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Tragic silences in "Hamlet" and Antonin Artaud

Pouchard, Line Catherine, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1993

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TRAGIC SILENCES IN HAMLET AND ANTONIN ARTAUD

by

LINE CATHERINE POUCHARD

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

1993

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 22, 1993

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ABSTRACT

TRAGIC SILENCES IN HAMLET AND ANTONIN ARTAUD

by

Line Catherine Pouchard

Adviser: Professor Fred J. Nichols

This study makes the hypothesis that silence is a valuable concept for the analysis of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy. It explores the dialectical relationship between speech and silence in order to account for the shaping of dramatic conventions in this drama. Antonin Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty" provides various concepts of silence which I apply to the analysis of plays of the early modern period, in particular Hamlet. On the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, dramatic silences intervene in the shaping of such conventions as the ghost, the use of disguises, soliloquies and asides, and the use of pantomimic action in dumb-shows.

For Artaud, silence plays a dual role. First, it supplies a background which gives relief to the actors' gestures, the sets, noises, music, and other elements of *mise-en-scène* that a play director may use. As a result, language loses its privileged position, and, in performance, the text of a play assumes no more importance than other elements. Second, silence, as it is represented in language, particularly in Artaud's writings on the Theater of Cruelty, occupies a space where the act of naming is a logical and ontological contradiction. Silence thus described performs a cruelty upon language, as it tears off language from its consensual meaning and forces it into new representations.

Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies use extensively this quality of silence, of undermining meanings, and propose figurative representations of cruel acts to their audiences. In Hamlet, two major kinds of silence are identifiable: the silence produced and designated by the word "silence," a word which appears 5 times in the play, second only to Coriolanus for instances of recurrence in all of Shakespeare's plays, and the silence implied in stage directions such as the silent entrances and exits of the ghost at the beginning of the play. The study of silences in Hamlet gives an internal epistemic context to the problem of Shakespeare's play-texts as representations of plays.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My everlasting gratitude to Professor Fred J. Nichols, my dissertation director who introduced me to Comparative Literature and Renaissance studies, guided my hesitant steps throughout and provided much-needed encouragements with unfailing interest and kindness, far beyond his call of duty.

Many thanks to Distinguished Professor Vincent Crapanzano for his ability to point out the pitfalls of my reasoning, suggest viable solutions, and provide many sessions of free-associative brainstorming during which the pieces of the puzzle fell into place.

My gratitude also goes to Distinguished Professor Mary-Ann Caws for setting the example as a woman scholar and for her patience when reading this manuscript. Without her expertise, intuition, and enthusiasm this project would never have been brought to completion.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Joan Dayan and Andrew Gurr at various stages of this project, Joan for her early comments and passionate suggestions, Andy for continuous challenge and subversive humour.

And most importantly, many thanks to all my friends at the Graduate Center, and elsewhere, in New York, Paris, Rome, München, and Reading, UK, for their support and affection during this perilous journey of the mind.

Pour Sylvie, Alice, Berthe et Jean-Claude

TABLE OF CONTENTS**1. Introduction**

1.1. Silences in the analysis of dramatic conventions.	1
1.2. Ghosts and the effect of their speech upon audiences.	14
1.3. Partial dramatic silences: asides, disguises, soliloquies.	25
1.4. Enigmatic silences: the dumb-show.	37

2. Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty": Poetic and Dramatic Silences.

63

2.1. Artaud's method of composition and rewriting: the fear of silence.	64
2.2. Silence as absence of words: a new language of theater and poetry.	78
2.3. Poetic images containing silence.	96
2.4. The links between silence and cruelty pass through the body.	111
2.5. Artaud's prophetic voice.	123

3. Examples of silence in early modern English tragedies.	
3.1. Political hierarchy in <u>The Spanish Tragedy</u> .	132
3.2. Self-definition in <u>The Revenger's Tragedy</u> .	146
3.3. Two separate worlds in <u>Coriolanus</u> .	162
4. The importance of silence in <u>Hamlet</u> .	172
4.1. Enter Ghost: the silence of audiences.	183
4.2. Tragic irony and flows of silence in the taboo of speech.	197
4.3. Poetic simile of silence in the Pyrrhus speech.	212
4.4. Polonius: action versus words.	220
4.5. "The rest is silence": building a legend.	231
5. Afterword: The Cruelty of Representation.	244
Selected Bibliography	246

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Silences in the Analysis of Dramatic Conventions.

Silence has always been considered as a context out of which words arise. In a pre-biblical tale of the flood, the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh, after six days and nights of storm the old man Utnapishtim emerges from his boat: the first thing he notices is the silence spread over the earth. The story of creation in the Fourth Gospel starts with the famous phrase: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1-2), but, in Augustine's Confessions, the Word of God is silent, it is the border which prevents Augustine from losing himself in chaos and sin, and at the same time, it is the silent presence which lends meaning to his system of signification. John Freccero assesses the importance of silence in Augustine's system of signs:

Whether we accept Augustine's theology in some form or translate it into what might be called a semiology of desire, we remain within a verbal universe, reaching out for a silent terminal point that lies outside the system.

The Word, the silence that subtends the system, grounds both desire and language. In its absence,

however, both threaten to become an infinite regression, approaching ultimate satisfaction and ultimate significance as an unreachable limit.¹

In what appears as an early attempt to ground the infinitely regressive arguments of deconstruction, Augustine points to a major problem that this study explores. If silence is antithetical to words and forms the underlying basis from which words may be uttered, how is it possible to define silence, since all we have at our disposal to appraise it is precisely words? Thus, one of the major directions of this study is to find various means of identifying silences in the works chosen, and to point out the obstacles and difficulties encountered in defining silences. Some of the questions addressed here include the following: what constitutes a dramatic silence? how are these silences recorded in the play-texts? how can we identify them when we are working from written records of an essentially oral medium? how do silences affect the imaginary world of each play? to what extent do they modify the dramatic structure? what role do they play in the interaction with audiences?

¹ John Freccero, "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics," Literary Theory/ Renaissance Texts, eds. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986)

The Oxford English Dictionary defines silence as "abstinence from speech and noise;" our senses inform us that in nature, in a forest for example, absence of noise does not exist. Silence must then be defined within the framework of a dialectical relationship to speech, keeping in mind the biases and errors introduced by some of the questions outlined above. Since the Elizabethans used "speech" rather than "language," I will keep this word when talking about them. For Artaud and contemporary theater, "language," is the most general term. As Artaud is creating his own language, this term only has a functional, and not a theoretical value hereafter. Perhaps the dialectic between silence and speech or language accounts for the scant interest silence has stimulated in literary theory. Many studies have been devoted to language and speech: among them, analytic philosophers & generative linguists have built models to account for it, and critics practicing deconstruction have focussed their studies on its nature. Structuralist and logical constructions of the world in terms of bi-polar oppositions have perhaps led us to assume that, since language has come under intense scrutiny, lack of it was equally well understood and not worthy of further inquiries. Yet music, ever so closely intertwined with poetry, relies on a very sophisticated use of silence for dividing time into rhythmic units.

John Cage who insisted that "There is no such thing as silence, something is always happening,²" wrote an entire book entitled Silence³. The book is concerned with experimental music, sounds considered for themselves apart from their musical qualities, sounds unrelated to each other, and anecdotes on other composers. Although it does not mention silence at all, silence pervades the entire book; it is indicated with blank spaces in the layout, blank columns except for repeated punctuation on each line facing a column of text, a concern for individual sounds standing on their own. There are many other unnamed silences in Cage's book. One can almost venture the idea that for each given sound and each given utterance, there is a specific silence. The depth and range of possibilities that can be hidden under the very term "silence" make it necessary to limit drastically the scope of study.

This study makes the hypothesis that silence is a valuable concept for the analysis of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. It explores the dialectical relationship between

² quoted by Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," (186), A Susan Sontag Reader, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1963, Repr. 1982).

³ Silence. Lectures and Writings by John Cage, (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1939).

speech and silence in order to account for dramatic aspects in these early modern plays. Antonin Artaud's ideas help define various theatrical characteristics of silence which I then apply to some early modern plays, in particular Hamlet.⁴ The results of such an encounter fall into two categories. First, plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, an age so celebrated for its eloquence, are analyzed from a new perspective⁵. By using a comparative method I

⁴ The working text of reference will be Hamlet, ed. Harold Jenkins, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare, London and New York: 1982. I often disagree with his editorial choices: his edition, based on Q2 (1604-05) and F1 (1623), too easily discards the contribution of the so-called "bad" Q1 (1603) because it is "a memorially reconstructed" or "reported text" (21). The relevance of textual problems in the Shakespeare canon for the study of silence in his plays constitute an issue which cannot be addressed in the scope of this study. For a starting point, see Michael J. Warren, "Textual Problems; Editorial Assertions in Editions of Shakespeare," Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press: 1985)

⁵ Few critical works examine silence in Shakespeare, and none uses it as a viewpoint to interpret Hamlet. Alwin Thaler, in Shakespeare's Silences (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), studies Shakespeare's influence upon Milton. Harvey Rovine, in Silence in Shakespeare. Drama, Power, Gender (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1985), focuses on silent characters, which hardly describes Hamlet. Philip McGuire, in Speechless Dialects. Shakespeare's Open Silences (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) discusses the interpretation in performance of silences such as Isabella's at the end of Measure for Measure, and he does not discuss Hamlet. R. Viswanathan reexamines words such as "harsh," "rough," and "cruel," in the context of noise, sound and silence (The Explicator, 46 (2), Winter 1988, 6-8). Marjorie Garber argues for the topos of inexpressibility as a rhetorical figure in "'The Rest is Silence': Ineffability and the 'Unscene' in Shakespeare's Plays" (Ineffability. Naming the Unnamable from Dante to Beckett. Peter Hawkins and Ann Schotter, eds. AMS Press: New York, 1984). In "'Fingers on

also avoid the methodological pitfalls of applying to plays concepts derived from the same plays in order to test the validity of those very concepts. Second, this perspective yields sufficient insights to indicate directions for applying these concepts of silence to the theory of dramatic genre. Without needing a historical survey of theatrical silences, this study indicates conclusions about the genre of tragedy: that tragedy, linked to politics since the Oresteia, arises from the interplay between silence and speech.

Antonin Artaud⁶'s interest in early modern drama is known, but critics who mention it study what early modern plays bring to Artaud's ideal theater, not the implications of his analyses for the criticism of these plays⁷. Artaud,

your lips, I pray': on silence in Hamlet" (English, 27 (128), Summer-Autumn 1978, 121-128), Zvi Jagendorf examines language in the play from the dialectical relationship between speech and negation of speech. Ann Pasternak Slater in Shakespeare the Director (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982) studies silences as dramatic pauses.

⁶ As my text of reference, I will use Antonin Artaud's Oeuvres Complètes, Paris: Gallimard, 1956-. There are 25 volumes to date. For volumes I and IV of the complete works, I use the new editions of 1976 and 1978 respectively.

⁷ Alain Virmaux, in Antonin Artaud et le Théâtre (Paris: Seghers, 1970), asks if Artaud's theater is at all possible, and considers a bit hastily that Elizabethan plays provided him with a poor substitute for the "Theater of Cruelty." Carol Rosen emphasizes the aptness of Tis Pity She's a Whore to serve as an example for the "Theater of Cruelty" but takes at face value Artaud's assertion that the language of the play should be bypassed ("Language of Cruelty in Ford's Tis Pity She's a Whore," Drama in the

who wanted to adapt The Thyestes for the "Theater of Cruelty," read Seneca, the Roman playwright who inspired some blood-and-slaughter Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedies. In Le Théâtre et son Double, his relationship to Shakespeare displays seemingly irreconcilable contradictions: he held Shakespeare responsible for the introduction of psychology into modern drama, and castigated him for inaugurating its decline. But Artaud staged a private reading of Richard II to attract benefactors to the "Theater of Cruelty," and planned to open its second season with Macbeth. He was directly influenced by the plays of John Webster, and John Ford, among others. He knew Cyril Tourneur's Revenger's Tragedy⁸, a play now attributed to Thomas Middleton, and Webster's Duchess of Malfi and The White Devil⁹; he analyzed John Ford's Tis Pity She's a Whore, using Annabella, the title of Maeterlinck's translation; and he unsuccessfully wooed André Gide for his support in staging Arden of Feversham, a play of Shakespeare's apocrypha. Ignoring this wealth of evidence, critics of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama have hardly taken Artaud's analyses on the theater

Renaissance. Comparative and Critical Essays. Davidson, Gianakaris, Stroupe, eds. New York, AMS Press, 1986).

⁸ Oeuvres Complètes, V. 64.

⁹ Oeuvres Complètes. V. 36.

seriously¹⁰. When they do so, they tend to misconstrue Artaud's conceptions on the theater. And with the exception of the French comparatist Pierre Brunel, who praises Artaud's insights into Ford's play¹¹, no scholar has attempted to use Artaud's ideas to assess tragedy.

Silence serves many purposes in early modern drama. It also enters into the composition of imagery which forms such an essential component of the appeal of these plays to our imagination. I will first distinguish between dramatic silences, and poetic or language-related silences. Dramatic silences occur when an important element of the plot is conditioned by silence. The ghost, a staple of revenge tragedies beginning with Thomas Kyd's Spanish Tragedy (c. 1587)¹², sometimes appears silently, and sometimes talks. Silence is indispensable to keeping a secret about a murder

¹⁰ Artaud is nowhere mentioned in The Violence of Representation. Literature and the History of Violence (Armstrong and Tennenhouse, eds. London: Routledge, 1989), although this collection includes essays on early modern drama and contemporary literature. In Radical Tragedy. Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.) Jonathan Dollimore, who relies heavily upon Bertold Brecht, considers Artaud "to a much lesser extent."

¹¹ Pierre Brunel. Théâtre et Cruauté ou Dionysos Profané. Paris: Librairie des Méridiens, 1982.

¹² As the dating of plays varies, I follow Andrew Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980).

or a revenge plot. Keeping or breaking silence contribute to the foundations of a revenge plot: revelations breaking this silence bring about a climax in the plot, and often the conclusion of plays. The dumb-show, a popular and little understood feature of early modern drama, present silent revelations. The paradox here is that silent revelations often anticipate the dramatic disclosure of a murder or a revenge. The role of silence in the development of the plot will lead us to highlight the opposition between words and action on the Elizabethan stage.

Language-oriented or poetic silences play an important role in the poetic qualities of a play. Silence is used as it is in a poem and in poetic prose. The importance of silence is well-known to twentieth-century poets. When a writer or poet chooses to express himself or herself in a particular genre, he or she faces a form of silence specifically induced by the genre chosen. Octavio Paz notes that writing poetry necessarily involves a confrontation with silence: "Inspiration does not speak. It is mute. It is the silence beyond us that beckons to us. It is the promise of the word that is silence¹³." These sections will examine the poetic silences used specifically in the language of

¹³ Magazine Littéraire. "Entretien. Octavio Paz, le Poète dans la Cité." 263. March 1989. 105-107. (My translation).

drama: silence occurs in the scansion and delivery of blank verses. When a syllable, and sometimes a half-line, is missing in the metrics of the iambic pentameter silence introduces a dramatic break in the rhythm of verse delivery. Artaud brings this feature to a paroxistic level when he introduces sound and silences in the stage directions of his play The Cenci, and when he uses silence as a hieroglyphic element of the "Theater of Cruelty."

Another category of silence in the early modern period is the silence expected of women. Women characters often deliver a far smaller number of lines than men characters in each play. Women's silence is portrayed as an index of their chastity, and women characters are prevented from expressing their feelings, desires, and points of view. When a female character does so, it often results in a disaster for her. Women's honor is measured by their silence about the wrongs done to them, and in tragedies, suicide is often their only means of protesting such wrongs. The establishment of a feminine ideal to which "good" women are supposed to obey includes an imperative silence. On the contrary, when male characters become silent in decisive situations, this is the onset of their downfall. Words are often regarded as evil in revenge tragedies, but this characteristic must be qualified within the context of gender.

Women are seen to yield to the evil words of men attempting to seduce them, but the real damage takes place when women cannot keep silent after hearing these words. Women's response is portrayed as an acquiescence, thus implying a loss of honor.

The silence of women in early modern drama deserves a full study on its own terms¹⁴. In the period when the London stage was at its climax with Shakespeare, no record mentions the performance of plays written by women. Women are portrayed by male playwrights, which may introduce a partial viewpoint. Indeed, this situation is sometimes reflected in the plays, as we often learn about women characters' intentions and motives through the viewpoints of men characters. A feminist study of women's silences must take into account "closet" drama, such as Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam, and Aphra Behn successful plays in the seventeenth-century, which outreaches the boundaries of

¹⁴In "A Room Not Their Own: Renaissance Women as Readers and Writers," Margaret Ferguson proposes guidelines to the study of women's silences. The Comparative Perspective on Literature. Approaches to Theory and Practice. Ed. with an int. by Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1988. Catherine Belsey discusses the "uncertain place" of women's speech, and the "discursive discontinuities" in her chapter on women's silence in The Subject of Tragedy. Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama. London and New York, Methuen, 1985).

the present study¹⁵. It must also consider the historical background provided by numerous pamphlets, conduct books, and treatises on wives's "duties," on their education, and on their public conduct, pamphlets which admonish women to silence. As what Adrienne Rich calls tokenism¹⁶ would prevent me from doing justice to the complex question of women's silences, and perhaps perpetuate distorted claims, the silence of women cannot be addressed in this study unless it underlines a major fracture in plot entanglement, as it does in Coriolanus.

Some aspects of the relationship between a playwright and his audience are portrayed within the plays themselves. Silences in the plays are useful to create certain effects, such as awe, expectation, and controlled misunderstanding, in theater audiences. Artaud intended to use the theater to stir up ideas of revolution in his audience. Silence was also instrumental to performing the kind of ritual theater destined to change the mentalities of his audience. In

¹⁵In Feminism and Theatre (New York: Methuen, 1988), Sue-Ellen Case also quotes Hrotsvit von Gandersheim, a medieval playwright who wrote in Latin.

¹⁶Blood, Bread and Poetry. Selected Prose 1979-85, (London: Virago Press, 1986). She emphasizes the need to treat women's writings and women characters within the political and historical context of oppression and violence against women. See especially "What does a woman need to know," and "Towards a more feminist criticism."

early modern drama, the kind of silences at work in a play help establish the author's didactic intent. Given the conditions of performance on the Elizabethan stage, the silence of audiences during a performance was not to be taken for granted. Silences in a play can be seen as either training rowdy Elizabethan audiences to silent listening or as allowing space for audiences' responses. Silence at the conclusion of a play may imply a judgment on the political situation described in the plot, and invite audiences to draw their own conclusions. These silences must be understood in the cultural context of a period in which orality was much stronger than in ours. As plays were essentially an oral medium, silence supports a different ontological significance in words than it does in a written text.

My study aims at determining the characteristics of a silence specific to tragedy. It also gives a few directions for researching the aspects of silence related to drama. Artaud defines silence as a paradigm of drama, he makes ample and varied use of it in the 'Theater of Cruelty,' and other texts. In "The Theater and its Audiences," an informative study of the contemporary reception of plays in England, Alan Sinfield comments upon Artaud's influence over playwrights and directors:

In the longer term, Artaud's influence made theater generally less verbal (even Pinter's

silences are verbal). Playwrights were freed to move between naturalistic and surreal effects, and to develop complex relationships with audiences. (188)¹⁷

My study constitutes an approach to the major problem of defining silences in an oral form which we primarily know in writing. The paradox of studying an oral form through a written medium is circumvented thanks to the remedial silences or traces of silences left in the play-texts. The insights of Artaud, who read these plays with the design of staging them, become indispensable.

1.2. Ghosts and the effect of their speech upon audiences.

Artaud describes an important characteristic of ghosts in "L'Assomption," a short prose text written in 1921-22¹⁸. This text reads like the summary of a tragic plot, a narrative of a drama about a castle going up in flames, and its inhabitants slaughtering each other. There are no dialogues, and frightening sounds alternate with solemn silences filled with terror. At the moment when the lord, dressed in black, comes out of his chamber, a priest

¹⁷Society and Literature. 1945-1970. Alan Sinfield, ed. (London: Methuen, 1983.) 173-198.

¹⁸ Oeuvres Complètes, I*, 304.

escorted by servants carrying a casket appears. The lord claps in his hand:

Alors il y eut un silence inouï. Une immobilité spectrale figea les mystérieux fantoches muets, et une douce lumière irréelle remplaça la turquoise languissante des cieux. Et tout à coup le bruit rapproché du carrosse ébranla les vitraux.¹⁹

In Le Théâtre et son Double silence is sometimes linked to lack of motion on stage. Here it prepares for the characters stopping speechless in their tracks, and the entrance of the carriage. The reader expects some development to dissolve the dramatic tension created by the combination of silence, and of dumb and immobile characters. Tension is released by the frenzied activity following silence and the characters' sudden arrest. The silent stillness of ghosts designed to provoke fear in "L'Assomption" contrasts with a silent stillness of characters Artaud denounces in "Lettres sur Le Langage" in September 1931²⁰. Here silence and stillness emphasize psychological motivations and reduce the acting style to a minimum of gestures:

Que le théâtre soit devenu psychologique, alchimie intellectuelle des sentiments, et que le summum de l'art en matière dramatique ait fini par consister

¹⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, I*, 197.

²⁰ Oeuvres Complètes, IV.

en un certain idéal de silence et d'immobilité, ce n'est pas autre chose que la perversion de l'idée de concentration... du jeu. (102)

Artaud was perhaps reacting to the "Théâtre du Silence" or "Théâtre de l'Inexprimé," a form of theater first presented at the Théâtre des Mathurins in 1922, when Gaston Baty's company, La Chimère, started rehearsing Jean-Jacques Bernard's successful play Martine²¹. In a November 1930 conference at the Théâtre Montparnasse, "De la Valeur du Silence dans les Arts du Spectacle," Bernard presented the idea of sub-text, which "reveals the deepest feelings less by the actors' lines themselves than by the clash between these lines."²² Bernard mentions the dramatic effects of silence in Hamlet and in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex (29). Although his concepts of silence and the ineffable stress the "necessarily circumspect use of silences" and "the betrayal of language" in the theater (26), these concepts cannot be further remote from Artaud's: Bernard uses silences to reveal the subconscious, Artaud to allow the

²¹ As demonstrated by the letters he sent them, Artaud knew Louis Jouvet and Lugné-Poe, and briefly acted in Charles Dullin's company, actors who were all in close relationships with Baty, and quoted by Bernard in his book of souvenirs, Mon Ami Le Théâtre (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1958.)

²² Jean-Jacques Bernard, Témoignages. Cahiers d'Art Dramatiques XXV. Paris: Editions Coutan-Lambert, 1933. 25-26, my translation.

spectator's ritual identification with divine cosmic forces. Artaud who, like Bernard, refutes the dominance of language in the theater, places the emphasis upon spectacle and cathartic effect upon the audience, not upon the psychological dimension of plays.

