phenomenon: "The Courtier as Trickster in Jacobean Theatre"; "Intriguers and Tricksters: Manifestations of an Archetype in the Comedy of the Renaissance"; and "The Sense of an Ending: John Marston and the Art of Closure".

the personhood of the trickster lies more clearly before us. If he, too, attains personhood as a mental representation, we may well ask if the mind allows for greater and lesser versions of that ontological category.

Important to our sense of the selfhood of Marston's protagonist are the few details concerning his frustrations with the life of the ruler. Hercules was annoyed with courtiers. Back in Ferrara they had been his bane and the reason for his pressing need to get away. He had been contained by their obsequiousness and by his own sense of duty. Office had made him servile and base in his own eyes, while the "appetite of blood" was calling him to fulfil "wild longings" and tasks of "exorbitant affects". The change he sought appears to be a permanent one, given his promise that "these manacles of form" will never regain control over him (I.i.39-45). One impetus to the forward direction of the play is our desire to know what could satisfy that "appetite of the blood". In Urbino he manages only to set up a few eccentric courtiers for light mockery, while coaching his own son incognito to disoblige him by courting for himself the girl he had been sent to woo as his proxy. We relish the situational irony in spite of the transparent formula. As a man of three-score-and-five, his pretensions to a "lady of fifteen" had already been cut short by the courtiers as "an enforcement even scandalous to nature" (I.ii.196, 201-2). If his quest for excitement could not be found in young love, then it could be found in social manipulations based upon an efficient exploitation of the *eiron's* skills. He would find excitement, and perhaps a little revenge against courtiers, by slipping into an adopted social mode. In a word, our protagonist becomes a self and its other—a playful transformation to which we have been made party. The question is whether these transformations and functional adaptations of a theatrical "self" are understood in the same way that we decipher the intentional stances of autonomous selves in everyday social life.

All this is to say, for the present debate, that Hercules' "selfhood" (to the extent he has one) functions at multiple mimetic levels. As Fawn, he is clearly the playwright's "internal maker", while at the same time he is a "man" with private causes born of conscious awareness, suffering, and deliberation. One question is how complete a man we recreate in our imaginations around a figure who is simultaneously driven by design agency, as well as by interior beliefs and desires. Presumably, all readers and viewers will see him as something beyond caricature. His caper abroad is preceded by an enigmatic meditation upon his discontentment over his lot as a prince, as defined by the expectations imposed by the flattery of his subjects—in short, by public opinion and politic restraint.

We know that initially he had entertained the prospects of a romantic fling in his old age, the folly of which he recognized in time, settling, instead, for a turn as a self-made satirist, whereby he succeeded in transforming the court of Urbino into a "purgative" playground, while at the same time furthering the romantic interests of his once reticent son Tiberio. Frail as Hercules seems as a psychological portrait, we nevertheless expect him to conform to a certain range of human behavioural probabilities, in light of the propositional and contingent mind states provided to him by the playwright. Once a character representation achieves such a level of complexity, we attribute, in this case to Hercules, not only the facts of his career—his disillusionment as ruler, his paternal concerns, and court-trickster ploys—but the mental competence to perform in all of these capacities. Presumably, this is to grant to him a status tantamount to all that constitutes personhood. The crux, as it is expressed here, is a cognitive one concerning our own mental predisposition for according a "complete" state of mind to all entities manifesting intentional states, no matter how much another part of our consciousness recognizes them to be mimetic creations or artistic simulacra. Arguably, this impasse can never be entirely resolved, given that the hierarchies of cognitive processing pertaining to the "reading" of "other minds"—and in light of the importance of such readings to our survival—may take precedence over the analytical deconstruction of those minds as mimetic representations.

Fawn plays the trickster, more particularly, in adopting the rather gentle strategy of the *eiron*, the calculating underdog whose innocence of manner and disarmingly unassuming ways lead braggarts and pedants to confession. His victims are induced to supply the information by which they are exposed. Strictly speaking, the *eiron* relies upon tendentious questioning, whereby his interlocutors are led into self-exposing stupidities. In pedagogical exercises of this nature, the student is induced, in Socratic fashion, to perceive the inadequacies of his answers. Through the devious intentionality of the method, however, the pedagogue elides into the trickster who turns questioning into baiting or flattery. In *The Fawn*, the moment of truth is an elaborate courtly entertainment featuring a "Ship of Fools" of literary inspiration, to which those who have been singled out for their folly willingly consign themselves. If the play has any particular defect, it is the mono-dimensionality of the vices manifested by these fools and their inability to pose any serious challenges to Fawn's design. Even Duke Gonzago, for his pedantic mismanagement of his daughter's amorous escapades, is made

to join the ridiculed. Such interactions translate readily into themes concerning the categorical boasting, sexual predation and licence, jealousy, insipidity, and derelict silence that characterize the respective gulls.

As with Marcolphus, or the folk-magus Faust, or Tyl Eulenspiegel, the role of Fawn, at this juncture, seems pure agency. His identity is the sum of his trickster performances. He is talkative and has inventions for every occasion; he is affable, engaging, yet private, able to keep counsel, quick to seek his advantage, politic in building alliances with the court fool, and managerial in coordinating the final dramatic inset. His mind is contained within his capacity to induce others to betray themselves through his action scenarios leading to physical injury, public humiliation, or the loss of personal property in an economy of wit and ignorance, expectations and reversals, trust and exposure. If Fawn is mentally represented strictly in terms of his vocation as *eiron*, then his identity is adequately circumscribed by the rules of his performance; he, like Volpone, is defined by the outsider logic of the confidence game.

In this regard, the tool-trickster is born, rather than emergent, and functions as a "psychologem", to use the Jungian term — which I understand to be an allegorized projection of a single mental capacity functioning independently of a fully integrated psyche. The trickster psychologem is a frame of mind seeking entry into society merely to find social contexts for carrying out a penchant for practical joking. He is a human-like creature, yet so signally intent upon writing his entire biography in deeds of a kind, that he has no other self-reflexive interiority. Jung explains such a mind-set as an emblematic depiction of dawning consciousness endemic to eras past, when men were uncertain even of the parts of their own anatomies, much less of possessing a full ethically and logically constituted mind (pp. 200ff).[5] The entire life of the trickster is composed of *beffe* based on the inventive opportunism whereby he creates his victims. This he performs by preparing the conditions for exploiting their fatuousness, largely through their vulnerability to his blandishments. His single mental advantage is his virtuosic employment of a fundamental human survival trait, namely the ability to rehearse, in the imagination, a number of potential scenarios for future action before choosing the best. But in making such choices, he employs his own brand

---

5.   Jung goes on to say that "the trickster is a collective shadow figure, an epitome of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out of it continually" (p. 209).

of folk psychology in reading the misplaced beliefs and goals of others in order to deceive them. Jung's psychologem is about the emergence of personhood in its primitive states—just at the dawn of psychological integration. A secondary skill is the trickster's capacity to follow events from a safe distance, yet remain proximate enough to control and redirect interim contingencies, by which he manifests intimations of metaconsciousness — an awareness of himself thinking and choosing. Trickster is merely the incarnation of this singular adaptive measure, namely the human capacity for mentally constructing multiple versions of the future in order to control the environment to his own advantage. Such creatures are loners and egoists, motiveless or motivated by hostility. Nevertheless, they work to the ultimate benefit of the group, insofar as their tricks eventually provoke an equivalent level of provisional thinking in members of the target community, thereby teaching skills that will benefit the survival of the collectivity. That is why Fawn is a crafty loner, even the angry *eiron*, and yet remains a public benefactor. Ostensibly, then, the trickster, as a character reduced to his trickery, is of a lesser category, as it were, and proof that intentional states can be assigned to medial characters, existing between construct and mind.

The difficulty is that the dukes-in-disguise, as tricksters, differ from the folk trickster in one essential and troubling way. The latter has no life outside of his trickery; his biography is the sum of his exploits in that specific mode. The former moves in and out of that mode, carrying with him memories of a former phase of life. This is a mental tease, for Fawn, to an extent, typologizes himself in the guise of a more primitive mental being, willingly suspending his duties of office as duke, yet never forgetting his identity as duke. The reversal of the plot depends upon the fidelity of his memory, and hence the assurance that the trickster is a superimposition upon a residual psyche. Spectators, likewise, pass through the trickster phase with him in full cognizance of his former identity and promise of return. Hercules gives us something more of himself than the portrait of a single-minded prankster. His memory, anticipated and revealed, is an integral part of the mind states we are challenged to attribute to him.