To emphasize the dramatic effectiveness of Old Hamlet's ghost, we can contrast it with the ghost in Thomas Kyd's Spanish Tragedy, a play considered as a model for Elizabethan revenge plays, and continuously performed until the closing of the London theaters in 1642. In the Spanish Tragedy, the ghost of Don Andrea, killed in battle, does not appear silently on stage. On the contrary, the play opens with an 85-line speech by the ghost addressed to the audience and to the allegorical figure of Revenge. In his five appearances (I.i, I.iii, II.v, IV. vii, and V. iii), the ghost is coupled with Revenge, and their dialogue serves as a chorus commenting upon the action. In the expository speech, the ghost explains the path that led him from the underworld to the present stage. For 67 lines inspired by Book VI of The Aeneid, the ghost describes how Minos and his counselors sent him to Pluto because he could not decide if Don Andrea should be sent to the green pastures with lovers, or, because he died in battle, to "martial fields / Where wounded Hector lives in lasting pain, / And Achilles'

Myrmidons do scour the plain" (I.i. 47-49). Shakespeare's refusal to use Virgilian imagery to describe the underworld works towards a heightening of the effect of horror:

But I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their
spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair stand an end
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.²³

While Don Andrea's ghost rehearses the Virgilian imagery Old Hamlet's ghost refrains from it, and describes instead the effect of the tale on Hamlet if the ghost were to tell the story of what he has seen. Silence about the horrors of the after life is thus likely to leave each member of the audience to conjure up for himself or herself what these horrors must be. The effect of fear is much more powerful, as it is created not by reference to something known, but by allusion to unknown terrors. Furthermore, the underworld is not necessarily frightening in Virgil, as it includes the Elysian Fields, and the pastures of "green myrtle trees and

²³ Hamlet, I.v. 13-20.

cypress shades²⁴" where lovers enjoy "everlasting times." References to Virgil in The Spanish Tragedy, and to Minos' indecision as where Don Andrea's ghost should go fail to create an atmosphere of awe at the beginning of the play, as opposed to what happens in Hamlet.

The dialogue between Revenge and the Ghost in which this imagery occurs gives the Spanish Tragedy the tone of a rhetorical debate. As Revenge and the Ghost never interact with characters on stage, in the way that Hamlet's and other revenge plays' ghosts do, they create a transition between the audience of the play, and the action on stage. The playwright explicitly points out to his audience the Ghost's and Revenge's roles in his play. Revenge answers the Ghost's expository speech:

Here sit we down to see the mystery,
And serve for a Chorus in this tragedy. (I.i.88-89)

It is possible to read these lines literally, and understand them as stage directions. The hypothesis is that Revenge and the Ghost would be sitting somewhere on stage during the entire performance, in full view of the audience, not unlike the characters of the Kings of Spain and Portugal witnessing Hieronimo's staging of Soliman and Perseda at the end of the

²⁴ Spanish Tragedy, I.i. 44.

play. The fact that two fictional characters watch and comment upon the play creates a distance between the real audience and the action. The position of these two characters gives us insight into the degree of the theatrical illusion afforded by The Spanish Tragedy. As two characters explain the plot to the audience at the opening of the play, a reaffirmation that what the audience is witnessing can happen in the audience's day-to-day reality becomes necessary. Again using Virgil's imagery, the Ghost explains his entrance upon this stage "in twinkling of an eye:"

Forthwith, Revenge, she [Proserpine] rounded thee
in th'ear,

And bade thee lead me through the gates of Horn
Where dreams have passage in the silent night.

(I.i.81-83).

In Virgil's description, ghosts send false dreams to the upper world through the Ivory gate, whereas true dreams pass through the gate of Horn²⁵. In the fictional world of the play, there is no question that this ghost is a true ghost. Not only does he exist as a ghost, but what he says cannot be questioned. His very existence is guaranteed by the dialogue in which he engages with Revenge: since another character talks to him, he cannot be a figment of a character's imagination. We immediately see the benefit

²⁵ The Aeneid. VI. 1211-15.

Shakespeare drew from getting rid of Revenge in Hamlet. An intermediary level of theatrical illusion, one that distances the audience from the play with its explanations and commentaries, disappears. With the disappearance of the Chorus, replaced by nothing, and the integration of the Ghost in the fictional world of the play's characters, the audience is directly confronted with the events in the play as if those events could take place in their reality. The uncanny effect of a ghost who appears silently at first is quite different from that of a chatty ghost who neatly sets up an explanatory frame with references to Virgil around the tragedy. As in Shakespeare's play the ghost and Revenge are incorporated into one character, the debate between them about the necessity for revenge becomes Hamlet's internal debate. The ghost is no longer a semi-allegorical figure detached from the action, but a character in the play who interacts with Hamlet. When, in The Spanish Tragedy, the Ghost is presented as true, though disengaged from the action, the existence of the ghost in Hamlet remains dubious, let alone the truth of what he says. Because in Hamlet the ghost does not refer to an external, literary reference such as the gates of Horn, silence upon the horrors of hell and the existence of ghosts leaves it to the personal beliefs of the members of the audience to decide for themselves. Leaving undecided a matter so central to

the plot of Hamlet gives the play powerful appeal to each individual imagination.

In The Spanish Tragedy, Revenge and the Ghost display parodic features that will be exploited in later revenge tragedies such as Antonio's Revenge. In The Spanish Tragedy, V.i., the Ghost appears very nervous because the characters get entangled in subplots instead of revenging him so that he will not get satisfaction. Revenge and the Ghost are seen quarelling about the speed of the action, with the Ghost impatiently rising to stir Revenge from sleep. In their choric role, they anticipate a possible audience reaction of impatience with the lengthy detours of the plot. Although their presence distances the audience from the characters, Revenge and the Ghost provide a link between action on stage, and reactions in the audience. They are simplistic because they display only one motive, the desire to see revenge perpetrated, but, in pursuing this motive, they tell about various emotions related to the performance of revenge that they are witnessing in the play. These emotions can be ascribed to the audience of the play. The quarrel between Revenge and the Ghost brings comic relief to the events of the plot, but also deflates the horror of these events. By contrast, Hamlet's feeble attempts at mocking the ghost fall flat, which enhances the horrify-

ing effect. Hamlet's ghost, silently appearing several times before speaking to Hamlet, is fiercely economical with his own words. The only actions he performs are his entrances and exits. Even when Horatio and Hamlet aggressively provoke him, all he does is raise his arms. Artaud who associates silence with ghostly stillness ("immobilité spectrale") helps us understand that a still and silent ghost is more frightening than one who quarrels and chats like a living person.

However, a ghost which is only silent is not very effective either from the dramatic point of view. In Webster's The White Devil, the brief silent appearance of Brachiano's ghost seems the pretext for Flamineo to spell out the question of the existence of ghosts. This ghost remains on stage for 17 lines, dressed up in a friar's cowl and carrying a skull. Flamineo raises the question of "what religion's best / For a man to die in?"²⁶. But he immediately brushes it aside with an interrogation about his own future:

or is it in your knowledge

To answer me how long I have to live?

That's the most necessary question.

²⁶ The White Devil, V.iv. 125-6.

Whether ghosts exist or not, as "our Italian churchmen / make us believe" (134-5), not only is irrelevant to the revenge plot in The White Devil, but also seems irrelevant to the construction of one of the main characters. This ghost appears as a deadened theatrical convention as if Webster was using a traditional feature of revenge tragedies without the structural necessity of his plot demanding it.

The alternation between speech and silence in Hamlet's ghost conditions various questions that help move the plot forward. The ghost speaks just enough to raise problems but does not bring any element toward resolution. These well-known issues are: does the ghost really exist, or does Hamlet imagine it? If it exists, does it speak the truth and is it to be believed or is it lying? If it speaks the truth, should Hamlet avenge the murder or not? The ghost's silence is tragic because it reveals enough to tangle up conflicts into a dramatic knot, yet conceals more by the very fact of its speaking. It creates the elements of dramatic conflict without giving any possibility of resolving the conflict. As the main character is left to choose not only which course of action to take, but how to initiate this course, the ghost's silence is ominous as to the outcome of this action: indeed, what it refuses to reveal concerns death and what comes afterwards. The ghost's silent

message may be that some truths are better left unspoken, that silence upon certain questions, such as the time of death, and the afterlife, cannot be answered by human characters because they belong to a superior instance of knowledge. This silence would thus rejoin Augustine's portrayal of the Word of God.

1.3. Partial dramatic silences: asides, disguises, and soliloquies.

Silences are instrumental in the dramatic convention of the aside. According to this convention, one character on stage utters something which is not supposed to be heard by the other characters but only by audiences. There is no complete silence in the sense of absence of words or noise, but a partial silence is implied when one or more characters on stage act as if they did not hear what another is saying. Those characters display a temporary and selective deafness to the lines of one of them. The audiences who hear these lines are expected to understand that they are the only ones who can hear them. Nowhere is this feature more used by a playwright than in The Revenger's Tragedy.

In the first scene in a public setting, the trial of the Duke and Duchess' younger son for raping Antonio's wife, the Duchess, Spurio, Ambitioso and Supervacuo, the older sons, use asides to indicate the depravity of the ruling family. In these asides, the Duchess expresses dismay at the Duke's refusal to twist justice in favor of his younger son; the bastard brother Spurio expresses joy that one potential heir is eliminated, which advances his thwarted ambition to the dukedom:

Spurio [Aside]:

Now, now he dies, rid'em away.

Duchess [Aside]:

Oh what it is to have an old-cool duke

To be as slack in tongue as in performance.

(II.ii. 73-75)

While both asides radically contradict the feelings openly professed by the Duchess and Spurio, they also set the grounds for future alliances in the plot. The asides introduce a silence with respect of the other characters, a silence covering the motives of the Duchess and Spurio. They are partial silences because they are only silences when considered from the point of view of other characters. These silences are not directed toward the audience, but serve to reveal to the audience information necessary for the formation of one subplot, as well as hide this subplot

to the other characters. In the dramatic perspective, they establish a bond between the Duchess and Spurio, which the playwright will exploit in the next scene, when Spurio becomes the Duchess's lover.

Other alliances between characters are displayed in the asides when, in the trial scene, another brother, Ambitioso, comforts his younger brother by telling him that he will help him escape.

Ambitioso [Aside to Younger Son]:

Brother this makes for thee,
Fear not, we'll have a trick to set thee free.

Younger Son [Aside]:

Brother I will expect it from you both,

And in that hope I rest. (I.ii. 73-75, 85-88)

The aside includes a conventional silence, since the two brothers are assumed to share this conversation in a public scene. The theatrical convention is based upon the shared understanding that the audience hears the aside when the other characters hear nothing. This silence is possible because it can be taken for granted that the audience is familiar with the convention of the aside. The playwright stretches the convention because he does not present one character speaking his mind to the audience unheard from the other characters, but allows the silence of the aside to be

the base for a private dialogue between two characters, unheard from the others. This silence connects the Younger Son to his brothers Ambitioso and Supervacuo, and the three form a separate alliance from the rest of the family. Thus, the conventional silence inherent in an aside differentiates between several groups amidst characters. In the larger group of the old Duke's family present at the trial, two instances of asides announce two sets of alliances within the family, Spurio and the Duchess on the one hand, the three brothers on the other. The conventional silences presumed in the aside establish a division between the members of the family, and reinforce the bonds between the members of the sub-groups. Layers of silence establish separations between these sub-groups, setting up the background for the competition for the Duke's throne.

Vindice, the revenger and hero of The Revenger's Tragedy complicates the rules of scheming presented in the trial scene by adding disguises to asides in order to forward his murder plots. Disguises, so widely used in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, imply a form of silence about the "real" identity of a character. It is in keeping and breaking the silence of the disguise that many climaxes are brought about in plots. In Hamlet, the prince's madness functions like a disguise because it introduces a silence about his inten-

tions and the knowledge of his father's murder. Hamlet epitomizes this silence of disguise when he first appears mad to Ophelia. Ophelia describes Hamlet's mad behavior to her father: the young Prince's clothes are disorderly, the look of his face is "pale" and "piteous," he seizes Ophelia's arm and gestures incomprehensibly, he walks out of the room looking backward. During this entire scene, of which we only know through Ophelia's description, Hamlet keeps silent, although he eloquently conveys his fear and terrorizes Ophelia. In Ophelia's description, Hamlet seems about to speak "As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors, he comes before me" (II. i. 83-84). Duplicating the effect of the ghost's words about hell, not telling Ophelia the reasons of his behavior, and keeping silent during his appearance reinforces the effect of terror upon the one witnessing the scene. As Hamlet's first mad episode includes a silence, Polonius misinterprets his behavior (in spite of Ophelia's prudent "My Lord, I do not know," [85]). This silence in Hamlet's madness permits the madness to function like a disguise in further episodes because it introduces uncertainty and misconceptions as to how other characters, particularly Polonius, the King and the Queen, understand Hamlet's intentions. This silence also allows for the "mad" Hamlet's numerous puns and ironical double-entendres that only the play's audience is meant

to understand.

In what sometimes appears as verbal hemorrhage in The Revenger's Tragedy, the disguised Vindice constantly explains his intrigues in numerous asides throughout the play, when at the same time engaging in conversational exchange with other characters, particularly his enemies. Speaking as Vindice in asides, and as the disguised servant Piato in open dialogue, the character of Vindice is built upon the split of two disjointed identities. It is the joint silences introduced by the convention of the aside and of the disguise that allow the construction of his character. When one identity is displayed to some characters, the other one is necessarily silenced. Only the audience and the characters let into the scheme possess a complete but fragmented view of Vindice's character. Vindice's asides sometimes speak to the audience alone, sometimes are shared with his brother Hippolito, as well as with the play's audience. Vindice's asides are of two kinds: while he talks to the Duke and his son Lussurioso, pretending to serve their base dealings, he explains to the play's audience how he plans to kill them. When, as a disguised servant, he talks to his mother and sister and attempts to convince his sister to yield to Lussurioso's sexual propositions, Vindice's asides provide a commentary vilifying women for

their weakness and lack of virtue. The partial silences functioning in the conventional aside allow the playwright to build an intricate network of secrets between the various characters. In The Revenger's Tragedy, as the audience is never kept in ignorance about who intends to kill whom and how, and about who intends to seduce whom and with what purposes, the information kept secret from some characters builds dramatic expectation regarding how the secrets will be revealed to these characters. Climactic revelation is not achieved when the playwright reveals who killed the Duke and Lussurioso, for example, since the audience already knows. It is achieved by the manner in which an expected revelation is brought about, and the emphasis upon how the ignorant victim learns the identity of his murderer during a prolonged agony. These victims do not even get to know the reasons why they are killed: only the audience of the play and the revengers know. But as the victims do not question the motives of their murderers, which they would have plenty of time to do before dying, it is implied that the victims themselves know the wickedness of their deeds. The absence of questioning the victims brings to the motives behind their own slaying betrays a didactic intention towards the audience: the doers of wrong deeds must live with the expectation that revenge may come at any time.

Disguises are indispensable to complement asides in The Revenger's Tragedy, as they cast a form of silence upon the identity of the revenger as revenger. The revenger must shed his disguise before the fallen victim before he dies for the secret of his identity to be revealed. Vindice associates disguise to aside when he plots against Lussurioso, one of the Duke's sons. Disguised as Piato, he acts as servant to Lussurioso when the latter intends to seduce Castiza, Vindice's sister:

Lussurioso:

Piato, why the man I wished for, come,
I do embrace this season for the fittest
To taste of that young lady.

Vindice [Aside] Heart and hell!

Hippolito [Aside] Damned villain!

Vindice [Aside]

I ha' no way now to cross it, but to kill him.

(II.ii. 153-157).

Hippolito, Vindice's brother, is the constant accomplice of the revenger. He encourages his brother to remain steady in his purpose, expresses admiration for his capacity to design murder plots, and helps him to carry them out. When the two brothers plot Lussurioso's seduction of their sister, their conversation in asides provides the audience with the necessary information to understand their motives in killing Lus-

surioso. These dialogues, occurring in asides between the two brothers are not unlike the dialogue between Revenge and the Ghost in the Spanish Tragedy, in which each character encourages the other to forward the common goal of revenge. Like the dialogues between the Ghost and Revenge, the dialogues in asides between the disguised Vindice and his brother play a choric role in providing the audience with a commentary upon the characters' action. As Vindice and Hippolito are "human" characters, and not fantastical and allegorical ones like their counterparts in Kyd's drama, the setting of the play remains firmly rooted in the domain of human political matters. No metaphysical questions about the after life are being asked, and no discussion about the right for a commoner to be revenged on his rulers is presented to the audience. As may be deduced from his name, Vindice never questions his right to revenge, although he waits for nine years for the proper occasion. The reason given for killing Lussurioso's father, the Duke, that he poisoned Vindice's betrothed nine years before the events in the play happen, is mentioned only once, and is soon forgotten as new motives arise, motives allowing Vindice to provoke the massacre of the Duke's entire family.

Partial silences about secret motives and upon murder intrigues are always required for the murders to take place.

Yet, even the best kept secrets cannot long escape discovery in as corrupt a court as the one presented in The Revenger's Tragedy. In an instance of tragic irony, Vindice himself is aware of the fact:

And the old duke being dead but not conveyed
 - For he's already missed too-- and you know
 Murder will peep out of the closest husk-
 (IV.ii. 204-206)

As Vindice realizes that his murder will soon be discovered, he initiates the discovery himself by dressing the Duke in his own disguise as the servant Piato, and leads Lussurioso to the corpse. Dressing up corpses that take on another identity parallels Vindice slipping in and out of disguises throughout the play. This circulation of disguises between characters can be seen as a theatrical rendering of the actors changing costumes behind the stage. As Vindice comments upon the impossibility of keeping silent about a murder which he has himself committed, this comment anticipates the final revelation of Vindice and Hippolito as revengers to the new Duke's court. Vindice's statement that murders cannot be buried in silence is underlined by tragic irony because Vindice himself will be the one who reveals his murders at the end of the play. Furthermore, this revelation does not come from a discovery made by other characters who accuse him, and if Vindice was able to keep silent upon his

actions, he and his brother would escape revenged and unpunished. It is the brothers' inability to remain silent about their own murders that bring about the final revelation. Boasting about the murders permit the brothers to claim an identity as revengers, which would otherwise remain unknown to the court, if not to the audience. Breaking silence about the murders is a way of shedding the various disguises in order to appear before the whole court in their identity as revengers. Since no disguises are donned, and no asides are made to belie the face value of what is said, the lack of dramatic convention in this statement alerts the audience that Vindice is telling a "truth." Vindice's statement about the impossibility of keeping murders secret anticipates the discarding of disguises, breaking silence about the murders, and revealing the truth to all, as it occurs at the end of the play.

Artaud's only performed play, The Cenci, presents conventional, partial silences as if the theatrical conventions of silence were lost to his play's audience. In two instances, characters explicitly refer to the silence implied in a convention. As they spell out this silence, the characters direct the audience's attention to the convention. Count Cenci, alone on stage at the end of Act I Scene I, declares his intention to murder his sons, and

destroy his entire family. His prose soliloquy is frequently interrupted by stage directions pertaining to hand movements, pacing across the stage, and blowing air out:

[il souffle dans l'air].

Air, je te confie mes pensées.

[il va et vient dans la galerie].

Et toi, écho de mes pas, cours dans l'air. Vous êtes aussi silencieux l'un que l'autre. Même les murailles ne vous entendraient pas.²⁷

Artaud's character explains one of the conventional mechanisms of soliloquies: a character alone on stage delivers a speech in which he or she is supposed to express private and silent thoughts. The convention of the soliloquy makes public a character's unavowed intention, and allows the audience to hear what a person in reality would keep silent. The soliloquy on stage erases the silence about one's thoughts in reality. Soliloquies introduce a paradox because silent, private thoughts are expressed aloud and shared with a multitude. Members of the audience and the soliloquizing character are assumed to ignore this paradox. By conventionally erasing the silence of private intentions, soliloquies allude to the theatrical illusion and the consensus between audience and actors about the fic-

²⁷ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 155.

tional character of theater representation. Artaud destroys the functioning of implied silence in soliloquies by explicitly naming this silence. Cenci directs the audience's attention to the paradox of crying out loud to his audience that no one can hear his thoughts as the silent air carries them. As a result, showing the audience of The Cenci how the theatrical convention of the soliloquy works undermines the effectiveness of a convention based upon a mutual, unspoken agreement between actors and audiences.

1.4. Enigmatic silences: the dumb-show.

Dumb-shows in a play exemplify silence as an absence of speech and certainly not an absence of noise. On the contrary, the very absence of dialogue and speeches delivered by actors give room to an auditory space in which the director of a play can explore the possibilities of music, rhythms, and sounds. In Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, the stage directions describing dumb-shows often included trumpet sounds, music, and thunder clap. In this section, I will use "silent action" to mean theatrical action without language. Dumb-shows figure among the most obscure of dramatic conventions in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century drama. There are uncertainties about their origins, whether the convention of dumb-shows was borrowed from the

Italian stage, and thus relatively new in the English theater, or derived from old morality plays. The functions and effects of dumb-shows in the drama vary as much as the different types of dumb-shows; even the elements of what constitutes a dumb-show do not seem clearly defined. B.R. Pearn gives a strict definition of the dumb-show: "a part of a play which presents by means of action without speech an element of plot which would normally be accompanied by speech."²⁸ This definition has the advantage of limiting with precision the stage interludes which can be considered dumb-shows. In a more recent study, Dieter Mehl proposes that a dumb-show is "any part of silent action where one would normally expect speech"²⁹ (xii). Although Mehl argues that his definition is broader than Pearn's, he also excludes detailed stage-directions suggestive of pantomimes, masque-like performances, and funeral or ceremonious processions. It is striking about both Pearn's and Mehl's definitions that they rest upon the lack of speech which is expected to accompany dramatic action. The two critics emphasize the strangeness of the dumb-show by making it an exception to a "norm" which they implicitly establish as the "nature" of drama: drama is action accompanied by speech,

²⁸ "Dumb-show in Elizabethan Drama," Review of English Studies, 11 (44). 1935. 385-405.

²⁹ The Elizabethan Dumbshow. The History of a Dramatic Convention. London: Methuen, 1965.

and if a play presents action, one normally expects speech as well. The dumb-show is thus defined as a dramatic interlude which falls short of being an integral part of the "real" play. Conceptions such as Pearn's and Mehl's may account for the lack of recent critical interest in the convention of the dumb-show, and for the fact that, in modern performances of Elizabethan plays, dumb-shows are often omitted. Yet, this omission of dumb-shows in modern performances cannot be justified by the idea that modern directors would not know how to stage dumb-shows: dumb-shows are precisely a detailed account of stage directions.

In comparing Oriental and Western Theater in Le Théâtre et son Double, Artaud rehabilitates silent action as an integral part of a play:

Cette idée de la suprématie de la parole au théâtre est si enracinée en nous et le théâtre nous apparaît tellement comme le simple reflet matériel du texte que tout ce qui au théâtre dépasse le texte, n'est pas contenu dans ses limites et strictement conditionné par lui, nous paraît faire partie du domaine de la mise en scène considérée comme quelque chose d'inférieure par rapport au texte.³⁰

³⁰ Oeuvres Complètes. IV. 68.

According to Artaud, theater in his time has lost its popular appeal because it subordinates acting to the text to such a degree that the relationship between words and action is hierarchical, with *mise-en-scène* inferior to the text. In the ineffective theater described by Artaud, action is only supposed to be a "simple, material reflection of the text." This "simple reflection" empties the theater of all the features that give it its specificity as an artistic form of expression. Artaud recommends a balanced interaction between text and *mise-en-scène* which allows him to renew contemporary conceptions of *mise-en-scène*:

Cela ne veut pas dire qu'il faille faire dominer la *mise-en-scène* sur le texte. Et à ce propos il faut encore opposer une certaine conception européenne de la *mise-en-scène*, où tout, lumière, décor et mouvement, n'est qu'un adjuvant on pourrait dire décoratif du texte, à une conception organique et profonde où la *mise-en-scène* devient un langage particulier.³¹

In Artaud's "organic conception" of the theater, the silent action presented in dumb-shows no longer appears as an inferior form of entertainment providing spectacle for the uneducated masses, as contemporary critics of Elizabethan drama sometimes view it. On the contrary, he finds in

³¹ Oeuvres Complètes, V. 16.

pantomimic action of a new kind the means to convey emotions without using language. This silent action will provoke a stronger reaction of awe in the audience than if actors were to deliver long speeches explaining their gestures:

Objectivement, c'est par une sorte de pantomime nouvelle où les gestes et les attitudes figurent dans le sens d'hiéroglyphes vivants que je compte les rendre concrets et sensibles sur la scène.³²

Artaud sees examples of his new kind of pantomime in the Balinese theater. Although he refers to Elizabethan and Jacobean drama for the elaboration of his "Theater of Cruelty," Artaud never mentions the extensive use of dumb-shows in the plays of this period. It is nevertheless useful to briefly examine these dumb-shows, bearing in mind Artaud's thoughts on silent action, and a few questions. Were dumb-shows part of early modern "low" culture, which would explain the contempt of an educated scholar, just returning from Wittenberg, like Hamlet? Did the absence of speech on stage provide an opportunity to display visual spectacle and a virtuosity of mise-en scène, at the same time as leaving the audience free to provide its own running commentary? In silencing speech, did dumb-shows exemplify a means of representation outside verbal representation, closer to paintings and tableaux but introducing motion and

³² Oeuvres Complètes, V. 34.

incidents, not unlike silent film in our times³³? As dumb-shows could not be "simple, material reflection of the text," what did they represent, and were the intended effects on the audience akin to those of sacred rituals, carnivalesque entertainment, and reinforcement or undermining of political hierarchy?

Dumb-shows were widely used in English tragedies and histories throughout the period when the theater was the most flourishing, the last decade before and the first two decades after 1600. Their interpretation has elicited much controversy because it is only rarely clear from a textual analysis of the play what the meaning of the pantomime is in itself, or even what it brings to the structure of the play, if anything at all. For example, if we assume that an explanation given by a presenter is a criteria of clarity and understandability for the dumb-show, Pearn finds presenters in only about half of the 120 dumb-shows in 57 surviving plays between 1562 and 1626. Although Pearn states that the "tenor of the dumb-show" can easily be understood from the dialogue in the play, it is not surprising that

³³ Stanley Cavell studies the different ontological space introduced by silent film: "there is a further reality that film pursues, the further, continuous reality in which the words we need are not synchronized with the occasions of their need or in which their occasions flee them," The World Viewed. Reflections on the Ontology of Film (New York: The Viking Press, 1971) 147.

dumb-shows have been such a problematic element in studies of the London theater. For instance, Alan Dessen in his thoughtful study of stage conventions as a shared language does not study dumb-shows at all³⁴. Instead of searching for clues in the play that permit us to understand dumb-shows, it might be worth considering the fact that some of them were not meant to be intelligible by means of structural logic in the play. On the contrary, the very uncertainty in the meaning of some dumb-shows may have been part of the intended effect, thus creating in the audience anxious anticipation for an explanation, and perhaps awe at the impenetrable workings of destiny. This would have been particularly true of allegorical dumb-shows, an early type of dumb-show which Pearn sees disappearing in the early 1590's³⁵.

Early dumb-shows often were symbolic and allegorical representations with a moral significance pertaining to the following act, or to the whole play. This type of dumb-show is comparable to sixteenth-century popular emblems, such as

³⁴ Dessen, Alan C. Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

³⁵ "The inclination for symbolical dumb-show, however, was evidently disappearing, just as the academic play in which it figures was disappearing, though in a few cases we find this type of show surviving in plays of a more robust nature." (Pearn, 390)

the ones found in Whitney's "Choice of Emblems," in which the motto and stanzas of the emblem would be spoken by the presenter³⁶. The characters in a dumb-show may be different from those of the play: they often represent mythological figures difficult to distinguish from allegorical figures because they both served to carry a moral purpose. Allegorical dumb-shows appear in such academic drama as Gorboduc (1562) and Jocasta (1566) in which a dumb-show at the end of each act summarizes the action of the following act. They become much less important and are replaced by other forms of dumb-shows after 1600³⁷. The Spanish Tragedy presents a symbolic dumb-show at the end of a long Act IV to alleviate the impatience of the Ghost calling for Revenge:

(Enter a Dumb-show)

Ghost. Awake, Revenge; reveal this mystery.

Revenge. The two first nuptial torches bore

As brightly burning as the mid-day's sun;

But after them doth Hymen hie as fast,

Clothed in sable and a saffron robe,

³⁶ Whitney's "Choice of Emblems," a facsimile reproduction ed. by Henry Green, London: Lovell Reeve and Co, 1866.

³⁷ Pearn, 390. Thomas Dekker still uses allegorical dumb-shows in The Whore of Babylon (1606), and mixes the figures of Time, Truth, and Plaine-dealing with characters of the play. A Warning for Fair Women (1599), an anonymous play, contains a mixed dumb-show, in which the figures of Justice, Mercy, Chastity, and Diligence interact with some characters of the play (Mehl, 193).

And blows them out and quencheth them with blood,
As discontent that things continue so.

Ghost. Sufficeth me; thy meaning's understood,
And thanks to thee and those infernal powers
That will not tolerate a lover's woe

Rest thee, for I will sit to see the rest.

Revenge. Then argue not, for thou hast thy
request. (IV. vii. end)

In the sample of ten dumb-shows quoted in full by Pearn, taken in the period 1562-1626, and in the nine dumb-shows in five plays studied here³⁸, the recording in print of this dumb-show is unique because its action is not given in stage directions, followed by a Presenter's explanation about its meaning; rather, Revenge, acting as Presenter, describes to the Ghost the actions in the dumb-show as it is being acted. Here also performing their choric function, Revenge and the Ghost provide a commentary about silent action on stage. Other dumb-shows are given as stage directions, with or without a Presenter. Thanks to Revenge, the audience of The Spanish Tragedy knows with certainty who the allegorical character, Hymen, is. As it pours blood over the nuptial

³⁸ The Spanish Tragedy (1587): 2

Antonio's Revenge (1600): 3

Hamlet (1601): 1

The Revenger's Tragedy (1606): 1

The White Devil (1612): 2

See "Appendix I: List of Plays Containing Dumb-Shows" in Mehl (173-187).

torches, the audience can expect a dénouement including murders during a wedding scene. The dialogue between the Ghost and Revenge during the dumb-show is necessary to understand the action on stage, not just its meaning ("Revenge, reveal this mystery"). It emphasizes that mute allegorical figures can be totally confusing to an audience, whose members may not even understand which allegorical figure is portrayed, notwithstanding the greater familiarity Elizabethan audiences had with visual allegorical representations.

Obscure silent action in an allegorical dumb-show can represent an ominous sign for the outcome of the action. If a dumb-show anticipates violent developments in the plot, as the presence of blood indicates in The Spanish Tragedy, the uncertainty about possible interpretations of the meanings of such a dumb-show aggravates the atmosphere of doom and the anguished expectation of an audience. As in Greek tragedy, where the prophecy of oracles, and ominous signs such as Clytemnestra's dream contribute to the tragic aspect, unexplicit, symbolic dumb-shows with their ambiguous revelations may prepare the audience for the coming atrocities. In The Spanish Tragedy, Revenge reveals enough about the meaning of the dumb-show for the Ghost to be satisfied that his request will be fulfilled. This revelation emphasizes that lack of clarity in some dumb-shows, far from being an

inconvenient feature of the device, can help create a sensation of horror around the anticipated events, awe at the unknown workings of Fate, and fear of misunderstanding its warnings. Silence which renders dumb-shows ambiguous would thus reinforce the effect created by the ghost's non-revelations about hell in Hamlet: it is more frightening by the silence it keeps about certain matters than by what it actually describes.

Dumb-shows were often used to present an action foreshadowing the development of the plot; they may also replace parts of it. They serve to advance the plot, as silent action is more economical than lengthy explanations. Thomas Heywood seems particularly fond of this device; he insists on its dramatic value in a prologue to the Four Prentices of London (c. 1600?, printed 1615):

in dumbe shewes, which were they writ at large,

Would aske a long and tedious circumstance.³⁹

Heywood uses four dumb-shows in the Four Prentices of London, five in the Silver Age (1610-12), and the Golden Age (1610?) respectively, and four in the Brazen Age (1610-13) to that effect. Other playwrights such as Barnaby Barnes in The Devil's Charter: a Tragedy (1606), and John Marston in Antonio's Revenge (1601) use respectively one and three

³⁹ The Shakespearean Stage, 174-75.

dumb-shows in which part of the action is summarized. Dumb-shows might include ceremonial processions with gestures, dramatic encounters, and grand state occasions such as Jeronimo's installation as marshall in the anonymous 1 Jeronimo (c. 1604). Kings' coronations, the reception of an ambassador, or a judgment scene require a festive atmosphere and a display of wealth and authority, easily created in dumb-shows, with their frequent accompaniment of trumpets, torch-bearers, and procession of courtiers and soldiers. Andrew Gurr discusses dumb-shows as one of the staging devices used by public and private theaters:

Dumb-shows were affairs of pure spectacle, and employed relatively far more properties than the plays in which they were incorporated. [...] Stage business of this kind should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the stages themselves were essentially bare, and that as a general rule, the better the playwright the less spectacle there was likely to be in his plays.⁴⁰

Although speech is of prime importance, particularly in Shakespeare, plays can hardly be understood as static recitation of events, or as pure dialogue. And to have the strongest dramatic effect on an audience not always attentive, action must be spectacular. Dumb-shows were one of

⁴⁰ The Shakespearean Stage, 174-175.

the devices at the playwright's disposal to fulfill this function. In these cases, the dumb-shows are not indispensable to the plot, and could be omitted without damage to the unity of the play. They contribute highly colorful visual entertainment for the audience on stages that used very few outside objects. Pearn ventures that dumb-shows in the early academic tragedies such as Gorboduc and Jocasta provided the spectacular displays and movements so lacking in these static rhetorical plays, but the tradition of dumb-shows continued far beyond the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In order to study the proposition that dumb-shows had fallen out of fashion by the time Hamlet was produced, and were subsequently revived⁴¹, it is useful to examine some figures about the number of dumb-shows performed from 1560 to 1620. This proposition, Hamlet's supposed motivation for dismissing dumb-shows in his advice to the players, has been the object of much questioning among the interpreters of the play, and is sometimes thought of as one of the inconsistencies of that play. It is usually formulated in these terms: why do the players use a dumb-show when Hamlet pronounces himself against it?

⁴¹ The Shakespearean Stage, 174.

For the number of plays containing dumb-shows by decade, Pearn gives the following figures: 1561-1570 4; 1571-1580 0; 1581-1590 4; 1591-1600 13; 1601-1610 16; 1611-1620 14. As the total number of plays greatly increased in the 1590's, one cannot really compare the early decades with the later ones, as Pearn does. His use of the calendar decades to separate the periods seems quite artificial in light of this increase. My own count is somewhat different as I use a different dividing point, and add some plays to his list. For the twenty-four year span which goes from 1562 to 1585, one finds ten plays containing dumb-shows. For the thirteen year period that goes from 1587 (the year the Spanish Tragedy was entered in the Stationer's Register) to 1599, fourteen plays contain dumb-shows, and for the next thirteen years, until 1613, the number increases to thirty-one. Thus it seems that dumb-shows were used very early on, and fell out of fashion in the 1570-early 1580's. Pearn mentions no play containing a dumb-show for the twenty years from 1567 to 1587. The popularity of dumb-shows seems to take a new turn by 1587, the year that sees the production of the Spanish Tragedy although the device was never really abandoned, and from 1587 on, it became increasingly fashionable. In the thirteen-year span following Kyd's play, dumb-shows appear particularly in fashion with the Admiral's Men at the Rose

Theater, one of Shakespeare's company's chief competitors. Around 1600, the popularity of dumb-shows jumps to new heights, perhaps following the staging of Hamlet. But it may be that most of the distinctive features of these two very popular plays followed a similar pattern, as playwrights tried to exploit to the maximum successful devices. In terms of this analysis, Hamlet's disdain for dumb-shows hardly reflects any trend in the stage conventions of the period.

The Revenger's Tragedy differentiates between what the script calls a dumb-show presenting Lussurioso's installation as duke (opening of V.iii) and two silent masks presenting two groups of revengers (V.iii.41, and V.iii. 48, stage directions). The first silent interlude is performed by Lussurioso and his nobles, the second by Vindice and Hippoloto, the third by Lussurioso's jealous brothers. In a remarkable economy of words, the silent dumb-show and masks introduce Lussurioso's celebration banquet, allow Hippolito and Vindice to come in and kill everyone, and present the other brothers frustrated in their revenge turning upon each other. Silence becomes the indispensable preliminary to action as Vindice points out:

Prepare for deeds, let other times have words
(V.ii. 29-30).

Vindice's warning introduces the shift in tone in the final scene of the Revenger's Tragedy. A catalogue of theatrical devices, the scene contains a dumb-show, two masks, various disguises, seven corpses, murder confessions, the deus ex machina, installment of two dukes, and removal of three culprits in 129 lines. The last scene gives at an accelerated pace a list of devices from which writers of tragedies had drawn freely in the past two decades, and which they elaborated more or less intricately. The accumulation of so many devices in such a short passage, and the resulting breathless rhythm, cued by Vindice's phrase, call attention to the theatrical process. Behind the overabundance of devices, it is difficult not to see a parodic intention directed at stage-conventions. Jonathan Dollimore proposes a different, yet related understanding of irony in the Revenger's Tragedy⁴². According to Dollimore, Vindice steps out his role of revenger and endorses that of playwright when he calls for the thunder to clap at the moment of the killing. This new role destroys the theatrical illusion of the deus ex machina, which discredits the belief in providentialist orthodoxy:

No power is angry when the lustful die:

⁴² Jonathan Dollimore, Radical Tragedy. Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) 141.

When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy
(V.iii. 46-47).

When Vindice calls for action instead of words, he is already taking on the role of director and playwright, announcing the conclusion of his murder plots. He shortcuts any new explanation, and gives preference to silent, but speedy action: the three wordless interludes take place within the first 50 lines of the scene, which drastically increases the pace of the action. Vindice's remark announces that some words provoke action by giving action priority over words, and by silencing talk in time of action. It equates action with silence and opposes words to actions; it functions as a cue for himself to start the killing and for the audience to prepare for the accelerated rhythm of the dénouement. In The Revenger's Tragedy, the dumb-show introduces the metatheatrical dimension of the last scene because, as silent action, it directs the attention to the opposition between words and action.

As we will see in our discussion of Hamlet, a different kind of silence introduces the opposition between words and action. In Hamlet, the dumb-show is part of The Murder of Gonzago, a tragic entertainment performed at the court of the King of Denmark. It precedes the play-within-the-play, and takes as audience both the audience in the theater, and

the audience on stage formed by Hamlet, Ophelia, the King and Queen, and the rest of the court. In his advice on how to perform the speech he has given them to insert in their play, Hamlet does not condemn all dumb-shows, but specific types, the "inexplicable dumb-shows and noise" (III.ii. 12). Without seeing "inexplicable" as a reference to early allegorical dumb-shows, it is significant that the characters of the dumb-show in Hamlet are not allegorical figures, like Hymen and Revenge, but the characters of the following play-within-the-play:

The trumpet sounds. A dumb-show follows.

Enter a King and a Queen, the Queen embracing him and he her. She kneels, and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck. He lies him down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in another Man, takes off his crown, kisses it, pours poison in the sleeper's ears, and leaves him. The Queen returns, finds the King dead, makes passionate action. The Poisoner with Three or Four comes in a gain. They seem to condole with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner woos the Queen with gifts. She seems harsh awhile, but in the end accepts his love. (III.ii. between 133-134).

The characters are denoted either by function (a Man, a Poisoner) or by rank (a King, a Queen). They do not represent allegorical figures, nor characters of the main play, nor do they perform symbolic acts like drenching nuptial torches in blood. Dumb-show, Prologue, and The Murder of Gonzago are interspersed with comments by Hamlet and the courtly audience. These comments reinforce the effects of Hamlet's dumb-show, and indicate the ambiguity that action without speech introduces in dumb-shows. In Hamlet, if the actions and the characters in the dumb-show are clear, the meaning of it is not, as Ophelia's question to Hamlet after the dumb-show points out: "What means this, my Lord?" (III.ii.134). We may conjecture that King Claudius does not arise to interrupt the dumb-show, as he does for the play-within-the-play, because, like Ophelia, he does not understand it, and thus cannot see the connection with the murder he has committed, if any.⁴³ Dover Wilson's theory,⁴⁴ a theory arguing that the King does not rise because he does not watch the dumb-show, implies that dumb-shows are undignified spectacles and instances of "low" culture unfit for the entertainment of a king. But as the celebration of

⁴³ W.W. Greg argues that the dumb-show does not represent the King's crime, and thus, that the ghost is lying.

⁴⁴ What Happens in Hamlet, 3rd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951, 158-9).

royal glory was often the substance of dumb-shows, why would a monarch disdain the show? Hamlet condemns inexplicable dumb-shows because an ambiguous dumb-show would defeat his purpose of proving his uncle's guilt. An allegorical dumb-show may not suggest at all to the King that the action of the performance reflects his murder, and the dumb-show presented by the Players come close to that. On the other hand, the words of a Presenter, if there was one, would break the mysterious silence around the murder with a sudden revelation that would also defeat Hamlet's purpose, and perhaps openly offend King Claudius in the audience. Breaking the ambiguous silence of the dumb-show too early is what Hamlet fears when the Prologue to the play-within-the-play enters, a character Hamlet mistakes for a Presenter used with earlier Elizabethan dumb-shows⁴⁵. The presentation of a silent murder in the dumb-show, because it is given no explanation, recalls the story of the ghost, but maintains the doubt about a possible relationship with the King's action. The dumb-show produces a strong visual effect which supports the ghost's tale, independently of Hamlet's questioning and the audiences' view depending on their religious allegiances. The spectacular effect of the dumb-show

⁴⁵ Hamlet answers to Ophelia's question: "We shall know by this fellow. The players cannot keep counsel: they'll tell all" (III.ii. 137-8). Dover Wilson gives a similar interpretation for Hamlet's remark.

counterbalances Hamlet's doubts about the ghost and emphasizes its story; the absence of words maintains enough obscurity to prevent the King from rising until he is directly threatened as he is by the play-within-the-play.

Taken together, The Murder of Gonzago and the dumb-show perform a mise-en-abyme of the whole Hamlet. The dumb-show presents a spectacle of the original murder, and recalls the past. But, contrary to what a reader of the play would know, the identity of the poisoner in the dumb-show is unknown to the audience of Hamlet. The play-within-the-play announces the subsequent development of the whole play, because between the two staged episodes Hamlet announces the poisoner's identity: "This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King" (III.ii.239). Naming the poisoner and his kinship to the King anticipates the conclusion of Act V, and directly threatens the King who watches the interlude. As an incomprehensible dumb-show misses the point of stirring the King, Hamlet must constantly explain the action to the audience at court. Indeed, the King seems to arise, pricked as much by Hamlet's comments as by what he watches. During the play, Hamlet fans the King's guilt ("Your Majesty, and we that have free souls, it touches us not" [III.ii.236-7]), and he gets reprimanded by Ophelia for talking too much during the performance ("You are as good as a chorus, my lord"

[III.ii.240])). It is Hamlet who interrupts the performance when Lucianus poisons the sleeper with his announcement: "You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife" (III.ii.257-8), something no one will have a chance to see. The dumb-show in Hamlet and the frequent interruptions of the Prince point to a characteristic of Elizabethan audiences: that these audiences were not trained to watch and hear plays silently and that actors could expect loud comments as they were performing. If the audiences could not refrain from interjections and perhaps more, why not provide them a limited opportunity to do so at leisure, during a spectacle without words and with trumpets or music covering the audiences' responses?

The critical controversy over the dumb-show in Hamlet seems based upon an assumption that Shakespeare's audiences practiced the same structural logic as ours, and would be uneasy at the apparent lack of coherence between the dumb-show, the play-within-the-play, the King's reactions, and the ghost's tale in Hamlet. Therefore, the existence of a logical explanation which would account for all loose ends in Shakespeare's play would be necessary, and the critics have been actively engaged in looking for it without being

able to reach a satisfactory solution⁴⁶. The beginning of a consensus appears around the impossibility of making sense of the dumb-show, at least for the courtly audience on stage⁴⁷. It seems rather that the critics' controversy over a past convention and their unwillingness to accept irreconcilable contradictions stems from an uneasiness about measuring the limitations of their critical enterprise. As Dessen puts it,

are we to characterize the theater or theatrical conventions of another age by the moments that make best immediate sense to us, that cause us the least discomfort, or, in contrast, can we best understand a theater other than our own by concentrating upon those moments that do cause us problems and therefore make us conscious of the gaps between them and now?⁴⁸

If the trend in the dramatic convention is a valid indicator, Hamlet's disdain of dumb-shows when they were

⁴⁶ For a review of the various theories, see W.W. Robson Did the King See the Dumbshow? (Edinburgh, 1975), quoted by Jenkins (505).

⁴⁷ Mehl believes that the audience of Hamlet understands it (The Elizabethan Dumb-Show, 116-7) but not the courtly audience on stage. For Jenkins, the real problem is the absence of any indication for the actor playing the King: the actor who wants to be faithful to Shakespeare must keep an inscrutable face (Hamlet, 505).

⁴⁸ Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters, 18.

becoming more abundant on the London stage would set the character apart from the tastes of the audience. By including a dumb-show in spite of Hamlet's contempt, Shakespeare disassociates himself from his main character, and gives his audience a favorite spectacle. Although Shakespeare uses the device sparingly in his plays, the dumb-show in Hamlet does not disparage the dramatic convention and explores some dramatic possibilities in the interludes. Critics such as Mehl, for whom this dumb-show exemplifies a negative criticism of dumb-shows on Shakespeare's part, are too quick to make Hamlet the mouthpiece of Shakespeare. Elucidating the inconsistencies in Shakespeare's plays, and then eradicating them is a project consistent with an aesthetic viewpoint which privileges a logical, consistent, monolithic picture of the playwright. This view makes him more easily able to produce the "universal truths" that this viewpoint strives to discover. In other words, forcing the play into a rigid set of mutually exclusive interpretations, as is the case with the dumb-show controversy, says as much about the ideological judgments behind such criticism than it does about Hamlet. These judgments, often rooted in unexamined assumptions about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, reinforce the beliefs in a harmonious, hierarchically ordered society.