This must complicate the cognitive frame of reference by which the Hercules-Fawn sequence is processed. The question restated is how spectators deal with such configurations of data. Two issues arise. The first is the degree to which the self-metamorphosis paradigm, as represented in the play, constitutes an essential alteration, insofar as selfhood inheres largely in the continuity of attributions, desires, goals, and social techniques invigilating consciousness at

any one time, and directing volition in accordance with those desires and goals. The answer is not self-evident, but for our purposes the conventions governing disguising as a form of temporary self-othering must fill in. Our folk psychology—that default process, evolutionarily prepared, of empathy and reasoning by which we seek to know what others are thinking and intending through every available sign—permits us to maintain a single identity across these conflicting behaviours to the degree that survival depends upon our sophisticated means for decoding acts of social dissimulation. That leads to the second issue. How much psychological competency must we accord to the duke-in-disguise, as part of his ontological package, in order to process our understanding of such compound intentional states? Is there a critical threshold of complexity that can be decoded only by the same processes used in everyday life in dealing with real persons, and will the very activation of those processes impose upon theatrical characters the same properties attributed to autonomous minds? At stake here is the degree to which our cognitive habits induce us into belief states concerning theatrical representations.

The argument to this point has allowed that there are caricatures and characters, tricksters as the mediating creatures of myth and trickster agents circumscribed by memory of former states. In these terms, Fawn can function allegorically as the embodiment of a satiric scheme in action, yet be the designer of that scheme as a form of self-expression and actualization. His soliloquies, in particular, take us to contrasting levels of awareness of the self-conscious outsider in which Hercules, the mental insider, always has both a latent and a strategic part. In particular, the Duke persona is never absent in his nourishing of the romance plot, with its implications for the dynastic future of Ferrara. Fundamental to our folk psychology, whereby we represent the minds of others as intentional stances in relation to their passage through social time, is an ability to posit coherent personhood for all but the most deceptive and hypocritical of psychologically mobile individuals. This is a precondition to all social understanding, one that is carried out with intuitive reliability.[6] The dyad of the insider- outsider is there-

---

6. The current thinking among cognitive philosophers, developmental psychologists, and primatologists is that we take a "commonsense approach", one that accounts for the behaviour of others in terms of their desires, intentions, hopes, preferences, and phobias, and that moreover, for many, this procedure constitutes a valid theory of mind. Nevertheless, this default approach to knowledge has been assigned the term "folk psychology", because it establishes the propositional states attributed to others either

fore a way of stating the change of registers in the duke's conduct, or his position within social groupings, but only in relation to those unable to perceive the continuity of his personhood. In Hercules' case, acting is an extension of being. We can question whether he was an insider or an outsider to his own court, or whether, as an upstart intruder in the court of Gonzago, he finished as an insider or an outsider. But the outsider in relation to the self is a contradiction in terms. Hercules, through the provisional planning of the trickster, epitomizes