The forms of silence introduced by ghosts, disguises, asides, and dumb-shows render disclosure necessary, both in verbal and dramatic events. As certain truths and intentions such as murder and revenge cannot be revealed for fear of sabotaging their purpose, Vindice and Hippolito in The Revenger's Tragedy elaborate dramatic performance of the killing during a silent mask. In Hamlet, the truth of the King's murder cannot be revealed to the Court, even in dramatic performance, hence the dumb-show. The lessons of silence in tragedy is that some truths are better kept unspoken, such as the ones the ghost in Hamlet refuses to reveal. Others will come to be known regardless of the combined efforts of various characters to keep an effective silence upon them: murders of rulers and within families belong to that category. Whether silence about these truths is kept or broken is not under the control of single individual characters; and the tragedies studied here often imply that neither is it under the control of human beings. Even a skeptic like Hamlet speaks of the "miraculous" capacity of murders to come to light ("For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak / With most miraculous organ." [II.ii.589-90]). Pantomimic action reveals truths as well as keeping them silent; it is a dramatic form particularly adapted to convey mystery, and provokes audiences to direct reaction. After seeing the Balinese Theater, Artaud makes

it one of the cornerstone of the hieroglyphic gestures of his new theatrical language. Silencing spoken language permits one to hear other sounds which also compose this language:

Il arrive que ce maniérisme, cet hiératisme excessif, avec son alphabet roulant, avec ses cris de pierre qui se fendent, avec ses bruits de branches, ses bruits de coupe et de roulements de bois, compose dans l'air, dans l'espace, aussi bien visuel que sonore, une sorte de susurrement matériel et animé. Et au bout d'un instant l'identification magique est faite: NOUS SAVONS QUE C'EST NOUS QUI PARLONS.⁴⁹

The mannerism of gestures and figures which do not speak our language of words allow identification between the audience and the sacred forces Artaud tries to put into action with his theater. Silencing spoken language, as in pantomimic action, creates identification because the audience recognizes that this new, hieratic language, not made of words, is ours, and co-exists with spoken language. Silences of this kind can also be found in the poetic language and images of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

⁴⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 64.

CHAPTER 2

ARTAUD'S "THEATER OF CRUELTY": POETIC AND DRAMATIC SILENCES

Antonin Artaud experiences constant fear of not being able to complete a project. This fear is justified in very concrete terms by the works which he was commissioned to write, and which never went further than their inception. For instance, Paule Thévenin, his editor, refers to a book contract signed February 7, 1935 for which he received money from Gaston Gallimard, and which was never written¹. Artaud's work functions as a resistance to silence which represents an ideal point located at the core of his thoughts. Artaud constantly resists accepting that his writing has reached a stage when he can no longer continue writing. He wages an incessant battle in order to force the limit between silence and words to recede further before silence overcomes him. He becomes aware that, however imperfect any piece of his writings appears to him, he must be satisfied with the imperfection. The texts gathered in

¹ Oeuvres Complètes, V. 360, Satan, Vie et Mort de Satan le Feu.

Le Théâtre et son Double are built upon the underlying tension of this resistance between saying something imperfect and unsatisfying, and saying nothing at all. As a result, Artaud rewrites his texts over and over, and keeps changing them even when his editors are satisfied with publishing them as they are. The resistance to accepting a final form for his manuscripts illustrates his difficulties in reaching the center of his thought in a concrete manner: silence thus poses a practical as well as a theoretical problem. It is worth tracing some details of the publication of Le Théâtre et son Double and other texts about the theater in order to understand the concrete manifestations of Artaud's fear of silence.

2.1. Artaud's method of composition and writing: the fear of silence.

Antonin Artaud's complete works have presently reached twenty-five volumes in the Gallimard edition. They are still at this date in the process of publication because of the difficulty involved in the editing of his manuscripts, and a controversy over the XXVIth volume between Paule Thévenin, the editor of his voluminous production, and

Artaud's family². Paule Thévenin met Artaud in 1946, and worked steadily on the first volume until its publication in 1956. Although Artaud had signed a contract for the publication of his complete works with Gaston Gallimard, he died leaving behind him instructions for only the first volume. According to Paule Thévenin, Artaud wanted to include recent texts which he thought more important to accompany the old ones, and he does so for the first volume of the Oeuvres Complètes³. This is symptomatic of his writing habits, and indeed of his entire work, as he kept writing and re-writing his texts before, during, and after their publication.

Artaud's writings about the theater were first given as lectures and sometimes appeared in La Nouvelle Revue Française and other periodicals. He collected the texts written on the theater since 1932 in Le Théâtre et son Double which was published in limited edition in 1938, and with numerous corrections again in 1944⁴. However important Le Théâtre et son Double has been considered for theater production after World War II, Artaud's own work as a

² Interview with Paule Thévenin, "Ma rencontre avec Antonin Artaud." Art Press, 155, February 1991, 59-61.

³ These texts are Préambule, Adresse au Pape, and Adresse au Dalai-Lama.

⁴ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 275-6.

playwright either was never produced or resulted in commercial failure. The performance of his single complete play The Cenci, a tragedy adapted from Shelley and Stendhal, which he had written specifically to demonstrate the potentialities of the Theater of Cruelty was interrupted after seventeen performances in May 1935⁵. The other texts written for the theater were not produced in his lifetime, and other projects for the stage were never completed. Two short pieces Artaud wrote for the stage when he was involved with the Théâtre Alfred Jarry, a company he had founded with Roger Vitrac and Raymond Aron in 1926⁶, remained in print form. "Samouraï ou Le Drame du Sentiment" was possibly written between 1923 and 1925⁷. It sketches the character of a samurai around the themes of incest and dream, and uses masks and strident music. "La Pierre Philosophale," written for the Théâtre Pigalle in April 1931⁸, describes the bloody experiments of a doctor, and his reactions when he finds his girlfriend engaged in sexual activity with a Harlequin. "Il n'y a plus de Firmament," conceived as a project for an

⁵ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 331.

⁶ Oeuvres Complètes, II, 268.

⁷ Oeuvres Complètes, II, 290. The 1980 edition of Volume II, which I am using, contains these short theater pieces, together with several texts written about the collective project of Antonin Artaud, Roger Vitrac, and Raymond Aron entitled "Théâtre Alfred Jarry."

⁸ Oeuvres Complètes, II, 291.

opera with Edward Varèse in 1932-33⁹ and unfinished, has the form of a narrative in five "movements" about the destructive contacts with the planet Sirius. It contains allusions to the plague¹⁰, crowd scenes, a chorus, voices and light effects, elements similar to what he describes in Le Théâtre et son Double.

The discrepancy between Artaud's ideas expressed in writing and the actual production on stage of his works must not obscure the fact that his ideas have been widely used by play directors with various degrees of success. For example, Peter Brook experimented the Theater of Cruelty with the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1964 to 1966, staging Private Eye, and US.¹¹ Alan Sinfield comments upon the reception of these plays:

Brook and the RSC were condemned for making a self-indulgent Artaudian experiment out of the horror of the Vietnam war for offering an inadequate political analysis... Themes of violence and metaphysical anguish ran through many RSC productions between 1960 and 1965. Audiences

⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, II, 292.

¹⁰ Oeuvres Complètes, II, 87, 89.

¹¹ Alan Sinfield "The Theater and its Audiences," Society and Literature, 1945-1970. Sinfield, ed. (London: Methuen, 1983). 173-198.

too felt frustrated at their exclusion from influence, first under an aging Tory leadership, then, under the managerial manipulation of Wilson. Theater of Cruelty represented a desperate determination to make some -any- impact upon a society that seemed able to absorb all criticism.

(187)

A recent example of a successful production using the Theater of Cruelty is JoAnne Akalaitis' Spring 1992 production of John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, at the Public Theater in New York. The texts in Le Théâtre et son Double constitute an experiment in writing as much as it expresses Artaud's ideas about the theater. It deserves scrutiny on its own terms rather than as the announcement of what Artaud would have done, or a "theory of theater." Yet, Le Théâtre et son Double always presents itself as this announcement. It is my contention that silence is a useful metaphor to describe the unreachable point in Artaud's thought. Silence provides a way of accessing its substance, and must be examined for the poetic images of silence as well as for Artaud's use of it on the stage.

Silence is an ideal which Artaud strives to reach. It is also a form of evil which threatens to destroy his creativity. It appeals to him and terrifies him at the same

time, like the ancient archetypal forces, or "destine", which he sees at work in the Balinese Theater. Artaud writes and re-writes to negate the silence always threatening to overcome his intellect and his capacity to write. Yet, at the same time, he succeeds in keeping himself on the border between silence and words, writing at the edge of silence both to conjure up the figure of silence, and to exorcize it. Silence is present in Artaud's writing style, and it is a principle of the Theater of Cruelty. As Pierre Brunel puts it: "Pour Artaud, le théâtre n'est pas fait que de mots (on sait même qu'à l'état pur le théâtre est silence)"¹².

In his 1923-24 Correspondance with Jacques Rivière Artaud explains his difficulties with thinking. He calls his inability to focus on the object of his thoughts "a disease of the mind":

Je souffre d'une effroyable maladie de l'esprit. Ma pensée m'abandonne, à tous les degrés. Depuis le fait simple de la pensée jusqu'au fait extérieur de sa matérialisation dans les mots. Mots, formes de phrases, directions intérieures de la pensée, réactions simples de mon esprit, je suis à la poursuite constante de mon être

¹² Théâtre et Cruauté ou Dionysos Profané. 66.

intellectuel. Lors donc que je peux saisir une forme, [his italics] si imparfaite soit-elle, je la fixe, dans la crainte de perdre toute la pensée. Je suis au-dessous de moi-même, je le sais, j'en souffre, mais j'y consens dans la peur de ne pas mourir tout à fait.¹³

Artaud describes every step in the disintegration of his thoughts with very precise details in 1923. The movement of this disintegration is what allows him to write because he transcribes every form he succeeds in "seizing" with his mind, for fear of its disappearance. The form may be imperfect, yet it is a victory over the complete loss that his intellect suffers from. Early in 1924, he explains this to Jacques Rivière:

je vous présente la dernière production de mon esprit. Relativement à moi elle ne vaut que peu de chose, quoique mieux tout de même que le néant. C'est un pis aller. Mais la question pour moi est de savoir s'il vaut mieux écrire cela ou ne rien écrire du tout.¹⁴

Artaud struggles against the nothingness which absorbs his thoughts like a devouring monster. This nothingness is a form of silence which always threatens to overcome his

¹³ (I*, 24) Lettre à J.R. 5 juin 1923.

¹⁴ (I*, 29)

ability to retain and express his thoughts, and Artaud writes to keep silence at bay. During the period of his correspondence with Jacques Rivière, Artaud writes a poem entitled "Cri" in which he addresses "le petit poète céleste." In a stanza of "Cri," he describes the role of silence in preventing imperfect forms from emerging:

Par conséquent silence et nuit

Muselez toute impureté

Le ciel à grandes enjambées

S'avance au carrefour des bruits." (I*, 31)

Artaud attributes a double role to silence in this paragraph, because silence is told to block imperfections with the imperative of the verb "to muzzle." In a variation given in the original manuscript, "mutilez" is also given.¹⁵ The violence implied in the action of "mutilating impurities" indicates the active role of silence as a malignant force always on the lookout to destroy the poet's thoughts. Thus Artaud is always negotiating with this force of nothingness, which he finds in any one of his thoughts, trying to find an acceptable ground between "écrire cela ou ne rien écrire du tout."

Jacques Derrida refers to Artaud's problem with self-expression in terms of the idea of "impouvoir", a lack of

¹⁵ (Oeuvres Complètes, I*, 276).

power and ability that Artaud quotes in "Le Pèse-Nerfs"¹⁶. According to Derrida in "La Parole Soufflée," Artaud's difficulty with expression is not the banal lack of inspiration which prevents the poet from transcribing his thoughts:

"L'impouvoir", dont le thème apparaît dans les lettres à J. Rivière, n'est pas, on le sait, la simple impuissance, la stérilité du "rien à dire" ou le défaut d'inspiration. Au contraire, il est l'inspiration elle-même: force d'un vide, tourbillon du souffle d'un souffleur qui aspire vers lui et me dérobe cela même qu'il laisse venir à moi et que j'ai cru pouvoir dire en mon nom.¹⁷

This force of attraction of a void which Derrida describes originates in silence, or "néant." It is in the face of this very force that Artaud struggles to seize his thoughts, and it is at the same time, what allows him to express "imperfect forms," and "impurities" in his early poems. In Le Théâtre et son Double, the same relationship of attraction and repulsion towards this force at the core of his thoughts, which is an aspect of silence, is exemplified in the constant re-writing of this work.

¹⁶ (Oeuvres Complètes, I*, 291). "Le Pèse-Nerfs" was published August 1, 1925, in the collection "Pour Vos Beaux Yeux" directed by Louis Aragon.

¹⁷ L'Écriture et la Différence, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967. 263.

In 1932, Artaud's struggle with silence strikingly appears in the genesis of the first manifesto of the "Theater of Cruelty, published in the Nouvelle Revue Française October 1st, 1932¹⁸." Re-writing is for Artaud a painful process which we follow in Artaud's letters in the Summer of 1932. He writes to André Rolland de Renéville about his difficulties to write the first manifesto of the "Theater of Cruelty":

Je crois que vous n'avez pas très bien compris le genre de difficultés auxquelles je me heurte dans la rédaction de mon manifeste.¹⁹

Silence is both what prevents Artaud from completing his manuscript, and an absent center towards which the forces at work in his writings converge. The poet wrenches his words out of silence, but, at the same time, these words are never satisfactory. Using a familiar French phrase which takes on a particular importance when related to the excremental references in his later work, Artaud explains to his correspondent the reasons why he has not answered his letter:

Ceci étant réglé, l'autre raison pour laquelle je ne vous ai pas écrit est que je suis prodigieuse-

¹⁸ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 309.

¹⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, V, 110. Letter to André Rolland de Renéville, July 13, 1932.

ment emmerdé par la rédaction de ce manifeste que je n'arrive pas à mettre sur pied. Expliquez cela comme vous pourrez. Je ne pouvais donc pas vous répondre en vous parlant puisque le même phénomène d'inhibition intervient chaque fois que je m'attaque si peu que ce soit à lui.²⁰

Silence which always threaten to overcome Artaud and to paralyze his capacity to write constitutes this "phénomène d'inhibition." Later in his life, it will take the more precise shape of the incubus and evil forces which Artaud believed had cast their spell on him. As a result of this paralyzing effect, Artaud must constantly write and rewrite, in a desperate attempt to finally fix into appropriate words a thinking process which always eludes him. He writes to Jean Paulhan, editor at the Nouvelle Revue Française, in August 1932:

Ce manifeste qui a été réécrit de bout en bout environ une quinzaine de fois, je suis tenace, n'a trouvé sa forme définitive que maintenant, ces jours derniers. C'était surtout une question d'expression; de filon intellectuel à atteindre. Il est atteint et je ne saurais mieux dire. Et ce

²⁰ Oeuvres Complètes, V, 114. Letter to André Rolland de Renéville, July 26, 1932. His italics.

n'est que maintenant que j'ai trouvé le ton de ma voix.²¹

In fact, Artaud's subsequent writings disavow his affirmation that the first manifesto has found its completed form, and that he has "found the tone of his voice." A second manifesto on the "Theater of Cruelty" follows the first one in 1933. Furthermore, it is as if all the ideas contained in the first "Theater of Cruelty" in 1932 had returned to an abysmal silence, a blank in Artaud's memory. Announcing the second manifesto to Jean Paulhan in a letter dated June 12 1933, he writes:

Répugneriez-vous beaucoup dans l'absence encore de toute réalisation à me permettre quelque chose qui serait un commentaire absolument concret et précis et objectif du "Manifeste" mais sans que même une allusion au "Manifeste" soit tentée ni faite. Un écrit de quatre à cinq pages, qui serait tout à fait nouveau²². Je veux dire qui ferait figure d'essai entièrement original sans lien avec le passé."²³

²¹ Oeuvres Complètes, V. 139. Letter to Jean Paulhan, August 29, 1932.

²² my italics.

²³ Oeuvres Complètes, V. 214. See Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 309 for the dating of the manifestoes.

Two manifestations of silence in Artaud's work appear in this quotation. First, the absence of a concrete project is circumvented when he writes a second essay about the "Theater of Cruelty." It is as if the concrete realization of the project refused to emerge from the silence which covers it, as if silence refused to relinquish the concrete realization of "The Theater of Cruelty". Second, the first manifesto on the "Theater of Cruelty" seems to vanish from the author's memory, and returned to the silence it had originated from. Artaud announces to Jean Paulhan a writing that would be "totally original without any link with the past" when, in fact the second manifesto has much in common with the first one.

Silence appears in the almost pathological tendency Artaud has of writing and re-writing his essays because this exemplifies his attempt to oppose the vanishing of his thoughts. His capacity to remain focused on an idea such as the "Theater of Cruelty" and to approach it from different angles parallels his tendency to never consider his work finished, or never fully realized. The idea of "Theater of Cruelty" returns in November 1947-January 1948 after his release from the Rodez asylum as a poem which was to be included in the radio show "Pour en Finir avec Le Jugement

de Dieu"²⁴. Because of time considerations, the poem was deleted from the program at the last minute, and because of the unilateral decision of the director of Radiodiffusion Française, the program itself was banned from the air.

Artaud's fear of silence also appears very concretely in another of his idiosyncratic methods of composition. Dictating his work aloud to a typist, he would either read from a previously written draft, or compose orally. Paule Thévenin, the editor of his complete works refers to this habit, as she started her collaboration with Artaud by typing his work²⁵. Other women before her had typed under Artaud's dictation. Several accounts mention his thunderous voice when he directed The Cenci, and the chronicler in Dimanche-Records announces "Pour en Finir avec le Jugement de Dieu" in these terms: "Antonin Artaud va faire du bruit et des bruits à la T.S.F. avec son "Jugement de Dieu."²⁶

Artaud writes in order to negate silence. Yet, he almost banishes language from the plays he plans to stage. And he also uses noise and music very precisely as a counterpoint to silence in The Cenci, in Le Théâtre et son Double, and in "Pour en Finir avec le Jugement de Dieu."

²⁴ Oeuvres Complètes, XIII. 323, 324.

²⁵ cf Art Press.

²⁶ Oeuvres Complètes, XIII, 325.

2.2. Silence as the absence of words: the new language of theater and poetry.

The silence which Artaud names using the actual word "silence" is not the same as the one which he negates when he re-writes his texts, and uses his voice for screaming. Silence is a positive element which forms an integral part of Le Théâtre et son Double under several aspects. One of these is the absence of words. The new theatrical language Artaud announces in "La Mise-en-Scène et la Métaphysique"²⁷, one of the texts constituting Le Théâtre et son Double, is first a language of silent gestures:

ce langage de signes, cette pantomime silencieuse, ces attitudes, ces gestes dans l'air, ces intonations objectives²⁸.

This language, according to Artaud, has been kept in an inferior position because the theater "vit sous la dictature exclusive de la parole"²⁹. The conflicts which form the substance of theater are dictated by the struggle for supremacy between "parole" and a silent language of signs and gestures, which he sometimes refers to as

²⁷ "La Mise-en-Scène et la Métaphysique" was first given as the text of a conference in la Sorbonne, December 10, 1931.

²⁸ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 39.

²⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 39.

"hieroglyphs"³⁰. One of the main characteristics of this new language is the absence of words, a silencing of the major form of communication, but it does not preclude inarticulate noise, screams, and music. The silencing of words is necessary in order to get rid of the supremacy of verbal language. Once words have been removed from their dictatorial position in the theater the potential for meaning of other elements constituting theater can be freely explored. In order to realize this kind of theater, the author of a play must give way to the *metteur-en-scène*. The latter, in Artaud's mystical approach to the theater, is rather like the priest of a ritual ceremony: "une sorte d'ordonnateur magique, un maître de cérémonies sacrées"³¹. This silent language, silent taken as in absence of words, not the absence of sound, has been devalued by every one. Artaud underlines the irony in the public and the critics' attitude towards this form of expression: "tous ces éléments qui existent en dehors du texte, sont pour tout le monde la partie basse du théâtre, on les appelle négligeamment 'de

³⁰ "Dans ce nouveau langage, les gestes valent des mots, les attitudes ont un sens symbolique profond, sont prises à l'état d'hiéroglyphes et le spectacle tout entier, au lieu de viser à l'effet de charme, sera pour l'esprit un moyen de reconnaissance, de vertige, de révélation." Oeuvres Complètes, V, 41.

³¹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 57.

l'art'³²." The public and the critics show their contempt towards the language of gestures by calling it "art" in a derogatory use of the term. Yet, for Artaud, this language is a form of expression with a higher aesthetic value than words, and thus qualifies as "art" in a positive meaning of the term, and not in a derogatory sense as the public and the critics would have it.

The silent language Artaud envisions is "concret, destiné aux sens et indépendant de la parole"³³, and it bypasses the level of words to convey meaning. Artaud finds one of the best examples of this silent language in certain kinds of dumb-shows, the ones he calls "pantomime non pervertie":

Par "pantomime non pervertie" j'entends la pantomime directe où les gestes au lieu de représenter des mots, des corps de phrases, comme dans notre pantomime européenne vieille de cinquante ans seulement, et qui n'est qu'une déformation des parties muettes de la comédie italienne, représentent des idées, des attitudes de l'esprit, des aspects de la nature, et cela d'une manière effective, concrète, c'est-à-dire en évoquant

³² Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 39.

³³ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 36.

toujours des objets ou détails naturels, comme ce langage oriental qui représente la nuit par un arbre sur lequel un oiseau qui a déjà fermé un oeil commence à fermer l'autre³⁴.

The distinction he makes between two forms of "pantomime," the French term for dumb-show, is this. In one form of dumb-show, gestures and facial expressions take the place of words, and of parts of sentences. He despises this form of expression because it still takes verbal language as its model and imitates it. This devious form of dumb-show originates in Italian comedy and represents its mute parts. Thus it only mirrors a perverted form, and, in mirroring it, deforms it even more. In the other, more archaic form of dumb-show, the mimed expressions directly represent ideas, ways of thinking, and aspects of nature. This form uses images more closely related to thoughts not yet formulated in verbal language. Elsewhere, Artaud briefly summarizes the distinction: "deux sortes de pantomimes, l'idéographique, et celle où les gestes ne sont que des équivalences de mots"³⁵. Artaud sees an example of this "pantomime" in the Balinese theater which he calls very "abstract" and "intellectual" because the verbal level of representation is removed. From this example we see how

³⁴ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 38.

³⁵ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 224. Fragment XV.

verbal language becomes the perversion which prevents Artaud from coming into contact with his own thoughts, and how much he yearns for a non-verbal form of expression. He finds an ultimate example of this non-verbal form in the "pantomime non-pervertie" because it can directly express emotions, moods and thoughts in gestures and sounds without the intermediary step of language. According to Artaud, in doing so, the dumb-show is both a more archaic form of expression, and a purer form of art, a perfect artistic form which his theater is trying to reach.

Words are not to be completely expelled from Artaud's theater, but they will lose the predominance given to them in ordinary theater. By emphasizing the absence of words, Artaud creates a silent space in which other elements such as music, danse, dumb-show, gestures, architecture and sets³⁶ acquire meaning. Words are then reintroduced, but having lost their position of supremacy, their meaning coexists along that of the other elements and is transformed by the juxtaposition. Words will especially lose the fixity they acquire in print, and return in improvisation as the way to round out the theatrical experiments Artaud plans to stage thanks to the other elements:

³⁶ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 37.

les gestes, les attitudes, les signes s'inventeront au fur et à mesure qu'ils seront pensés, et directement sur scène, où les mots naîtront pour clore et faire aboutir ces discours lyriques faits de musique de gestes et de signes actifs.³⁷

Artaud perceives the difficulty of transmitting this new language of signs, announcing the necessity to create a new coded language to transcribe it.³⁸ Artaud's new language is the result of an entire process of manufacturing similar to industrial production. Indeed, the "Theater of Cruelty" at times appears as the presentation on stage of industrial production. The body and the mind of the people involved in Artaud's theater become the machines through which the transformation of raw ingredients such as gestures, sounds, and even physical objects (the wheel in The Cenci) occurs. Artaud explains what route the elements of his new language follow to transit into the mind:

D'un geste à un cri ou à un son, il n'y a pas de passage: tout correspond comme à travers de bizarres canaux creusés à même l'esprit!³⁹

³⁷ Oeuvres Complètes, V, 37. "Le Théâtre que je vais fonder." Article in Paris-Soir, July 14, 1932.