on the basis of dubious empathetic simulations or dubious norms. There is, in fact, a heated debate between the intentional realists like Jerry Fodor and the eliminative materialists like Paul Churchland as to whether the mind actually functions in terms of beliefs and desires at all, and whether the tenets of folk psychology will ever be validated by research in neurobiology and the cognitive sciences. The essence of Fodor's thought on these topics can be read in two of his articles: "Why there Still has to be a Language of Thought" and "Banish DisContent". These appear in the same collection as "Stalking the Wild Epistemic Engine", co-authored by Paul Churchland and Patricia Smith Churchland. For a commentary on Foder's thoughts see Phillipps. Churchland is at his most accessible in *The Engine of Reason*: see, in particular, "The Neural Representation of the Social World" (pp. 123-50) and "The Puzzle of Consciousness" (pp. 187-226). For a commentary on Churchland, see Phillips, pp. 118-24.
Our best option for the moment will be to join with Dennett, who maintains that probably common-sense psychology as a theory of mind will not stand up to scientific scrutiny, but that it will remain the operative approach to the evaluation of personhood in everyday life, perhaps indefinitely, simply because we have no capacity to imagine what could replace it, apart from trying to reduce all of our mind operations to neurobiological equivalents. In this direction lies the huge debate over materialist reductionism, and the menace of a new dualism that brings back distinctions between mind content as having its equivalent in the functions of the brain, yet producing thoughts and sensations of a different order that cannot in themselves be reduced to neurobiological happenings. See Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, esp. "Folk Psychology as a Source of Theory" (pp. 43-57), in which he states: "There are different reasons for being interested in the details of folk psychology. One reason is that it exists as a phenomenon, like a religion or a language or a dress code, to be studied with the techniques and attitudes of anthropology. It may be a myth, but it is a myth we live in, so it is an 'important' phenomenon in nature" (p. 47). Baker likewise holds that in spite of recent cognitive and neurobiological investigations, the commonsense approach to the mental attitudes and mind states of others will remain in effect (p. 319). This is to accept for the discussion to follow that some form of functionalism will prevail, and that a kind of explanatory dualism will allow us to endorse as legitimate phenomena those qualia-like features of propositional states so difficult to imagine in neurobiological terms. This is one of the most debated aspects of the entire folk theory, whether in attempting to know other minds we proceed fundamentally by theorizing about other minds, or whether we simply assume that other minds are like our own, and that hence we can know them by introspection, in short, by asking ourselves what we would be doing or thinking in their place. I have looked at numerous articles on the topic, including those of Tambiah and Brunner. There is a more extensive investigation in Stich, whose book devotes major sections to the topic, such as "Connectionism, Eliminativism, and the Future of Folk Psychology" and "How do Minds Understand Minds? Mental Simulation versus Tacit Theory"; these contain terms that will reappear in the body of this article. Also enlightening is the article by Johnson.

the intentional stance at work in a complex mode. The attendant ambiguities are every spectator's invitation to become absorbed in the hermeneutics of intentionality. The argument here is that such an absorption entails the wholesale engagement of a modular mind system designed by evolutionary selection, long before the conventions of theatrical representation were devised.

How, then, can the anthropomorphic fallacy be avoided, if theatre spectators are driven back upon the same cognitive mechanisms that pertain to everyday life in the divining of intentional states? It would appear that they can do no other, insofar as characters, even in their simplest manifestations, do the things which minds and limbic systems alone allow them to do: believe, reflect, intend, will, feel, and act. Stated otherwise, the phylogenetic means by which we know other minds, whether by empathy or by the logic of mental operations, deems, of necessity, that other minds possess the same properties as our own. We can know them only in our self-image. The logistics of folk psychology suggest, moreover, that implicit norms are in place by which the ontological category of personhood is assigned to literary characters. This is true of Jonson's humour characters, as it is of speaking animals in the beast fables, each type, up and down the mimetic scale, a reminder, by its respective conventions, of those negotiations necessary between psychological competence and schematic character structures that necessitate revisions "downwards as circumstances dictate" (Dennett, "True Believers", p. 155). Our working premise is that people will live up to preconceived expectations of reliability, honesty, cogency, timeliness, collegiality, until proven otherwise. Just such expectations abet the trickster, who plays the satirist among the unsuspecting, and who prevails only until his victims make that downward revision.

Hence, there would seem to be no entirely satisfactory resolution to this debate, in which the epistemic categories of the human are imposed upon the imitations of the human in the theatre. It is a delicate crux, for characters are not "case studies". Their makers are not psychoanalysts. They do not have lives outside of their theatrical representations. What we have of their minds is made of words, selected, contrived—yet, paradoxically, contrived to the end of representing states of will and desire that our judgments recognize as human. Plot is, functionally, the conflict of human desires socially expressed and evaluated by the only mechanisms at our cognitive disposal, namely those transactions collectively referred to as "folk psychology". The question is what this analytical mode systemically does to our reading of character.