³⁸ Oeuvres Complètes, V, 37.

³⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 55.

Words devoid of their exclusive claim on meaning also enter the composition process, just like any other element. Yet, it is paradoxical that the resulting products of this process of transformation of matter are also words, a paradox Artaud always denied by reaffirming his intention to stage the "Theater of Cruelty." It is in this context of physical transformation of matter that his theater really is "alchemical."

Words become the fixed conglomerations of the ideas Artaud wants to represent on stage, like the final sedimentations of the entire process during which ideas are transformed. This process of transformation (he sometimes refers to it as a "digestion") which results in the production of words is exhausting: in this respect, it is significant that "Théâtre de l'Epreuve"⁴⁰ was one possible title for the "Theater of Cruelty." Sometimes words are expelled as half-finished byproducts of the engineering process when this process is interrupted before the completion of its task. They are also the products of the manufacturing process taking place on stage and incorporating elements Artaud describes in his new language of signs. Artaud stumbles upon the difficulty of recording his new

⁴⁰ Pierre Brunel omits this title in his list of Artaud's titles.

theatrical language and feels the need for inventing another system of notations for the transformative process required in his theater:

Le théâtre ne redeviendra lui-même que le jour où les auteurs dramatiques, s'imposant de nouvelles disciplines, changeront leur inspiration et surtout leurs moyens d'écriture⁴¹.

Artaud's dilemma is that he tries to create a new theatrical language that use words among other elements but he must also record this language in words. Words can thus easily regain the position of supremacy from which Artaud has exiled them because they are both one element of the new language, and the means to record it. The capacity of words, to be simultaneously part and whole, element and category, diminishes the potential for meaning of other elements. The result is a general impoverishment in meaning because words, as finished products, become too clear, and this clarity obscures other possibilities:

Les mots n'étant plus employés que dans les parties arrêtées et discursives de la vie, comme une clarté plus précise et objective apparaissant à la pointe d'une idée.⁴²

⁴¹ Oeuvres Complètes, V, 101, Letter to Monsieur Van Caulaert, July 6, 1932.

⁴² Oeuvres Complètes, V, 101, Letter to Monsieur Van Caulaert, July 6, 1932.

When ideas are expressed clearly thanks to the mediation of words, only the tip emerges, and these ideas are dead: "pour moi, les idées claires sont, au théâtre comme partout ailleurs, des idées mortes et terminées⁴³". Part of Artaud's struggle, and the reason why he writes so much is to fight against the imperialistic tendency in words to claim all meaning for themselves. Artaud settles for an unsatisfactory compromise of using words in spite of themselves, and in forcing them into different combinations.

Pierre Brunel, in Théâtre et Cruauté⁴⁴, notices the tendency of Artaud's words to mean something else than what they usually signify in ordinary language. He studies the implications of Artaud's uses of "theater" and "cruelty," and demonstrates that it is characteristic of Artaud that he empties words of their generally accepted meaning and attributes to them a new meaning. Moreover, Artaud reintegrates the ordinary meaning of words and images into such words and he forces both levels of meaning to coexist: "le refus de la métaphore initiale va de pair chez Artaud avec une volonté de réhabilitation de la même métaphore."⁴⁵

⁴³ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 39.

⁴⁴ Théâtre et Cruauté ou Dionysos Profané. Paris: Librairie des Méridiens, 1982.

⁴⁵ Théâtre et Cruauté. 25.

Thus, Artaud's language functions on various levels simultaneously: his words and images keep their literal sense, and their ordinary metaphorical sense, and they acquire another, new dimension. Artaud welds his words like tools at the same time as he uses them for expressing his ideas. Brunel describes this practice as cruelty performed on language:

'Théâtre' et 'Cruauté' n'échappent pas à la règle nouvelle. Comme les autres mots, ils subissent chez Artaud cette torsion imposée au langage pour lui faire dire autre chose que ce qu'il dit habituellement, cette pratique cruelle qui consiste à détourner un vocable de son sens ordinaire."⁴⁶

Artaud's practice allows him to convey meaning on several simultaneous and often contradictory levels, and to expel out of himself elements of his mental process in a desperate attempt at communication⁴⁷. This twisting of language into other meanings, which Brunel refers to, is however only an unsatisfactory compromise, and words never reach the flow of thoughts Artaud desperately tries to seize. Pierre Brunel

⁴⁶ *ibid*, 22.

⁴⁷ Artaud explains in details how his mental process is defective, and the physical pain thinking causes him in the Correspondance with Jacques Rivière in 1922-24. (Oeuvres Complètes, I*)

talks about a "transcendental reality" that Artaud aims at representing: "Tout mot devrait donc, à la limite, être mis entre guillemets, n'étant que la simple approximation d'une réalité transcendante"⁴⁸. Rather than a "transcendental reality" which implies an order of things outside himself Artaud attempts to seize with words his own mental picture which eludes him both in its object, and in its constitutive process. On the one hand, the word "théâtre" as Artaud uses it refers to a mental picture which continuously unfolds in his mind. It is a sort of "theater of the mind" in which words, images, and sounds take the place of props, characters, and other physical elements of the stage. On the other hand, because of the constant duality in language, the word "théâtre" also refers to concrete elements of the stage. Because the stage is the actual place where Artaud thought it possible to give concrete realization to his mental process, "théâtre" cannot entirely lose its physical referent in Artaud's Le Théâtre et son Double.

Silence in its non-verbal form is also characterized by a double quality, that of being an ingredient in the process of transformation, and a condition for its realization. As an ingredient silence appears in poetic images that we will study in section 3. As a condition in the alchemical

⁴⁸ Théâtre et Cruauté, 21.

process for the emergence of the new language, it is necessary because it creates a space within which the non-verbal elements of the "Theater of Cruelty" can develop. Using again the image of chemical engineering that he develops in "Le Théâtre Alchimique," Artaud comments that the text of The Cenci was established as "un réactif au reset"⁴⁹. Silence plays this role of reactive that triggers the chain reaction of creative processes in Artaud's writings.

The silent language of signs⁵⁰ is the condition for the emergence of poetry in the theater, itself the condition for a successful theater, according to Artaud. He praises the Balinese Theater which he has seen in performance at the "Exposition Coloniale" in 1932 because it restores the theater to its origins using devices such as dance, songs, and dumb-shows⁵¹. The Balinese Theater, which appears to Artaud as one concrete example of the theatrical language he describes in "La Mise-en-Scène et la Métaphysique" is built in a language which exists prior to verbal language, and independently from it. Artaud emphasizes the existence of a silent space, a space devoid of words as the condition for perceiving the poetic quality of the other elements included

⁴⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, V, 45-46.

⁵⁰ silent here in our first sense of the term, i.e. non-verbal.

⁵¹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 51.

in the creation of his new language. He describes the importance of silent spaces in "Le Théâtre et la Cruauté," a short piece slightly different from the manifestoes:

Les mots parlent peu à l'esprit; l'étendue et les objets parlent; les images nouvelles parlent, même faites avec des mots. Mais l'espace tonnant d'images, gorgé de sons, parle aussi, si l'on sait de temps en temps ménager des étendues suffisantes d'espace meublées de silence et d'immobilité.⁵²

These spaces are filled with silence and absence of movement so that objects, sounds and even new images can produce an effect upon the mind. Because the audience must be totally and physically involved in experiencing the "Theater of Cruelty," the silent space provided by the absence of words allows it to reduce its attention given to understanding in favor of experiencing what Artaud calls "l'émotion poétique obscure"⁵³. Thanks to the space afforded by silence, the poetic possibilities contained in the elements other than words can be fully exploited by the metteur-en-scène. These possibilities combine themselves in an almost infinite number of combinations, creating such a wealth of poetic images that the resulting effect resembles a chaos:

⁵² Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 84.

⁵³ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 84.

Aucun point de l'espace et en même temps aucune suggestion possible n'est perdue. Et il y a un sens comme philosophique du pouvoir que détient la nature de se précipiter tout à coup en chaos.⁵⁴

The fragmentation of Artaud's texts is an example of the chaos produced by the sheer number of possibilities contained in the form of theater that he proposed. Yet, the chaos created by the vast number of poetic combinations is in fact ordered by the principles of its creation, such as the industrial process of production described earlier, and the goal, or determinism it aims at. The imagery of a chemical process is here carried by the image of a precipitate. Artaud's goal, which he also sees actualized in nature, is to allow poetry to arise in his new language. Poetry arises from the chaos in nature provoked by the accumulation of possibilities, it is made of this combination of the poetic possibilities contained in the elements that Artaud wants to bring forward in the "Theater of Cruelty." Silence as absence of words which permits these poetic possibilities to be perceived by the audience thus becomes the preliminary and necessary environment for poetry to exist in the theater. Artaud sees a philosophical mean-

⁵⁴ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 59. "Sur le théâtre balinais."

ing when nature⁵⁵ transforms itself into a chaos. One may suggest that this philosophical meaning is related to the capacity nature has to create poetry out of what seems to be a chaos. Of course, it takes Artaud, a mind finely tuned to other forms of reality, to notice that poetry emerges out of chaos in nature.

Once the audience perceives the emergence of poetry in the spectacles of the "Theater of Cruelty," what seemed like a chaos, a disorder, to an inattentive eye, makes sense because the audience understands the poetic structures governing the spectacle. In the Balinese Theater, for instance, poetry introduces a disruption in the fabric of ordinary reality thanks to the "hieroglyphic" gestures, sounds and dance it uses. This tear in the fabric of reality permits us to glance at chaos, and points to the fundamentally disruptive force of poetry:

Elle [Poetry] est anarchique aussi dans la mesure où son apparition est la conséquence d'un désordre qui nous rapproche du chaos.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ I will not venture to explore what Artaud describes by the idea of "nature." Taking the word as it is without trying to explain it at length serves our purposes just as well, because Artaud's "nature" is the one that can transform itself into chaos.

⁵⁶ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 41. "Sur le Théâtre Balinais"

The kind of poetry which he wants to draw into his own theater and which he admires in the Balinese Theater is a poetry of gestures, sounds, lighting, architecture, settings. It takes place in the space of air above the stage, and it requires the absence of words for full effect ("cette poésie dans l'espace, indépendante du langage articulé" 38-39). This poetry is inseparable from chaos and silence which Artaud compares to the blank spaces between the parts of a sentence:

Cet espace d'air intellectuel, ce jeu psychique, ce silence pétri de pensées qui existe entre les membres d'une phrase écrite, ici, est tracé dans l'air scénique, entre les membres, l'air, et les perspectives d'un certain nombre de cris, de couleurs et de mouvements." (60)

The silence existing between the parts of a sentence is a silence "wrought with thoughts." He makes an analogy between this silence and the silent space of air above the stage at the disposal of the director and playwright. This analogy allows him to turn this scenic space into a blank page upon which he can draw figures of silence, the poetic figures he attempts to create with elements other than words in his theater. In creating the new language of signs for the theater, he invents the figures of silence which he sees between words and parts of a sentence. Artaud is careful to

point out that these figures are already there, and he is only "drawing" them, outlining them in the space of air which belongs to the stage. He emphasizes the extraordinary intellectuality of the Balinese theater ("l'intellectualité admirable" ⁵⁷) because he sees an analogy between the space of air above the stage, and the blanks between words. This space of air thus becomes an intellectual air space ("l'espace d'air intellectuel"⁵⁸). This silence, characterized by its non-verbal quality is a written silence. It is perceptible directly in writing between the parts of a sentence. On stage, it is itself created by Artaud's language and is filled by the gestures and screams. Because of this reality of silence in Artaud's work, the language he creates is a "real" language.

The divorce between theory and practice in Artaud's writings shows that symbolic practices in the theater⁵⁹ incorporate elements which cannot be reduced to written words, even Artaud's words. If these elements can be described by words, it is not certain that they will correspond with what Artaud imagines his theater to be in

⁵⁷ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 55.

⁵⁸ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 40.

⁵⁹ Symbolic in the sense described by Julia Kristeva in Révolution du Langage Poétique.

actual practice. Artaud attempts to transcribe his "theater of the mind" with words which fail him. This results in a practical failure to communicate effectively what he envisions as a performance. Artaud's writing in Le Théâtre et son Double often appears as a set of prescriptions for mise-en-scène. When he concretely describes what he means by "Theater of Cruelty," the description resembles a very precise set of rules, a list of things to do, and things to avoid which almost constitute a system, or a recipe, for the actualization of his abstract ideas. As an example, the first manifesto of the "Theater of Cruelty," first published in the Nouvelle Revue Française in October 1932⁶⁰, ends with a list of paragraphs outlining how to handle various elements of stage production: "Le spectacle", "la mise-en-scène", "le langage de la scène", "les instruments de musique", "la lumière. - les éclairages", "le costume", "la scène. - la salle", "les objets. - les masques. - les accessoires", "le décor", "l'actualité", "les oeuvres", "spectacle", "l'interprétation", "le cinéma", "la cruauté", "le public", "le programme."⁶¹ The list is preceded by a short paragraph entitled "Les Thèmes." No matter how fruitful his approach, the practical failure of Artaud's play seems to indicate that a successful play cannot exist without a good

⁶⁰ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 309.

⁶¹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 90-95.

script which allows enough flexibility to a director, and that a set of rules for directing cannot replace the verbal language of plays. Of course, this does not mean that verbal language is sufficient to make a play a success. During the production of a play, a moment comes when verbal language has to be silenced so that other elements can be used effectively. We can now turn to examining the role of silence amongst these other elements. The silences used here define a kind of silence different from the absence of words.

2.3. The poetic images containing silence.

Various kinds and intensity of noise feature prominently amongst the other elements which Artaud emphasizes in the theater. These elements contributing to the creation of the new poetic language he invents for the theater contain their own poetic quality. This aspect of the new language, directly perceivable by the audience, seems to come out of physical objects, as if stones, branches and lumber, for instance, could speak. In correcting a passage of his text on the Balinese Theater for the final publication, Artaud calls the language of objects a "susurrement matériel et concret." The importance of noise and sound produced by various objects requires special attention because it

defines a kind of silence different from the one defined by the absence of words.

Silence is often part of an oxymoronic associations in which it is far noisier than words. For its dramatic effect upon the audience it is comparable only to the other non-verbal elements which together form the "Theater of Cruelty." As such, it becomes a component in its own right, and not as an absence of words, in the alchemical process of transformation that results in the staging of the "Theater of Cruelty." Silence used in this process defines rhythms in the way the components of the Theater of Cruelty are linked, and related to each other

Le chevauchement des images et des mouvements aboutira, par des collusions d'objets, de silences, de cris et de rythme, à la création d'un véritable langage physique à base de signes et non plus de mots.

Car il faut entendre que, dans cette quantité de mouvements et d'images pris dans un temps donné, nous faisons intervenir aussi bien le silence et le rythme qu'une certaine vibration et une certaine agitation matérielle composée d'objets et de gestes réellement utilisés. Et l'on peut dire que l'esprit des plus antiques hié-

roglyphes présidera à la création de ce langage théâtral pur⁶².

Objects, silences, screams, and rhythm (most probably here in the sense of a musical beat, because of the singular form) organize themselves together with the effect that a new language appears. This language is physical because it is made of objects. Objects are not used to evoke images and to create an atmosphere on the stage. They are a basic unit of this new language, like words are a basic unit in verbal language. Artaud places objects, silences, screams, and rhythm on the level of equality, and refuses to privilege one of these elements in the theater he wants to develop. Since there ought to be no principle of authority such as the design of a playwright or a director giving precedence to one element over the others, all these units are equal to each other. As a result of this equality, the encounter of these elements with each other becomes all the more dramatic, for the benefit of the audience. The elements react against each other by themselves, by the simple fact that they are juxtaposed on stage, like some chemical elements react with each other when set in each other's presence. To pursue the chemical analogy further, primary elements sometimes need an adequate environment, and an ade-

⁶² Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 120. "Lettres sur le Langage."

quate catalyst. Silence is complex in Artaud because it plays both roles at different times. Sometimes, as we have seen in the preceding section, it is necessary as an environment. In the case at hand now, it is one of the components used to react with others.

The types of encounter that Artaud describes in the process of his creation are numerous, and contribute to the abundance of poetic images in Le Théâtre et son Double. Silence may be set in a conflict with noise, objects, screams, and rhythms; but conflicts, even dynamic conflicts, are not always the organizing principle of the encounter. In the passage quoted above, images and movements overlap so that breaks in the continuity of the spectacle occur. The broken rhythms thus introduced permit the audience to perceive the poetry of objects, and gestures because objects and gestures used in this way emit a kind of "vibration" and "agitation matérielle." Silences and breaks are not the same thing for Artaud, because silences enter in the production of his language, in the same mode as objects, screams, and noises. Another form of encounter is the "collusion" of objects, screams, silences, noises and rhythms. It is as if these elements had a will or an intention of their own to secretly merge into hieroglyphs, thus creating a new language. When silence assumes an ominous quality, it destroys the new language, and even theater itself, bringing all

creativity to a standstill. For Artaud, silence, as one of the elements available in the theater, can become extremely claustrophobic. This is what happens to the contemporary stage, in which silence colludes with the predominance of psychology:

Que le théâtre soit devenu psychologique, alchimie intellectuelle des sentiments, et que le summum de l'art en matière dramatique ait fini par consister en un certain idéal de silence et d'immobilité, ce n'est pas autre chose que la perversion sur scène de l'idée de concentration⁶³.

Silence, like all the other elements of the "Theater of Cruelty," sometime takes upon this malicious quality that, for Artaud, denotes the presence of evil.

Artaud often uses images of liquids in motion to describe the interaction between silence and the other elements in his new language. Once again, the Balinese Theater provides him with a good example of how silence, noise, and rhythm are juxtaposed. The juxtaposition of rhythms, objects, and silences causes a reaction similar to that of boiling liquids:

⁶³ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 102. "Lettres sur le Langage."

Un bouillonnement chaotique, plein de repères, et par moments étrangement ordonné, crépite dans cette effervescence de rythmes peints, où le point d'orgue joue sans cesse et intervient comme un silence bien calculé⁶⁴.

Here again the idea of a chaos ordered by its own governing principle appears. But the chaos resulting in the creation of the new language is the one taking place in matter when liquids are brought to boiling. Rhythms painted in the space of air above the stage are punctuated by the notes of an organ which functions like a silence. In order to understand how Artaud's images function with such evocative power, it is worth studying the rhetorical figures upon which one image is based. In this image, the elements of the new theater do not boil when they encounter each other; but the conflagration of noise with silence produces one of the most powerful effects upon the audience of the "Theater of Cruelty." Artaud describes this effect with the image of "coups de silence", the first time the word "silence" occurs in Le Théâtre et son Double.

Located at the transition between the plague and the theater in "Le Théâtre et la Peste," the second text in Le

⁶⁴ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 60. "Sur le Théâtre Balinais."

Théâtre et son Double, the image of "coups de silence" points to a rhetorical motive of Artaud's text, in which the poet combines metaphor and analogy to designate a semantic area containing the occult "forces" supplying his imaginary world. "Le Théâtre et la Peste" occupies sixteen pages, the first twelve being exclusively devoted to the topic of the plague. There, in the style of an anecdote, Artaud recalls an incident of 1720 found in the archives of the town of Caligari. He quotes Boccaccio's Decameron, and Saint-Augustine's City of God as authoritative references on the topic of the plague. He makes the relationship between the plague and the theater three quarters of the way into the text: the plague, like the theater, liberates forces that upset social structures and introduces chaos. The last four pages in "Le Théâtre et la Peste" which deal with this relationship between the plague and the theater depend exclusively upon the grammatical conjunction "comme." The words "le théâtre," "comme," and "la peste" are repeated in various combinations like an incantation, and give the end of this text an almost prophetic quality. First, "le théâtre est comme la peste" because of the masses of people it affects. Both "la peste" and "le théâtre" work collectively, spreading victory over, and revenge upon decayed

social order⁶⁵. The turmoil they create uncovers natural forces gathered in order to "accomplir quelque chose d'essentiel"⁶⁶. Second, "la peste" as well as "le théâtre" take gestures and images as the same original material and carry them out to their extreme forms: "La peste prend des images qui dorment...; et le théâtre lui aussi prend des gestes"⁶⁷. The paragraph starting this way is an important development for the relationship between the plague and the theater because it is longer, it interrupts the sequence of phrases using "comme," and it introduces the analysis of John Ford's 1629?-33 play, Tis Pity She's Whore⁶⁸. It is worth quoting in its entirety, and making a detailed analysis of it:

La peste prend des images qui dorment, un désordre latent et les pousse tout à coup jusqu'aux gestes les plus extrêmes; et le théâtre lui aussi prend des gestes et les pousse à bout: comme la peste il refait la chaîne entre ce qui est et ce qui n'est pas, entre la virtualité du possible et ce qui

⁶⁵ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 26. "Le Théâtre et la Peste."

⁶⁶ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 27. "Le Théâtre et la Peste."

⁶⁷ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 27. "Le Théâtre et la Peste."

⁶⁸ Artaud quotes it by the title of Maeterlinck's 1895 translation, Annabella.

existe dans la nature matérialisée. Il retrouve la notion de figures et de symboles-types, qui agissent comme des coups de silence, des points d'orgue, des arrêts de sang, des appels d'humeur, des poussées inflammatoires d'images dans nos têtes brusquement réveillées; tous les conflits qui dorment en nous, il nous les restitue avec leurs forces et il donne à ces forces des noms que nous saluons comme des symboles: et voici qu'a lieu devant nous une bataille de symboles, rués les uns contre les autres dans un impossible piétinement; car il ne peut y avoir théâtre qu'à partir du moment où commence réellement l'impossible et où la poésie qui se passe sur la scène alimente et surchauffe des symboles réalisés"⁶⁹.

The rhetorical mechanisms of Artaud's text shift from analogy to metaphor. This, in turn, allows him to reach another level of comparison, that of theater and poetry. The shift is itself introduced by the conjunction "comme" which no longer parallels "le théâtre" and "la peste" but "figures" and "symboles-types" with "coups de silence," "points d'orgue," "arrêts de sang," "appels d'humeur," and "poussées

⁶⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 27. "Le Théâtre et la Peste."

inflammatoires d'images." "Coups de silence," "points d'orgue," and "appels d'humeur" are images in which one of the terms (coup, orgue, appel) denote sound. They act upon us in the same manner as the archetypal symbols which the theater creates. As images, their action is one of contagion (in Artaud's terminology), contamination, dissemination, and reversal. The perception of sound which provides the link between the three phrases migrates between them because they are contiguous. Furthermore, in "coups de silence" and "appels d'humeur" the first term denotes sound, in "points d'orgue" the second term does. The alternation between first term and second term for denoting sound emphasizes the monstrous quality in Artaud's first image "coups de silence" which is constructed in terms of a reversal: after "coups" one expects the name of an object with which to hit, and upon which to hit. Artaud names a few such as "coup de cymbale" and "coup de massue" in Van Gogh et le Suicidé de la Société. Hitting the object produces various sounds, according to the particular object chosen. But here, Artaud substitutes silence for the sound-producing object, keeping the sound connotation of "coup" and associating it with silence. Inserted in the context of "points d'orgue" and "appels d'humeur" "coups de silence" sounds very loud. Silence becomes the resonating chamber in which "coups" echoes, thus producing a dramatic contrast with the

ordinary connotations of "silence". Moreover, silence is also the instrument with which to hit, presumably, the theater audience. The use of silence in the stage directions for The Cenci illustrate this idea. In the image of "coups de silence," the ordinary meaning of the words is emptied because of their association. It is replaced by an extremely tight conceit which produces a rupture in semantic fields. This rupture is disguised by the repetitive use of "comme": the analogy which Artaud establishes between "symboles" and "coups de silence" becomes an analogy between a category of images, and images themselves. This logical "syllogism" is precisely what enables poetry to emerge. It points to an area outside the reach of ordinary language, and not adequately represented by it. In this area, silence is noisy, and Artaud hears it.