The opposite of the epistemic categorizing of folk psychology is not reading others merely as social constructs, or as functional agents (as though they could operate by non-human belief states), but the solipsistic predicament in which we may doubt that anything at all can be known about other minds. The most pragmatic answer to the solipsistic argument is that if our ancestors' capacities to know other minds had been seriously compromised at any point along the way, we wouldn't be here to ask the question. We know that they were efficient in maximizing liabilities and opportunities in relation to the agency of others through observation and negotiation, reading causes into events, predicting by norms, and placing themselves by simulation into the circumstances of others in order to calibrate what they would do in those same situations. Our lives are absorbed by these same operations, inside as well as outside the contexts of art. Not only do we have a capacity to read other minds, although imperfectly and in contingent fashion, but that capacity may well be hard-wired into the human genome. Evolutionary psychologists such as Steven Pinker and Peter Carruthers will argue that throughout our prehistoric past, humans have made progress in linking more and more complex belief states and desires to given ends, barring accident, contingencies, or competitive opposition.[7] Two areas in particular in which we display a certain virtuosity in reading other minds pertain to mate selection and group selection. Pressures in these domains undoubtedly did much to hone our skills, acting as powerful incentives to develop reasoning concerning social norms and the need to comply with them, for "with norms and norm-based motivation added to the human phenotype, the stage would be set for much that is distinctive of human cultures" (Carruthers, p. 75).[8] By such reverse

---

7. Pinker's *How the Mind Works* is suffused with the idea that man is what he is by a long process of selection and adaptation, and that the equipment we have today for computation, perception, the appreciation of beauty, social management and much more is based on the specialized uses of more basic operations to create interim states and processors. Thus "our organs of computation are a product of natural selection" and "natural selection is the only evolutionary force that acts like an engineer, 'designing' organs that accomplish improbable but adaptive outcomes" (p. 36). His references are to Richard Dawkins and George Williams. The importance, for our purposes, is that folk psychology, too, is selective and adaptive, prioritizing our attentions to those aspects of others of greatest relevance to our own survival.

8. As Hacking points out, we do possess a kind of theory of others based on social norms, for without such norms there would be a far less efficient basis for predicting behaviour. Norms are, of course, a philosophical minefield, but on the same basis that folk psychology asserts itself by the logic of what we must cognitively perform to the ends of social survival, "normalizing attitudes" emerge as the basis for making social attributions, predictions and moral evaluations. So much of society is based on regulariz-

engineering, Carruthers came to believe that "there may be a 'mind-reading' module charged with generating beliefs about other people's mental states", by which he means the special neural clusters that perform these functions, or that at least organize the "all-over" networks for attending to them (p. 73). This is merely to say that we are dealing with a deep-seated cognitive operation, one that is pervasive in dealing with the interpretation of intentional states, and one that posits assumptions about other minds by dint of the fact that we can know them only by analogy with our own. The problem is no longer whether we have the capacity to know other minds, but whether we can process that information without according the ontological status of the human to the mind being read.

That we commit a "fallacy" in mentally processing theatrical representations of persons as "real" persons may express a critical ideal, but perhaps not an epistemological fact. It acknowledges the constructed autonomy of the reader or spectator in keeping with the Cartesian myth that consciousness is in complete selective command of its content according to pre-chosen terms. It delivers the theatrical experience over to aesthetic determinations and social agendas, on the assumption that the reading mind is itself entirely blank in nature, a *tabula rasa* to be programmed by the schematics of social and aesthetic engineering through which the meanings and sensations of art are understood according to consciously approved agendas. But such theories of the critical act must turn a blind eye to the default modes of cognition determined by evolutionary selection, which impose their own epistemic operations. Arguably, however, the assessment of the intentional states of other minds is just such an operation—a drive in the mental main-frame that posits its own terms of being and expectation. Folk psychology may intrude upon the reading of theatrical characters in ways rather more profound than the cultural constructivists could wish. This is not to say that mental conditioning cannot imprint deeply upon the spectator of theatre the plasticities of a double mimetic representationalism, whether as text or as performance. But one may well ask whether the modes of our folk psychology can be altered in reading the intentional states of theatrical characters, as though their beliefs and desires differ in essential ways from those

ing practices, and while, in the postmodern world, we may have convinced ourselves that deviancy and subversion are the forces of progress and liberation, nevertheless, man as a social animal will continue to conform in order to insure inclusion. Normalcy is a mode of thought in its own right, a mental habit human minds resort to as a theorized base for social orientation. Concern about being abnormal is a driving human preoccupation (Hacking, p. 61).