The migration or dissemination of meaning which occurs between "coups" and "silence" also occurs with the other images following "comme" in this passage. Artaud demonstrates the fruitfulness of his image by enumerating the other elements which act like "coups de silence": "des points d'orgue", "des arrêts de sang", "des appels d'humeur", "des poussées inflammatoires d'images." In ordinary language, many phrases are constructed around "coups," using another term of Artaud's list. They are

"coup de sang" and "coup d'arrêt," which Artaud collapses into "arrêt de sang." "Coup de sang" is a familiar phrase for a brain hemorrhage which often results in death. "Coup d'arrêt" refers to a movement which comes to a standstill. "Coup de poing" is another possibility, and in the vocabulary of disease, "sang" "humeur" and "poussée inflammatoire" are common terms. These metaphorical images evoke a large number of possible combinations of meaning depending on each connotation of each term, and the particular binary pairs that can be made between terms: the link between the terms of each pair depends on the common connotation between them.

The rupture in the semantic process which Artaud introduces by setting a parallel between "symboles-types" and "coups de silence" is comparable to the discontinuity in the body and thinking introduced by waking up. The imagery of sleep and the passage to a wakeful state pervade the entire paragraph. The plague uses sleeping images, "des images qui dorment;" conflicts are latent, and "dorment en nous." The effects of the theater, like that of the plague, and that of "symboles-types" is to abruptly wake us up ("nos têtes brusquement réveillées"). The theater provides the link which makes the infinite number of possible actions and the actualization of one of these possibilities. The principle

of uncertainty in statistics provides a useful scientific comparison. When a beam of electrons is sent to a screen through a magnetic cannon, which electron will hit the screen and its point of impact on the screen cannot be determined with certainty. It is only certain that one electron will hit the screen, and the impact will occur within a certain range. The actual point of impact is the actualization on the screen of the number of possibilities contained in the pack of electrons before they are sent. The function that Artaud attributes to the theater, and to the plague, is that of the magnetic cannon. It is what enables one possibility to materialize in nature, just as the magnetic tube allows one electron to hit the screen. My guess would be that, for Artaud, theater audiences play the role of the screen. The "coups de silence" is what indicates to an attentive reader of Artaud's text the passage from the level of discursive language to that of poetic language, which erupts into his text, and that he himself describes as "poussées inflammatoires d'images". At the end of the paragraph, Artaud returns to discursive language, pointing out the relationship between theater and poetry. Just as there is no hierarchy between the various elements constituting the "Theater of Cruelty," these various levels are not organized hierarchically in Artaud's text; they exist side by side, and Artaud shows considerable freedom in

moving from one kind of discourse to another.

Artaud's brief analysis of Ford's play emphasizes Giovanni's absolute freedom when he claims a right to incest. Artaud finds in this play an example of the sacred rites that the modern theater no longer knows how to present. Pierre Brunel comments upon Ford's inability to escape long speeches in a play that Artaud praises for its widespread exploitation of the possibilities of dramatic action:

Même quand il veut tordre le cou à l'éloquence, le dramaturge est donc amené à maintenir des résidus narratifs. Ford en est conscient quand, pour les besoins de l'exposition, il prête à Orgilus un discours si long que le vieux Crotolan son père en fait la critique -- critique qui à nos yeux prend valeur d'autocritique.⁷⁰

In "Le Théâtre et la Peste," the sequence of analogies established between "le théâtre" and "la peste" returns in the conclusion of the text, following Artaud's analysis of Ford's play. The repetition and the content of these analogies give an apocalyptic tone to the end of Artaud's text. As we have seen, the theater and the plague are similar in their effects by the number of people they reach. They are

⁷⁰ Théâtre et Cruauté ou Dionysos Profané.

also similar by the kind of effect they have on the masses: both reveal "un fond de cruauté latente par lequel se localisent sur un individu ou sur un peuple toutes les possibilités perverses de l'esprit⁷¹". Artaud here uses "cruelty" for the first time in Le Théâtre et son Double." The theater, like the plague, enacts a revelation of cruelty to the masses. Both perform an epiphany for audiences because they manifest on earth and in ordinary reality the irruption of forces beyond the control of human will, and far more powerful than the structures of societies erected as protection against them. These forces which give a language to physical objects may be forces of evil, but they are also responsible for the creation of Artaud's new language.

The entire essay "Le Théâtre et la Peste" is based upon the rhetorical device of analogy between "la peste" and "le théâtre." They are alike in their effects of disordering human societies, in their ability to show extreme behaviors, in their origin, and in their appearance as marking evil times. The theater and the plague, in particular, are identical as mediums of representation, a representation they establish between the thing or scene they mirror, and

⁷¹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 29. "Le Théâtre et la Peste."

the actual images of this thing or scene that they project unto masses of people. Poetry in the theater also point to a semantic area not directly accountable for in individual words, but which can be visible in the combination of several words.

2.4. The links between silence and cruelty pass through the body.

Artaud uses the alchemical process of transformation of matter in order to create his new theater, the Theater of Cruelty. The Theater of Cruelty brings to the stage the new language that Artaud develops. Words and silences are to be found amongst the various elements entering the process. Artaud diverts words and silences from their ordinary meanings. He twists them into new meanings, which he forces to coexist along with the ordinary literal and metaphorical meanings these words and silences usually convey. Words are both a component entering the process, and an output of the process, a process sometimes finished, sometimes unfinished. Various silences also participate in the production at two levels: they enter the process as components, and they are necessary to create an auditive space in which the meanings of the elements other than words may appear and interact. In this function, silences counteract

the imperialistic tendency of words monopolizing meanings. In the alchemical transformation, words, silences, gestures, architecture etc... are the matter, the elements to be transformed. Silences are also a pre-condition of the process, words are also an output. The process of transformation itself occurs through the body and through the relationship with the audience. Artaud uses the human body, particularly his own, like a machine in order to process the elements of the Theater of Cruelty. The cruelty practiced upon language and upon the other elements in this process, is also practiced upon the human body. These elements are diverted from their usual purposes and meanings, and made to coexist with other elements in order to bring their intrinsic poetic qualities to the surface. The process of transformation itself is cruel, especially since it involves human beings, for instance actors, audience, playwright, director, and others, who are used to process the elements of matter. Cruelty to language dictates cruelty to the audience.

As it is impossible to reduce Artaud's words to a single definition, and since he forces several, sometimes conflicting meanings to coexist in the same word, I will use as a starting point one of Artaud's definitions of cruelty. It is only valid as a point of departure, and does not have

value as referent for what Artaud designates under the item "cruelty." Moreover, any definition of cruelty given by Artaud would serve my purpose equally well:

Le procès du théâtre actuel n'est plus à faire. Nous avons besoin d'un théâtre qui agisse, et qui tranche dans le vif. Il ne s'agit pas, bien entendu de sortir à tout instant le couteau du boucher, mais de retrouver théâtralement la notion d'un principe qui est à la base de toute réalité. On ne peut nier que la vie, dans ce qu'elle a de dévorant et d'implacable, ne s'identifie avec la cruauté. Et ce non seulement sur le plan visible et physique, où la cruauté est partout, et prend en tous lieux les allures d'une force, mais même et surtout sur le plan invisible et cosmique, où le simple fait d'être, avec l'immense somme de douleurs qu'il suppose, apparaît comme une cruauté⁷².

Ordinary cruelty for Artaud is present everywhere in daily life and actions, but it is also one of the occult, metaphysical forces controlling life. Artaud shows gnostic tendencies, a word he actually uses in Le Théâtre et son Double. Alain Virmaux talks about "ontological cruelty," a

⁷² V, 157. Lettre à André Rolland de Renéville, September 13, 1932.

cruelty which does not exclude physical cruelty, but is a way of expressing a vision of humanity as perpetually and painfully torn between matter and spirit⁷³. Cruelty controls life through the human body because, according to Artaud, the body only becomes aware of its existence thanks to huge amounts of pain. The task of the theater is to find ways permitting to make sense of the cruelty Artaud sees pervading life as a whole, and not just his. Artaud's 'Theater of Cruelty' launches a vast enterprise of decoding pain, the pain involved in "the simple fact of being." He watches closely the reactions provoked in the audience by his theater in order to detect signs that he is not the only one suffering from this pain. Artaud does not consider a theater audience as a homogeneous mass of spectators who react together to the same stimuli. He addresses a body of interlocutors whom he describes with various terms such as "la société," "le public," "la foule," "les masses," and "le spectateur." His potential audience is not just the one circumscribed by the performance of a theater event, but ranges in size and components according to Artaud's needs at a particular point of his argument. His audience is in perpetual motion, growing and shrinking at random, and each member of such a public body can be addressed personally.

⁷³ Antonin Artaud et le Théâtre. Paris, Editions Seghers, 1970.

This is particularly visible in his letters meant to be read by one person originally, and yet, published, like the Letters from Rodez.

In this situation, Artaud attempts to reach each person in particular, and everyone together. Desperate for a consensus about his work, Artaud tries to affect what all spectators have in common, their bodies. Reintroducing drastic action in the theater, cutting in the flesh, touching nerve endings⁷⁴, giving the whip to nervous sensitivity⁷⁵, all the tasks Artaud assigns to the Theater of Cruelty must be understood at the metaphorical as well as literal level. When Artaud talks about cutting in the flesh, he uses the phrase figuratively and literally. One only needs to remember the actress Lady Abdy's request that the wheel to which she would be attached in The Cenci stand on the ground, for fear of Artaud's tricks during performance. Later in Rodez, he would try to convince doctors to emasculate him, and in "Pour en finir avec le Jugement de Dieu"⁷⁶ he advocates the

⁷⁴ Artaud mentions the therapeutic effects of acupuncture. Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 131.

⁷⁵ Artaud explains one of the functions of the theater: "donner un coup de fouet à la sensibilité de qui y participe," "une action organique sur les organes de la sensibilité nerveuse," Oeuvres Complètes, V. 224 Lettre à Orane Demazis, December 30, 1933.

⁷⁶ Oeuvres Complètes, XIII, 104. Written in 1947 as the script of a radio show. 104.

body without organs as the path to ultimate freedom. In 1935, literal and figurative meanings coexist in Artaud's words, and he devises a form of theater to perform these actions on the bodies constituting his audience.

In "Le Théâtre de Séraphin," the last text included in Le Théâtre et son Double⁷⁷, Artaud is both actor and audience to his own theater. His ability to be in both places at once allows the spectator to identify with the performance. Identification and audience participation are crucial to Artaud for the development of the Theater of Cruelty. This identification is not global acceptance of his principles, but the detailed response of an audience minutely coached during each step of the process:

Mais dans ce théâtre où je mène ma fatalité personnelle et qui a pour point de départ le souffle, et qui s'appuie après le souffle sur le son ou sur le cri, il faut pour refaire la chaîne, la chaîne d'un temps où le spectateur dans le spectacle cherchait sa propre réalité, permettre à ce spec-

⁷⁷ This text was not included in the original edition against Artaud's precise recommendations. It is dated from Mexico, April 5, 1936, but, according to Paule Thévenin, the editor, was certainly written before Artaud's departure for Mexico. (Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 330).

tateur de s'identifier avec le spectacle, souffle par souffle et temps par temps⁷⁸.

It is as if Artaud attempted to train his audience to become actors, and for this purpose, he describes himself in a situation where he is both actor and audience. He seeks to reproduce an ideal, lost time when, in his conceptions, the theater could provide some essential, metaphysical identity for the spectator. The spectator's identification retains a nostalgia for the possibility of a unity between his/her consciousness and the forces of the universe, a unity that the representation of these forces, enacted in the theater, would not distort. It seems that, here, Artaud wishes for complete identity between the forces, their representation in the theater, and the spectator's representation of himself ("sa propre réalité"). In the effect he seeks upon the spectator in the "Theater of Cruelty," the distortion of representation would be annihilated; representation would allow identity to the self for the spectator, identity of their theatrical representation to the actual forces, and unison between the spectator and the represented forces. Cruelty is both the means to enact this adequation between represented forces and perceived effect, and the cruelty of representation, a cruelty which fails to perform the

⁷⁸ Oeuvres Complètes, IV. 132. "Un Athlétisme Affectif."

required adequation. Theatrical representation fails to join the spectator's identity and the cosmic forces of the universe; it becomes "Theater of Cruelty" because it contains the promise of perfect union and the impossibility of keeping that promise.

Artaud describes what happens to himself in solitary exploration of the "Theater of Cruelty." An audience, and spectators are no longer needed, as, recalling a dream, he becomes his own audience. In this dream, he is locked in a cavern and imitates the scream of an ancient warrior who collapses at the foot of a ruined rampart:

Et c'est ici que les cataractes commencent.

Ce cri que je viens de lancer est un rêve.

Mais un rêve qui mange le rêve.

Je suis bien dans un souterrain, je respire, avec les souffles appropriés, ô merveille, et c'est moi l'acteur.

L'air autour de moi est immense, mais bouché, car de toutes parts la caverne est murée.

J'imite un guerrier médusé, tombé tout seul dans les cavernes de la terre et qui crie frappé par la peur.

Or le cri que je viens de lancer appelle un trou de silence d'abord, de silence qui se rétracte,

puis le bruit d'une catastrophe, un bruit d'eau, c'est dans l'ordre, car le bruit est lié au théâtre. C'est ainsi que dans tout vrai théâtre procède le rythme bien compris.⁷⁹

It is significant that he does not dream that he is a warrior, but an actor imitating a warrior in a cavern where there are no spectators although he finds the appropriate pauses in which to breathe⁸⁰. Rhythm in the Theater of Cruelty provides order to the transformation of the heterogeneous elements composing it. There is rhythm because, between his call and the noise of a waterfall, Artaud perceives silence. Following his scream, silence retracts and forms a hole, like a mollusk or a sand crater. But the abyss, an abyss he describes earlier in *Le Théâtre de Séraphin* as "wounded earth," also resonates with voices. The screaming voices arise from the abyss ("des voix s'élèvent, profondes comme le trou de l'abîme et qui sont le trou de l'abîme qui crie" ⁸¹), they become the screaming

⁷⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 144. *Le Théâtre de Séraphin*.

⁸⁰ In Paul Les Oiseaux ou La Place de l'Amour, he reports that he thinks himself a bad actor: "Il s'agit d'un problème qui s'est posé à l'esprit d'Antonin Artaud, mais Antonin Artaud n'a pas besoin de problème, il est déjà assez emmerdé par sa propre pensée, et entre autres faits de s'être rencontré en lui-même, et découvert mauvais acteur, par exemple, hier au cinéma, dans Surcouf, sans encore que cette larve de Petit Paul vienne manger sa langue en lui" (I*, 55, 3rd MS, February 1st, 1925).

⁸¹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 141. *Le Théâtre de Séraphin*.

abyss itself. And the screaming abyss is silent because it is a dream. The Theater of Cruelty allows us to hear the silent, screaming voices of the abyss, which Artaud hears in his dreams.

Artaud follows very closely the circulation of breath in his own body. He monitors step by step how his breath transforms itself into a scream by travelling along various channels in his body, through the belly and the lungs, and out to the sealed mouth and open nostrils. The human body, particularly his own, becomes a thermo-dynamic machine in which he watches silence and screams move like steam travelling along pipes. Philippe Avron, another actor, who interpreted Hamlet in 1977, emphasizes the importance of breathing:

En tant que comédien, j'ai été très sensible aux pièces écrites par des comédiens, Shakespeare ou Molière. Ils ménagent des moments où l'on peut respirer, se reposer. Ce qui ne se sent pas dans Giraudoux ou Claudel qui, eux, étaient assis et écrivaient. Molière, c'est un texte qui "respire": c'est une écriture, mais c'est surtout

destiné à être dit. On ressent la même impression avec Shakespeare.⁸²

Artaud, himself an actor, attempts to find the "appropriate words"⁸³ to describe the scream resulting from circulating breath so that the audience, who is now reduced to a single spectator, can also feel the circulation of breath, and produce the scream:

Pour lancer ce cri je me vide.

Non pas d'air, mais de la puissance même du bruit. Je dresse devant moi mon corps d'homme. Et ayant jeté sur lui "l'oeil" d'une mensuration horrible, place par place je le force à rentrer en moi.

Ventre d'abord. C'est par le ventre qu'il faut que le silence commence, à droite, à gauche, au point des engorgements herniaires, là où opèrent les chirurgiens."⁸⁴

Artaud recommends that the Theater of Cruelty operates upon the bodies in the audience, and on stage, like a surgeon operates to remove excess of matter and disorders of the

⁸² Mythe et Histoire, Société Française Shakespeare. Actes du Congrès 1983. Paris: Jean Touzot, Libraire Editeur, 1984.

⁸³ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 145.

⁸⁴ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 141-2.

flesh. "Engorgements" is a word that can describe oversaturated traffic in a standstill at an intersection which slows down the entire network of communication. Artaud decides that cutting and cleaving in the human bodies constituting his audience is the best way to produce silence and screams. The collective scream, made of the orchestration of individual screams both by the audience, and by the actors, is one of the effects created by the Theater of Cruelty. Artaud wants to pass onto the spectator the knowledge of screams and silences forming into his own body, not through the spectator's ear but through his breast, so that the spectator can join in this kind of screaming. As a result of this collective enterprise, society will wake up from its criminal and comfortable sleep and find again, according to Artaud, the much needed reverence for the sacred.

In the images of "trou de silence" in the abyss, and silence starting in the belly, Artaud describes a feeling of overwhelming terror usually experienced in nightmares. It is as if his screams were silent, and were calling upon natural disasters, which themselves are noisy. In the cavern, the warrior's body seems to expel noise from his body, and attempts to produce silence. The external forces are the ones endowed with the capacity of producing sound. In

Artaud's dream, the human body is differentiated from the forces of the universe through the capacity of making noise: it is this difference which prevents him from the reunion with the cosmic forces that he will later seek in his experiences with peyote among the Tarahumaras. The ontological difference between the phenomena of noise and silence produces a split in the author's consciousness, "une déchirure" which he constantly works at mending, without ever being able to overcome the silence invading him, and threatening to engulf all utterances. Artaud, completely torn by this Herculean project, fears failing to recover his voice out of the abysmal silence produced in his body.

2.5. Artaud's prophetic voice.

Artaud's struggle with the noise of cosmic forces in the cavern in order to hear his own voice reminds one of Husserl's efforts to establish the voice as the only "pure" phenomenon. Jacques Derrida, discussing Husserl's theory of the sign, a theory based outside any metaphysical presupposition, concludes that a true expression of being, not already tainted by communication, and by an outside layer in expression, is impossible.⁸⁵ In his dream in the cavern,

⁸⁵ La Voix et le Phénomène. Introduction au Problème du Signe dans la Phénoménologie de Husserl. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967.

Artaud struggles to establish silence within himself, and instead hears the tumult of cosmic forces. As a result, his voice does not emerge, only screams and breath come out. Derrida's analysis of Husserl allows to understand how the voice must emerge from silence:

Husserl n'entend pas seulement exclure l'indication de la "vie solitaire de l'âme." Il considérera le langage en général, l'élément du logos, sous sa forme expressive elle-même, comme évènement secondaire, et surajouté à une couche originaire et pré-expressive du sens. Le langage expressif lui-même devrait survenir au silence absolu du rapport à soi. (77)

Le "silence" phénoménologique ne peut donc se reconstituer que par une double exclusion ou une double réduction: celle du rapport à l'autre en moi dans la communication indicative, celle de l'expression comme couche ultérieure, supérieure et extérieure à celle du sens. C'est dans le rapport entre ces deux exclusions que l'instance de la voix fera entendre son étrange autorité. (78)

Husserl, seeking to isolate the phenomenological being in solitary consciousness or soliloquies, distinguishes between two functions of the linguistic sign in order to get rid of any exteriority: an indicative function of communication,

and an expressive function carrying meaning. The indicative function, or communication of consciousness to itself is a fiction ("le signe est toujours travaillé par la fiction," 63) and, as such, is immediately dismissed. Phone, or phenomenological voice, is the acoustic image of words, which the subject hears as present to itself, outside any exteriority, and different from sounds, which belong to the world. This voice is inseparable from being as being always manifest itself simultaneously as being's expression in phenomenological consciousness. Phone is a specific phenomenon, according to Husserl, the one that represents ideality in itself because it joins, in this absolute proximity, inside phenomenological consciousness, presence of the outside object, which one represents to oneself, and presence of oneself (85).

The voice is unique, apart from other sensory perceptions, because, unlike for the other senses, the body does not have to offer its surface to the world to perceive itself (88); it has the power to affect consciousness purely from the inside. Derrida demonstrates that this pure interiority of phone hypothesized by Husserl rests upon the possibility of complete control of the signifier in phenomenological consciousness. In the case of phone, the interior, "pure" voice, the signifier perfectly sticks to

the signified with transparency, and without adding its own external connotations⁸⁶. Husserl posits what Derrida calls "la double réduction phénoménologique" for language which suppresses the communicative function, and the outside, supplemental layer of the signifier. This double reduction corresponds to a silence of the world in oneself so that the phenomenological voice, phone, can arise. Derrida shows that this "double réduction" is impossible and already invaded by the outside world.

Artaud's description of the effects of the Theater of Cruelty resembles Husserl's efforts to isolate the voice as a "pure" phenomenon. For Husserl, silence allows one to exclude the indicative communication with the outside and the expressive representation of the word to oneself. For Artaud, silence performs the double exclusion of the cosmic forces and the reduction of the world within the self. Artaud struggles to reduce the representative function of theatrical performance in order to achieve complete identification with the cosmic forces. Because it uses the body as well as language, theatrical representation simultaneously allows and obstructs identification: Artaud

⁸⁶ "Le signifiant deviendrait parfaitement diaphane en raison même de la proximité absolue du signifié. Cette proximité est rompue lorsque, au lieu de m'entendre parler, je me vois écrire ou signifier par gestes. (La Voix et le Phénomène, 90).

yearns for complete transparency of the body in the same manner as Husserl strives to achieve complete transparency of the signifier. The double exclusion performed by silence gives Artaud's voice its "strange authority."

In "Le Théâtre de Séraphin," Artaud depicts the emergence of voice with dreams that become themselves a form of theater. As the dream sets on stage various parts of his body, his stomach, his lungs, his thorax, his skeleton, he creates a theater of his own body, thus offering the perception of its surface to the world. The role of silence here is crucial because it separates the cosmic forces from the actor in the dream, as well as allows them to enter his body through "trous de silence":

Or le cri que je viens de lancer appelle un trou de silence d'abord, de silence qui se rétracte, puis le bruit d'une cataracte, un bruit d'eau, c'est dans l'ordre, car le bruit est lié au théâtre. C'est ainsi que dans tout vrai théâtre, procède le rythme bien compris.⁸⁷

Artaud distinguishes three principles in himself, the Masculine, the Feminine, the Neuter. The Feminine produces in his body a scream "tonitruant et terrible," but the Masculine transforms its energy in his breath without letting a

⁸⁷ Oeuvres Complètes. IV. 144.

scream out. As the Masculine keeps his energy, and the Feminine lets out a scream, Artaud creates a theater contained within his own body. Silence may be associated with the Neuter, as the latter is "pesant et fixé," an association Artaud does not make, perhaps because silence contains many more connotations. The production on stage of this body-theater is, for Artaud, the key to "real theater" and to spectators' identification. Only by recreating this theater for themselves and within their own bodies can the spectators find again the lost connection with the sacred. The success of this kind of theater depends upon its appeal to these forces which the crowds who know earthquakes, plagues, revolutions, wars, and who shiver before railroad accidents will recognize in the theater.⁸⁸

This silence can also be found in "Van Gogh, Le Suicidé de la Société," a text written in 1947 when Artaud was released from his confinement at the asylum in Rodez. Following an exhibit at the Orangerie, Artaud describes his impressions of Van Gogh's paintings which are normally silent to the viewer, in terms of violent sounds. In reproducing the violent sounds he hears in the paintings, Artaud finally finds his voice, the poetic path that he was

⁸⁸ Oeuvres Complètes, 73. "En finir avec les Chefs-d'Oeuvres."

earlier searching for when rewriting the manifestoes for the Theater of Cruelty. Here too, cruelty is performed upon matter, and once again for Artaud, voicing his own his poetic voice is painful, violent, and involves tormented flesh.

Silence is so violent, and so violently described by Artaud that it seems that the poet hears silence itself. And what he hears is an uproar, a tumult, that only natural phenomena such as the plague, storms and waterfalls can create. Silence functions like a center around which the various elements of the Theater of Cruelty organize their apparent fragmentation, out of which Artaud's voice arises. All the forces Artaud sets in motion tend towards this ideal point, in a manner similar to the center of a whirlpool, or to the eye of a hurricane. Arising out of an abyss of silence surrounded by cosmic forces, Artaud's voice acquires a prophetic quality. With his "metaphysical," and "alchemical" theater, he tries to renew the connections between audiences and actors with ancient cosmic forces, forces that also drive the Ancient Greek theater, the Elizabethan theater, and the Balinese theater. Unless the energies provided by these divine connections are renewed, Artaud

predicts chaos, famine, blood, war and diseases⁸⁹. He prophesies catastrophes to come as if he was a tragic actor delivering omens to a terrified audience.

Artaud envisions a ritual theater actualizing what Mallarmé called "theatre de l'esprit" in his own essays about the theater⁹⁰. He combines imaginary material, taking in concrete elements of his surrounding world, with the physical processes of his own body. He insists upon silence, gestures, lighting, shouting, noise, and movements in space. With the intent of capturing a new poetic language for the theater, a language which has vanished since the theater has become a psychological investigation of human characters and their motives, Artaud discards language as a signifying practice. The difficulties of representing on stage what he imagines in writing are contained in his writings about the theater. Until his death, Artaud remained firmly convinced that he could create the Theater of Cruelty on stage with great success. Yet, his awareness of these difficulties

⁸⁹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV, 78, "En Finir avec les Chefs-d'Oeuvres.

⁹⁰ In "Crayonné au théâtre," Mallarmé writes about Hamlet: "L'oeuvre de Shakespeare est si bien façonnée selon le seul théâtre de notre esprit, prototype du reste, qu'elle s'accomode de la mise en scène de maintenant, ou s'en passe avec indifférence." Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1945. Eds. "La Pléiade.") 300. "Igitur" presents an embryonic form of "théâtre de l'esprit."

displayed in Le Théâtre et son Double sheds new light upon this new dramatic language: it cannot be described by language, even Artaud's language. The paradox of writing what should happen outside language indicates that, in the Theater of Cruelty, Artaud dramatizes the writing of silence. He formulates an operative principle for our study of tragic silences:

Il y a des principes abstraits mais pas de loi concrète et plastique; la seule loi c'est l'énergie poétique qui va du silence étranglé à la peinture précipitée d'un spasme, et de la parole individuelle mezzo voce à l'orage pesant et ample d'un chœur lentement rassemblé.⁹¹

⁹¹ Oeuvres Complètes, IV. 109. "Lettres sur le Langage." His italics.

CHAPTER 3

EXAMPLES OF SILENCE IN EARLY MODERN TRAGEDIES

3.1. Political hierarchy in the Spanish Tragedy.

The various types of silence at work in later revenge tragedies such as Hamlet, or The Revenger's Tragedy are already present in the Spanish Tragedy. This is not surprising considering the popularity of Kyd's play, and its function as a repository of theatrical devices, and plot themes for the playwrights of the period. However, as T. McAlindon remarks,¹ the Spanish Tragedy is not simply useful to study as a source of themes and devices for later plays. The emphasis on words and language is not as pronounced in the Spanish Tragedy as it is in Hamlet, for instance, but silence plays a major role in it, in association with the representation of politics at court, and with stage conventions. Silence is strikingly linked to class conflicts and struggles for the favors of the King of Spain, conflicts

¹English Renaissance Tragedy. Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 1986. 55.

which wrong Hieronimo's family, and urge him to seek vengeance. Hieronimo's inability to get an audience from the King in order to express his outrage and to demand justice for the murder of his son introduces the political aspect of silence. Hieronimo's delay in revenging himself is expressed in terms of the opposition between words and action, to which silence serves a pivotal function, and the play's final slaughter is carried out in a mask which allows Hieronimo to temporarily rise above his inferior social status, and overcome the silence he has been subjected to by his enemies.

Silence becomes a powerful instrument at the hands of the King, and his nephew, Lorenzo, to impose order and their domination over those in lower social classes. The King, due to his position as the supreme authority, and Lorenzo, in order to forward his schemes, manipulate silence at the expense of Hieronimo, and various other characters in an inferior social position in the play. This dramatic situation prompts Hieronimo to take on the role of revenger, and he seeks justice by himself when his suit is not even granted audience by the King. Silence, in the Spanish Tragedy, causes Hieronimo's delay and induces him to perform desperate actions. By examining the divisions in class structure in the play one understands this form of silence,

because the various classes, struggling for the spoils of war and for the favors of the King, are separated from each other by silence. This silence, used for political purposes, is often imposed by the characters in superior position over the ones in an inferior one. But it is sometimes also found along an horizontal axis between servants, and is finally used by Hieronimo against his oppressors to perpetuate his revenge in a mask. Emphasizing the political aspect of silence in the Spanish Tragedy highlights the mechanisms of tragedy in a way permitting both a better understanding of that play, and an important component of the tragic in general.

T. McAlindon studies the conflicts in the Spanish Tragedy in terms of the dualities of reason and passion, and soul and body. He refines the Nietzschean categories of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac impulses in tragedy by adding the character's insights into himself and his world. In his view, the internalized conflicts in the characters' inner nature account for the structure of the play:

More typical of the play are those juxtapositions which show two groups of characters pursuing their own ends and moving in partial or total blindness towards final collision. (2)

² English Renaissance Tragedy, 59.1

Internal debates such as Hieronimo's right to perform justice for himself, or external conflicts such as Horatio, his son, and Balthazar, the Portuguese heir, vying for Bel-Imperia's favors, provide dynamic forces in the play. But the hierarchical ordering of the Spanish society portrayed often supply motives for the characters' actions. Characters in the Spanish Tragedy are defined by and function within the framework of rigid social divisions. The divisions between social classes supersede the division between Spain and Portugal, the two countries formally at war with each other. The Kings, Princes and lords at both courts benefit from this framework, and form alliances which become the common enemy of the less powerful.

After Don Andrea, a Spanish noble, has been slain in battle, Balthazar, son of the Portuguese Viceroy, is captured by Horatio, son of the justice marshall Hieronimo. The prisoner is entertained with banquets at the Spanish Court, and soon promised Bel-Imperia, niece to the Spanish King, and Don Andrea's former lover, in marriage to settle the peace. As she falls in love with Horatio, Hieronimo's son, the latter is murdered by a servant employed by Lorenzo allied with Balthazar. Although he had captured the Portuguese heir together with Lorenzo (the King calls Horatio "partner of the prize" [I.ii. 115]), Horatio, son of

the Justice Marshall, has been disadvantageded when he receives his share of glory and war trophies. Lorenzo and Horatio vie for the King's favors, and each hope that they will be chosen to keep the prisoner:

Lorenzo: This hand first tooke his courser by the
raines.

Horatio: But first my launce did put him from his
horse.

Lorenzo: I ceaz'd his weapon and enjoyde it first.

Horatio: But first I forc'd him lay his weapons
downe" (I.ii.156-159)

Balthazar is called upon for his account of the capture, and Hieronimo intervenes with the King in favor of his son. Both father and son insist upon their right to the spoils of war (Hieronimo: "My tongue should plead for young Horatio's right" [170], Horatio: "I sit beside my right" [178]). The King cuts short Hieronimo's plea, and silences him by reminding him of his social position: "Content thee Marshall thou shalt have no wrong,/ And for thy sake thy Sonne shall want no right" (174-75). He decides that, as a fair partaking, Lorenzo will keep the war trophies associated with glory, Balthazar's weapons and horse, and Horatio will be paid Balthazar's ransom. Horatio's and Hieronimo's inferior position is further underlined when the King attributes to Lorenzo the prisoner's keep: "For thine estate best fitteth

such a guest./ Horatio's house were small for all his train" (I.ii.186-7). Horatio, and his father Hieronimo are not heard to protest again in the scene; they are set apart from the nobles of higher rank, both Spanish and Portuguese, who very soon forget their previous conflict.

This quick shift of alliances with its emphasis on the distribution of war spoils, Bel-Imperia's new love, and Hieronimo's plea to the King on behalf of his son's war credit draw very stylized characters which sometimes appear as mere functions of their social positions. In the conflict of interests about the prisoner, even as both Lorenzo and Horatio have displayed equal worth in battle, Horatio's inferior social background (he is only a Marshall's son, when Lorenzo is nephew to the King) prevails in the share he receives. His father's suit on his behalf is frowned upon, with the result that father and son not only are treated unfairly, but are also denied the right to protest. Hieronimo's subsequent silence upon the murder of his son must be understood in this context. Hieronimo's and Horatio's social place which conditions the King's response in the distribution of war prizes also determines the effectiveness of Hieronimo's claim for justice.

Thomas Kyd emphasizes the conspiratorial aspect of the silence which Hieronimo is forced to maintain about the mur-

der of his son. As a result, Hieronimo's increased isolation is symptomatic of the strict hierarchical order of his society. In a soliloquy, Hieronimo laments the death of his son, and questions the justice of the heavens, when a letter written by Bel-Imperia denounces Lorenzo as murderer. Hieronimo immediately seeks to speak to her, and finds that she has been imprisoned in her bedroom by Lorenzo, her brother. The murderer asks Hieronimo to carry a message, who refuses the offer and exit. In the Spanish Tragedy, there is no doubt about who plotted the murder, since Bel-Imperia's accusation is confirmed in another letter exchanged between Lorenzo and his servant Pedringano. Hieronimo, who cannot speak to Lorenzo for obvious reasons, is denied the possibility of sharing grief with Bel-Imperia, who loved his son. As a Marshall of Justice, he cannot apply it for his own benefit, so Hieronimo attempts to appeal to the King. The fact that the wrongdoer occupies a higher social position also renders this appeal necessary.

But Hieronimo's appeal to the King fails once more, and he is silenced before he can actually explain the matter of his suit, because of Lorenzo's intervention with the King, and his position as preferred interlocutor to the ruler. First Hieronimo is denied access when he cries for justice ("Back, seest thou not the King is busied?" [III.xii. 28]).

As he waits for the King's interview with the Portuguese ambassadors to be finished and persists in his claim, Lorenzo tries to soothe his anger by showing him it is against his own interest to protest ("Hieronimo, you are not well advisde" [67]). When the angry Hieronimo finally pulls his dagger on Lorenzo, he is removed from the scene, and Lorenzo explains to the king that Hieronimo's "distract and in a manner lunatick" (III. xii.87) behavior stems from jealousy at his son receiving the ransom. Thus, because Lorenzo, as a Prince, has the King's ear, Hieronimo's appeal for justice is silenced although the King throughout this scene seems well-disposed toward his Marshall of Justice (he maintains him in his function against Lorenzo's advice, and grants him part of the ransom). Silence is thus manipulated as an instrument of power by Lorenzo in order to prevent his opponent from obtaining justice. Silence serves Lorenzo all the better because Hieoronimo is not a Prince.

An episode of the subplot gives another example of the conspiracy of silence used by Lorenzo to gain advantage over his rivals. Lorenzo uses his princely privilege to silence his servant, Pedringano, the executor in the murder plot. Pedringano, who has been arrested, is led to believe that, at the last minute Lorenzo will send him his pardon from the King. He boasts about his crime, insults the judge, and

laughs at the executioner. A page carrying the box supposedly containing the pardon finds it empty:

By my bare honesty heeres nothing but the bare emptied box: were it not sin against secrecie, I would say it were a piece of gentlemanlike knavery. [...] Ist not a scurvie jest, that a man should jest himselfe to death. Alas poore Pedringano, I am in a sorte sorie for thee, but if I should be hanged with thee, I cannot weep" (III.v. 5-17).

The page carrying the empty box expresses disbelief, and awe that his master displays such villainy, but his inferior condition as servant puts him at Lorenzo's mercy. Silence is imposed upon the servants for fear of losing their lives, and if they can display some compassion for each other's predicaments, Lorenzo succeeds in dividing them. The Prince reaps the largest benefit from his servant's trial because Hieronimo is the judge condemning Pedringano. Only the executor of the crime is punished, and not the one who mastered its realization. This subplot provides a parody of justice which further denigrates Hieronimo's function as Marshall, because, even when he applies justice, it serves the purposes of his enemy. Justice is being mocked by the nobles in power who are shown to use it for their scheming: the silence of those belonging to inferior classes is required for the twisting of justice.

The conspiracy of silence around Horatio's murder cannot be broken and the crime punished. Hieronimo's demand for justice is silenced by the intermediaries between him and the King. He fails when he uses direct appeal, which leads him to seek alternate ways of carrying out the revenge. He resorts to staging a mask in which, in disguise, he stabs Lorenzo and Balthazar. Silence is intricately linked to the stage-convention of disguise, and acting; this is brought into focus by the masked characters' use of foreign languages, the King's insistence on revelations, and Hieronimo swallowing his tongue to avoid them. The hero finally learns to use his enemy's weapon for his own purpose, and dies revenged.

The staging of a mask in which the wrongdoers will be punished serves several purposes. It forces the King to pay attention to the situation, since the latter attends the performance for his own entertainment. It calls the audience's attention to the medium of the theater, and its representation of reality. It validates the meaning of the plot in the main play, by positing it as a reality, from which the actors of the mask can differentiate themselves. It allows the playwright to conclude the play. Before the mask, the main plot reaches a conflictual standstill due to

an equal balance of forces, none of which can prevail over the other, or let go; after the mask, the tragedy ends with the death of the revenger. Hieronimo enlists Bel-Imperia's help in staging the mask, and convinces Lorenzo and Balthazar to act in it as well. Thomas Kyd shows the parallel and carefully distinguished between acting, as in play-acting, and acting, as doing. Hieronimo soliloquizes just before the beginning of the mask:

Behoves thee then Hieronimo to be reveng'd,
The plot is laide of dire revenge,
On then Hieronimo pursue revenge,
For nothing wants but acting of revenge.
(IV.iii.27-30)

Each character of the mask speaks in a different foreign language which introduces further confusion about the meaning of the mask: Hieronimo is thus able to conceal his real intentions. The use of various languages also provides him with a reason for giving explanations at the end. To Balthazar protesting that no one will understand the plot, he replies: "And I my selfe in an Oration,/ .. Assure your selfe shall make the matter knowne." (IV. i. 183-186). The silence imposed upon Hieronimo by his enemies in the main plot is now reversed, and works for Hieronimo's benefit.

As playwright and director of the mask, Hieronimo imposes his intentions upon his cast; as the only character

in the mask who speaks English, he gives his version of the events to the audience formed by the King of Spain, Viceroy of Portugal, and Castile, Lorenzo's and Bel-Imperia's father. Thanks to the mask, Hieronimo, who was denied access to the supreme authority and forced into silence, has at his mercy the King who becomes eager for Hieronimo's words ("But what followes for Hieronimo?" [IV.iv.72]). When the King asks him the meaning of all he has watched, the first thing Hieronimo does is to break the theatrical illusion of the mask, and return to the reality of the play, by denying that he and the others do only what actors do: "To die to day [...]/ And [...]/ Revive to please to morrowes audience./ No Princes, know that I am Hieronimo." (IV.iv.79, 82-83). By shedding the actor's identity, Hieronimo creates an expectation in the King and his court for his "latest tale." Hieronimo draws a curtain in order to reveal the body of his son. The dramatic effect silences the King, who is prevented from voicing his desire for an explanation: Hieronimo, in the midst of delivering an eighty-line speech, in which he explains his actions and recreates all the events of the play, acknowledges the eager silence of his courtly audience: "I see your lookes urge instance of these words,/ Beholde the reason urging me to this" (87-88). At the end of the speech, Hieronimo re-enters his identity as "Author and actor in this Tragedie"

(147) by calling "Princes now beholde Hieronimo" (146). He concludes by an appeal to his courtly audience to let him fall back into silence: "And Gentles, thus I end my play,/ Urge no more words, I have no more to say" (151-2).

The mask creates a dramatic situation in which the court becomes the silent and expecting audience of Hieronimo's speech. The reversal of roles between those upon whom silence is imposed and those who can impose their speech enacts the denouement of the plot in the Spanish Tragedy. The revenger's advantage over the court is of course temporary; it lasts only as long as his speech lasts, and ends when he falls back into silence. In this speech, Hieronimo assumes the role of narrator of his own plot. The revenger steps from the role of actor and playwright to that of storyteller, and enforces his words upon a now silent court. The narration provides him with an awareness of his shifting roles, the roles of actor, playwright, revenger, and state official. Silence underlines the shifts between Hieronimo as "himself," a character in the Spanish Tragedy, and between Hieronimo as "Author and actor" in the theatrical entertainment performed at the Spanish court. Because of the duplication of the actor-audience relationship within the stage-convention of the mask, silence creates a new balance of power between the King, Hieronimo, and his

enemies. This new equilibrium gives the impulse for the playwright to conclude the Spanish Tragedy. As the demands of the dramatic form prevent Hieronimo from sustaining a single monologue until the end of the Spanish Tragedy (it would not resolve the main plot because the reactions of the court and the king would not be known), he returns to silence, and to his role as actor, hoping to escape the King's rage and punishment by running to hang himself.

In the rigid society described in the Spanish Tragedy, the silence of those in a lower social position, at first imposed upon Hieronimo, and others, becomes a last right that a culprit can beg for. To the court pressing Hieronimo for an extended confession about the details of his plot although he has already given them, the revenger pleads the King to grant him silence, a denied request:

Hieronimo: What lesser libertine can Kings afford
Then harmeles silence? then afford it me Suf-
ficeth I may not, nor I will not tell thee.

King: Fetch forth the tortures Traitor as thou
art, ile make thee tell. (IV.iv. 179-183)

Hieronimo is now denied the silence he begs for, and swallows his tongue to avoid his fate. Silence as an instrument of power in the hands of the ruler has been briefly borrowed by Hieronimo in the form of the mask to achieve his purpose

of revenge. When the purpose is accomplished, silence is once again at the disposal of the ruler, who can enforce it or break it. The destruction of the state which follows the slaughter is only a possibility indicated by the play because the rulers of Spain and Portugal remain, although without heirs³. The Spanish Tragedy displays a society ruled by class division, and in which individual expression of the members of the lower classes is strictly controlled by those in power. In 1587, this control over individual freedom of speech by state rulers is still shown as successful by the playwright, and it does not bring about the collapse of the society based upon it. As we will see, later tragedies support an altogether different understanding of the issue.

3.2. Silence and the definition of the self in the Revenger's Tragedy.

³ Many critics disagree with this, notably Mc Alindon, but also others. They see the ending of the play leaving a king without heir as an indication of the future collapse of the Kingdom of Spain. David Bevington gives a more qualified account of the ending: "Even The Spanish Tragedy concedes that the proceedings of Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia are of disastrous consequences to the body politic...The state is not one-sidedly in the wrong, and suffers grievous injury. Though Kyd's resolution is far from orthodox, he does not pretend that considerations of national security are irrelevant." (Tudor Drama and Politics. A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968. 265)

Silence in the Revenger's Tragedy means keeping a secret. It is also associated with death, a link often made in the Renaissance. In both cases, silence is the staple of the plot, and the indispensable protection of the mechanisms of courtly intrigue. At the beginning of the play Vindice, the hero-revenger, castigates women for being unable to keep a secret, although the play presents no concrete example of this. At the climactic moments of revenge, he discloses his identity to his victims, and breaks the secret of his various disguises. The series of revelations culminate in a final twist, when Vindice claims responsibility for the murders in front of the new ruler who immediately condemns him to death. Vindice's ultimate confession resembles in no way an admission of guilt and rather seems unnecessary bravado. Breaking his silence is however what gives meaning to the acts of revenge, and allows him to transcend both his human and social condition.

At first, silence is related to the definition of women's identity, but this definition is made through male characters' speeches to and about women, particularly Vindice's. In fact, the play demonstrates that Vindice blames on women a vice from which he himself suffers but of

which he is unaware⁴. Yet, the conclusion of the play permits Vindice to justify his disclosure of the murders: in a familiar misogynistic pattern, what is presented as a vice in women turns out as the very quality which allows the hero to redeem his villainy.

Vindice, the hero-revenger, plays an active role in ascribing women characters' place with respect to speech at the beginning of the play, but in doing so, he also places himself in relation to it. In fact, the ability to keep a secret, and to keep silent about one's thoughts is to him what distinguishes men from women, and one element which justifies male supremacy in natural terms. Using a gross allusion and pun on women's anatomy, Vindice assures Lussurioso that he is worthy to be employed in his service because he can keep a secret:

Secret? I ne'er had that disease o' the mother,
 I praise my father! Why are men made close
 But to keep thoughts in best? I grant you this:
 Tell but some woman a secret over night,

⁴ Lenz, Green, and Neely note this common phenomenon in Shakespeare's plays: "When men revile women, they cry out against their own failures, hating themselves for what women 'tempt' them to; women, by contrast, curse men for external verifiable wrongs against them." The Woman's Part. Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare. Eds. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Green, and Carol Thomas Neely. Urban, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1980.(26)

Your doctor may find it in the urinal i'the morning" (I.iii. 80-84).