encountered in the social world around us. If the values of theatrical representationalism cannot be superimposed upon the cognitive processes for the reading of other mind states, because there is no generic difference between jealousy in and out of the theatre, let us say, then we are compelled, in this regard, to perform for art what we perform for life; the mind has no categories for making the distinction. To that extent, characters will always be real, because psychological competence is a precondition to having intentional states, and if theatre is about anything that really matters, it is about the dynamics of reading mind states in a community of persons.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Marston, John. *The Fawn*. Ed. Gerald A. Smith. Regents Renaissance Drama Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.

Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. Ed. J. W. Lever. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Methuen, 1965.

Secondary Sources

Baker, Lynne Rudder. "Folk Psychology". *The MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999. 319-20.

Beecher, Donald. "The Courtier as Trickster in Jacobean Theatre". *University of Ottawa Quarterly* 53 (1983): 199-209.

____. "Intriguers and Tricksters: Manifestations of an Archetype in the Comedy of the Renaissance". *Revue de littérature comparée* 61.1 (1987): 5-31

____. "The Sense of an Ending: John Marston and the Art of Closure". *Le spectacle dans le spectacle dans le théâtre anglais de la Renaissance*. Ed. Jean-Marie Maguin and François Laroque. *Collection Astraea* 4, No. 1. 2 vols. Montpellier: Université Paul-Valéry, 1992. 2: 369-79.

Brunner, Jerome. "Frames of Thinking: Ways of Making Meaning". *Modes of Thought: Explorations in Culture and Cognition.* Ed. David Olson and Nancy Torrance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966. 93-105.

CARRUTHERS, Peter. "Moderately Massive Modularity". *Minds and Persons*. Ed. Anthony O'Hear. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 67-89.

CHURCHLAND, Paul. *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul: A Philosophical Journey into the Brain*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.

CHURCHLAND, Paul, and Patricia Smith Churchland. "Stalking the Wild Epistemic Engine". *Mind and Cognition: A Reader*. Ed. William Lycan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990. 300-11.

DENNETT, Daniel C. *The Intentional Stance*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.

___. "True Believers: The Intentional Strategy and Why it Works". *Mind and Cognition: A Reader*. Ed. William G. Lycan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990. 150-68.

FODOR, Jerry. "Banish DisContent". *Mind and Cognition: A Reader*. Ed. William Lycan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990. 420-38.

___. "Why there Still has to be a Language of Thought". *Mind and Cognition: A Reader*. Ed. William Lycan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990. 282-99.

HACKING, Ian. "Normal People". *Modes of Thought: Explorations in Culture and Cognition*. Ed. David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 72-92.

JOHNSON, David Martel. "Taking the Past Seriously: How History Shows that Eliminativists' Account of Folk Psychology is Partly Right and Partly Wrong". *The Future of the Cognitive Revolution*. Ed. D. M. Johnson and Christina E. Erneling. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 366-75.

JUNG, Carl G. "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure". Trans. R. F. C. Hull. In Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, with commentaries by Karl Kerényi and C. G. Jung and introductory essay by Stanley Diamond. New York: Schocken Books, 1972. 195-211.

LAWRENCE, W. W. *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*. 1931; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969.

PHILLIPS, Hollibert E. *Vicissitudes of the I: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995. 114-16.

Pinker, Steven. *How the Mind Works*. New York: Norton, 1997.

Stich, Stephen P. *Deconstructing the Mind*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1996.

Tambiah, Stanley. "Relations of Analogy and Identity: Toward Multiple Orientations to the World". *Modes of Thought: Explorations in Culture and Cognition*. Ed. David Olson and Nancy Torrance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966. 34-52.

Traub, Valerie. *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*. London: Routledge, 1992.