According to Vindice, biological differences explain why women cannot keep a secret. This inability is expressed in terms of a disease or a malfunctioning of their bodies: women's bodies are deficient, and cause their lack of discretion which, in turn, disrupts men's plots and dealings. This defect in women, from which men are supposedly exempt, also appears responsible for Vindice's anxiety about the cause of his father's death. When Vindice and Gratiana, his mother, discuss the father's dissatisfaction with his social condition as a likely cause of death, Gratiana explains her ignorance of her husband's feelings by his "wisdom" which anticipated women's inability to keep their thoughts to themselves ("He was too wise to trust me with his thoughts" I.i. 129). When the female characters speak or act in the Revenger's Tragedy, they tend to repeat the traits in which male characters define them, without questioning them, and without offering a different interpretation of the early events in the play. They also conform to what men expect of them, like Antonio's wife who is praised for preserving her virtue from rape by killing herself. Although the uncertainty about Vindice's father's thoughts causes the son's spleen, a discontent which leads him to seek revenge on the Duke, Vindice praises his father's wisdom in terms

derogatory to women ("I' faith then father thou wast wise indeed,/ "Wives are but made to go to bed and feed." I.i. 130-131). The separation between the father and the mother is thus effected by the father's wisdom which is defined by his ability to keep silent; on the contrary, the mother appears to be unwise in this respect, not because of any concrete episode to support Vindice's claim, but because of the anatomical differences responsible for all women's defect in this respect. Vindice's circular argument stems from his extension to his mother of a commonplace reducing all women to the same traits, and from comparing one individual (the father) to a whole class (women). The father's wisdom is thus defined in relative terms, as an ability that women do not have. It is based upon women's defective nature, and stands in opposition to this nature. In order to prove himself worthy of Lussurioso's service, Vindice invokes his father's character, and protests that he takes after him, not after his mother. Thus Vindice constructs his identity through that of his father; by defining women's and his mother's incapacity to keep silent, Vindice also defines himself as one not given to such a disability.

However, by an ironical reversal at the end of the play, Vindice, unable to keep secret about the murders he has committed, reveals that he and his brother are the

actual murderers to the assembled court. This revelation brings about his own arrest and execution, and defines his social position at that court ("May not we set as well as the duke's son?" [V.iii.107]). In Radical Tragedy, Jonathan Dollimore challenges two opposed critical views, about The Revenger's Tragedy. According to these views, either the play adheres to an idealist conception of providence, and consequently betrays a moralistic intent, or its psychopathology is redeemed by the ironic tone of its peripeteias. Dollimore proposes that the world depicted in this play makes sense to itself only when in movement, particularly through the movement inherent in sexual drive and social ambition. As a consequence, the few moments of stasis involve an amount of detachment which yields a limited insight:

the brief moments of inaction allow for a full realization of just how self-stultifying is this world's expenditure of energy, of just how poor is the benefit of the 'bewitching minute'" (147).

In the light of Dollimore's analysis, one understands Vindice's final revelation to Antonio as one producing the stasis necessary for his final satisfaction in his revenge. Keeping silent over his villainous actions, Vindice would continue his fretful, sterile life at court. On the contrary, disclosing the murder brings this activity to a

standstill favorable to an affirmation of his position as revenger before the court. Vindice's revelations give a public interpretation of his and his brother's story; it is what permits him to fully reclaim their identity through social position, and finally assert themselves as equals in death to the Dukes ("I'faith we're well--our mother turned, our sister true,/ We die after a nest of Dukes!" [V.iii. 125-6]). Yet, only in death can this equality be achieved; equality in death only seriously undermines one of the tenets of the humanist position.

In Act V, the revenger displays the very shortcoming which he blames on women. After each murder that he commits, Vindice tells the ignorant victim that he is their murderer. In the last twenty five lines of the play, it pushes him to boast to Antonio, the new ruler, and confess to him the murder of the Duke. An entanglement of silence broken by revelations plays a major role in the denouement of the Revenger's Tragedy. Vindice's confession to Antonio is the last one in a series of revelations without which Vindice's revenge would be incomplete because performing the revenge becomes subordinated to affirming oneself as the revenger. The hero is not satisfied merely to kill the Duke who denied his father social status and poisoned Vindice's betrothed, and to kill Lussurioso who employed him to steal

his sister's virginity. Vindice needs above all to reveal to his enemies that he is the agent of their demise. The dramatic effect of a long agony is repeated for Vindice's main victims, the Duke, and Lussurioso, and it allows Vindice's confession to take place. Their agony seems to be prolonged for the purpose of hearing Vindice's revelations that he is their murderer.

The Duke's agony in III. v. lasts for sixty five lines, during which his wife, apparently unaware of his dying presence, plots his murder with her lover who is also the Duke's bastard son. After Vindice's cry of victory when the poisoned Duke realizes that he is his murderer (" 'Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'Tis I!" [III.v. 165]), an exchange of insults follow. The Duke fights with death, and calls "treason." With noise of a banquet heard at the door, the Duke's calls endanger the killers so that the revenger decides to nail down the Duke's tongue with a dagger ("What, is not thy tongue eaten out yet?/ Then we'll invent a silence." [III. v.188-9]). Not only does Vindice prove himself incapable of keeping silent about his actions, but, as his exhilaration testifies, the full extent of his revenge is reached when he proclaims his name to the victim. Following this revelation, the victim's rapid death becomes indispensable in order to restore the secret. In this

scene, the rhythm of the dramatic action depends on silence about the murder to be broken and restored. The audience's interest is sustained by the rapid succession of actions aiming at the Duke's death, and these actions are motivated in the plot by the secret first revealed then recovered about the murderer's name. Moreover, this dramatic process is alluded to by the frequent occurrences of the word "tongue" in the scene. During the Duke's agony, the dialogue explores various uses of "tongue," starting with eating and kissing, and continuing with the tongue as an organ of speech. A reference to his father by Vindice is what produces the switch in semantic areas ("He had his tongue, yet grief made him speechless" [III. v. 169]). To deprive the Duke of his ability to speak ultimately appears as important as killing him, and nailing down his tongue to achieve this is a means consistent with the language of the scene. Thus, Vindice's killing of the Duke calls the attention to a pattern of silence broken by secrets told, and the language in which it is expressed shows an amount of self-consciousness on the part of the playwright about what can be told in an effective vengeance. This metatheatrical quality in the Revenger's Tragedy is even more stylized in the last act, in which Vindice and his brother-accomplice perform a masque in order to carry out the final slaughter.

Lussurioso's agony in V.iii. lasts for almost forty lines, and it is interrupted by Vindice's and his attendants' exit and re-entrance, logically to shed their disguises, Antonio's appearance, and the performance of another mask with its massacre. Vindice does not commit the murders in his own person but hides under many disguises. First, as Piato, a servant of Lussurioso, he kills the Duke, then as himself, Hippolito's brother, he is hired to kill Piato for Lussurioso's service. In order to kill Lussurioso and his attendant lords, Vindice stages a mask in which he is disguised for the revels for the new Duke, Lussurioso. This disguise produces a confusion about the identity of the murderer in the victim's mind, a confusion that must be cleared. For the play's audience this confusion is not possible, since Vindice explains his plan in V.ii.9ff. However, the murderers are the actors in a masque performed for Lussurioso and his attendants. The blurring of the difference between life and stage enacted by the staging of a masque in the play or a play-within-a-play allows the audience to identify with the court in attendance of Vindice's masque. This identification contains a terrifying possibility for the audience of the Revenger's Tragedy: that the actors on stage transform themselves into Vindice's, and come out of their play to slaughter the audience, just like Vindice in disguise kills Lussurioso while performing a

mask. If we admit the identification of audience in the theater with audience on stage, a leap which has often been made by critics in many situations to explain the dramatic effect of a play-within-the-play, we are forced to consider the slaughter of the audience as one possible consequence alluded to by the masques in the Revenger's Tragedy.

In the light of this conclusion, one understands Vindice's necessary claim about his identity. The agonizing Lussurioso tells Antonio that "those in the mask did murder us" (V.iii.67), and Vindice whispers to him

Now thou'lt not prate on't, t'was Vindice murdered
thee

Oh

Murdered thy father!

Oh

And I am he! Tell nobody. (78-9).

Vindice's revelation serves to bring the audience back to the reality of the play, and breaks the theatrical illusion created by the mask that life and stage can be one. Because he claims his name as Vindice, a thinly disguised allegory, Vindice reminds the audience that they are watching a play. The potential slaughter of the audience recedes into imagination, but the threat remains. This threat is reinforced by repetition when Spurio, Ambitioso, and Supervacuo,

Lussurioso's younger brothers, enter disguised for another masque in which they intended to kill their already slain brother.

Breaking the secret of Vindice's disguises, and finally revealing his murders to Antonio, the new ruler installed thanks to Vindice's actions, can also be understood in political terms. What Vindice achieves with his murders and revelations is recognition from those in power. In III.v (the Duke's death), and V.iii (the final slaughter and epilogue), Vindice forces three different rulers to acknowledge his presence and his acts. His disguises introduce a silence upon his self and his actual social position at court, and the confusion of identities brought about by his many changes in appearance and name suggests that he does not really exist to the Duke and his son. Killing them, and revealing himself as the murderer is what forces these lords of higher status to take notice of Vindice's individual existence outside their own schemes.

As the Duke and Lussurioso die after hearing Vindice, the revenger reasserts his existence to the new ruler, Antonio, by revealing that he and his brother are the murderers. His triumphant manner suggests that he perhaps expects a reward, but, instead, he is arrested and subjected

to "speedy execution": Antonio's quick response to the confession shows that Vindice misjudged Antonio's anger at the social order, and that once in power, he forgot former grudges, and quickly assumed his new role ("You that would murder him would murder me" [V.iii.105]). Vindice, condemned and once again isolated in his rebellion explains the self-destructiveness of his revelation ("'Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes" [110]). Raising above social rebellion, he proposes an equation of the balance of power based on silencing one's conscience. Disguised as Piato, he had said that the murderer who would confess in time would be an ass, but, now he turns around his confession in these terms:

This murder might have slept in tongueless brass
But for ourselves, and the world would have died
an ass" (113).

Disclosing the murders he committed and accepting the condemnation is the only possible stand he can take, when faced with the dilemma that his world puts him to: either he who has been unjustly wronged is an ass, or the world who does not know he has taken revenge is. Without openly supporting the position of the revenger acting illegally to promote justice, the playwright escapes a moral, didactic conclusion when Vindice assumes some degree of heroic fulfillment in the knowledge that his revenge is complete because it gave him power over the nobles:

And if we list we could have nobles clipped
 And go for less than beggars. But we hate
 To bleed so cowardly: we have enough" (V.iii.122-4)

Vindice and his brother raise themselves to be equal to the nobles upon whom they got revenged, a position and a choice never offered to women in the play. This equality in death is perhaps an ironical undermining of essentialist humanism: Vindice finally gains the social status worthy of his value, is revenged on unjust rulers, and reclaims his identity by disclosing the murders, but it happens at the cost of his life. As many critics have noticed, the conclusion of the Revenger's tragedy remains ambiguous; Catherine Belsey writes: "the moral uncertainty persists to the end. Vindice's execution by Antonio either punishes or perpetuates injustice." (116) The play's conclusion provides no clue which helps to separate the amount of satire from a didactic, moralizing intent. And Vindice's fragmented identity expressed in his many disguises can only be reconciled by shattering the silence covering the murders, which immediately leads to his death.

Paralleling women's inability to keep a secret is their susceptibility to being influenced by the words of others. It is a common theme of Renaissance drama that men

use words as a ploy to seduce women, and the various degrees of resistance women show to this language becomes a test of their chastity. In the Revenger's Tragedy, Vindice in disguise attempts to gain favors from his sister Castiza for Lussurioso who employs him. As her name might have predicted, Castiza rejects Vindice's offer with a blow on his head. Vindice is delighted to have proven her virtue: "It is not in the power of words to taint thee" (II.i. 48). Contrary to her daughter, Gratiana, who is also Vindice's mother, and who earlier praised her dead husband for his lack of confidence in her, she easily yields to Vindice's cozening words, and entreats her daughter to sell herself to Lussurioso. Gratiana presents an extreme case of a female character who defines herself exclusively by the stereotypes offered to her, yet in doing so, points to her son's wickedness to exploit her poverty:

It is too strong for me. Men know, that know us,
We are so weak their words can overthrow us.
He touched me mearly, made my virtues bate
When his tongue struck upon my poor estate. (II.i
105-8)

She then turns to her daughter to urge her to submit with great eloquence. Anticipating her own weakness and yielding to it does not prevent Gratiana from imitating her son's behavior. She also tries to corrupt her daughter with

words, replicating the trap in which she herself fell with open eyes. As a result, Gratiza is "struck with silent wonder" (Ii.ii.53). Silence becomes the only alternative to a female character denied any form of self-expression, and coerced into disreputable behavior. In the Revenger's Tragedy, women's inferior status is indicated by their disability with language. Incapable of defining themselves in their own terms, easily influenced by the words of others, using the male-imposed stereotypes against each other, women's range of action becomes so limited that they disappear very soon from the stage. Apart from the adulterous duchess's brief appearance to learn of her husband's death, women do not participate in the last Act. This disappearance is structurally motivated though, because women's presence on stage at the end would call attention to Vindice's reversal of position on the matter of secrets. Without women to remind him that they are the ones who cannot keep a secret, Vindice has open space to indulge in his confessions of the murders. As he has defined himself by being what women are not, completing his revenge by disclosing the secret demands that women are removed from the stage, so that he can reach a higher, more absolute plane of being.

The play does not conclude with a unified vision of identity, far from it, but Vindice finally succeeds in con-

structing his self as revenger, and must die for it. The general impression left by the play is rather one of violence and disjunction, as Vindice's last minute fulfillment cannot make up for the atmosphere of strife, intrigues, massacres, and political opportunism that prevails. The forming of this unifying self as revenger at the very end with the ensuing death is made at the expense of women, the term which held him in a relative position in the definition of his identity. I would here go further than Catherine Belsey when she says that "man is the subject of liberal humanism. Woman has meaning in relation to man" (ix) by proposing that in order to construct his unitary subject, man gets rid of woman because he sees her as keeping him within the boundaries of a relative dimension.

3.3. Women denied self-expression: silence separates two worlds in Coriolanus.

Silence occurs as a rupture in communication. Often a silence takes place when language fails to establish successful communication. Then, silence becomes the mark that indicates a separation between incompatible worlds, a separation rigidly maintained which brings about the collapse of these worlds. Coriolanus exemplifies this use of silence as the indicator to the separate worlds of men and women. Attempts at bridging the gap in communication between the

worlds of men and women in the play fail, and if they succeed in words, are undermined in stage directions: Coriolanus does cancel the battle at his mother's request, "holding her hand, silent." This apparent success in words brings about further destruction, and the death of Coriolanus. The death of the hero, and the unresolved conflict for domination between the Roman and the Volscian camps at the end of the play point to the ineffectiveness of the structural divisions upon which these camps are built: between men and women, patricians and plebeians, war heroes and peacetime administrators. When the two sides of each conflictual set get in contact with each other, the values artificially represented as inherent nature to each particular term of the opposition contaminate each other, or reveal themselves as also present in the other term. The revelation of each side through the other brings about the collapse, showing that the separation between them is artificial and impossible to maintain. In Coriolanus, this is particularly visible in the silence that separates Virgilia from her husband.

In Coriolanus, Virgilia and Volumnia, respectively Coriolanus' wife and mother, exemplify a relationship to each other and to the world of men similar to that between Castiza and Gratiana. Madelon Gohlke reads Shakespeare's

tragedies "in terms of an explosion of the sexual tensions that threaten to rupture the surface of the earlier plays"⁵ (154). She defines the traditional postures of the feminine and the masculine, in which weakness and betrayal are viewed as feminine postures:

It is the masculine consciousness, therefore, that defines femininity as weakness and institutes the structures of male dominance designed to defend against such an awareness. Shakespeare's tragedies, as I read them, may be viewed as a vast commentary on the absurdity and destructiveness of this defensive posture. (163)

According to Gohlke, Coriolanus "enacts the paradox of power in which the hero's equation of masculinity with violence as a denial or defense against femininity leads to his destruction." (158). Volumnia not only adheres to the martial code of honor displayed by her son, but her honor rests upon the fact that she is the one who raised him into these values and sent him to war at an early age.

Contrary to her husband's mother, Virgilia refuses to have any part in this world. She shuts herself up at home

⁵"'I wooed thee with my sword,' Shakespeare's Tragic Paradigms." The Woman's Part. Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare. Eds. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Green, and Carol Thomas Neely. 150-170.

while her husband is at war and grieves. She is severely reprimanded by her mother-in-law for her lack of courage. Volumnia attributes to lust Virgilia's melancholy. In her discourse, the heroic values are opposed to lust in defining marriage: "I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour, than in the embracements of his bed" (I.iii. 3-4). Given the play's emphasis upon the conflict between heroism and political wisdom, it is not surprising that Virgilia plays such a minor role in the play. In a more extreme way than Ophelia, she sets a good example of a female character defined by the words of others because she is not allowed any space for self-expression. Silence is her desperate response to a situation in which she faces total opposition; for instance, in I.iii., the scene in which she says the largest number of lines that she is allowed to speak in the play, she repeats "no" four times, and uses eight negative phrases in forty lines⁶. Her grief attributed to base instincts, and therefore its expression denied by Volumnia, she lapses into silence and virtually disappears from the stage. Her silence is at the center of the oxymoronic image her husband uses to describe her when he returns triumphant from the war:

My gracious silence, hail!

⁶ See Marvin Spevack, A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968.

Wouldst thou have laugh'd had I come coffin'd
home,

That weep'st to see me triumph. (II.i.174-6)

The unnatural contrast in this image produces an effect of the grotesque, and reminds us of Claudius' "mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage." It is also the symptom of a complete separation of worlds between men and women, a separation that cuts deeper than the nationalist distinctions between Romans and Volcians.

Upon his return, Coriolanus continues by identifying his wife's grief to the women's tears in the vanquished town of Corioles:

.....Ah my dear,
Such eyes the widows of Corioles wear,
And mothers that lack sons." (176-8)

Virgilia's oppression begins with Volumnia's reproaches in I.iii. In the play, the women's and the men's worlds are completely separated, and the women's world is subjected to the men's. Communication between the two is only possible in the terms dictated by men, and concerns men's spheres of activity, war and politics. Volumnia and Valeria, a friend of the family, rejoice when Coriolanus is at war, and criticize Virgilia for refusing to participate "Let her alone, lady; as she is now, she will but disease our better

mirth" (I.iii. 103-4). By refusing to endorse the heroic values promoted by Volumnia, Virgilia exiles herself from Rome, and as Coriolanus points out, joins the camp of defeated Corioles. On one level, Virgilia's symbolic treason prefigures Coriolanus, but one must remember that it is a symbolic link made by Coriolanus himself, and not Virgilia. On another level, it suggests a division between worlds that provides a more fundamental structural axis than the division of territory, and authority, about which men in Coriolanus are at war.

This becomes more obvious in Volumnia's position, and in her appeal to her son to spare Rome in V.iii., when, exiled, Coriolanus has defected to the Volscians out of political spite. His friend, and companion in wars, Menenius Agrippa, first tries to appeal to him on the basis of their friendship without success. Then, Volumnia leads a delegation of Roman women to appeal to Coriolanus. As her appeal to his honour, allegiance to Rome, and his lineage fails Volumnia changes her argument: she appeals to him as a woman, his mother, and on behalf of his wife, son, and the other Roman women. The success of this appeal to Coriolanus' feelings directly leads to the hero's death, when he stops the battle and is accused of treason by Aufidius the Volscian leader. Linda Woodbridge sees Volumnia's

nia as a "breeches-envying tragic heroine" (155), and accounts for Coriolanus calling off the final battle at his mother's request with parallels in the socio-political context:

When fruitless war yielded to unpopular peace, literary unease about effeminacy in society only increased. James I was a pacifist; on his accession to the throne in 1603 he took steps immediately to end the Spanish war. Literature, I think, reflects the unease attending this action. Shakespeare's plays of the period are full of aborted battles and confused sex roles. (161)⁷

Volumnia's mannishness certainly owes much to the topical stereotype of woman as virago, yet, as Woodbridge points out, she lives her life of action through those of her son (155). Volumnia attempts to bridge the gap between the men's and the women's world by using the male rhetoric of heroism, the only kind that her son will respond to early in the play. Volumnia who has silenced all motherly feelings in herself, and succeeded in silencing Virgilia's feelings as a wife, reverts to the values of marriage and family when the values of heroism can no longer sustain her world. But the separation between these two worlds enacted since the

⁷Woman and the English Renaissance. Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 1984.

beginning of the play cannot be bridged, and Coriolanus cannot yield to feelings displayed by his mother without the collapse of both of them. Volumnia's tragedy is to lose her son in order to save herself and her city. Coriolanus is destroyed by the inexorable logic of his own martial code.

To restrict the women's world to the domestic scene and to the world of feelings, and that of men to heroic values is an utterly conservative position which Coriolanus shows cannot be maintained. This separation is produced by war, and by a society based upon strict class division, and it is destructive of the very order which it purportedly supports. As we already see in the Iliad, war is necessary to heroes in order to demonstrate their superior worth which justifies their predominance over commoners at home⁸. The heroic values which Coriolanus evinces rest upon presupposed patrician superiority, and causes contempt for feelings and the domestic scene, just as it causes contempt of the

⁸ "Indeed, these are no ignoble men who are lords of Lykia,

These kings of ours, who feed on the fat sheep appointed

and drink the exquisite sweet wine, since indeed there is

strength of valour in them, since they fight in the forefront of the Lykians."

(The Iliad of Homer. XII. 318-21. Translated and with an introduction by Richard Lattimore. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1951)

plebeians. This contempt ultimately undermines political stability, and both domestic and heroic worlds collapse when the two worlds contaminate each other. A Volscian's remark to Aufidius shows an example of this contamination in the Volscians' camp. One of the reasons Aufidius gives for killing Coriolanus is that because of him, many citizens of Corioles are weeping for the loss of their loved ones ("Tear him to pieces! Do it presently! He killed my son! My daughter! He killed my cousin Marcus! He killed my father!" [V.vi. 120-2]) At the end of the play, the tears in Corioles parallel those in Rome, reminding the audience of Coriolanus' remark to his wife, which established the similarity. In the Volscian camp, the world ruled by warriors' values also merges with the home sphere, with the result that their champion is killed and they lose all hope of conquering Rome. In Shakespeare's Coriolanus, a tragic silence which separates the men's world from that of women forms a structural axis which runs across the separation between the Roman and the Volscian camps, and the world of politics and that of war. It is perhaps this silence which separates from each other what Madelon Gohlke terms "a matriarchal substratum or subtext within the patriarchal text" (161).

Virgilia, contrary to her mother-in-law, takes refuge in silence and makes no attempt at communication with her

husband. Her silence can be understood as a passive form of resistance to the strict partition of worlds, and her lack of attempt to communicate in men's terms, as Volumnia does, a refusal of the separation. The fact that both women, although opposed, are equally unsuccessful in preventing Coriolanus' destruction suggests that this destruction is rooted in the division of worlds between men and women, and their inability to find a common language rather than in the characters' inability to sustain this division. Coriolanus, unpracticed in the world of feelings, yields to the first demand in that sphere that a woman makes on him. Thus, when Volumnia abandons the male rhetoric of war and politics, and reintegrates the world of feelings, the separation between the two worlds previously disguised by her adoption of a matriarchal position of power can no longer be maintained, and the worlds collapse. This separation was already indicated by Virgilia's silence.

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPORTANCE OF "SILENCE" IN HAMLET.

Silence in Hamlet is one element which determines tragedy. The naming of silence depends upon the use of "silence," a word which appears five times in Hamlet. Adjectives formed from the same root such as "silent" or "silenced" do not appear in the play. Hamlet himself names silence twice. "Silence" occurs five times: three times it punctuates turning points in the plot, and twice, in poetic images, it focuses similes upon the necessary delay between words and action. It is the last word Hamlet pronounces before his death, and it occurs in the last two lines Polonius says before he disappears behind the fatal arras. The prince and the ghost are constantly tormented by the dilemmas of saying too much or too little, of speaking or keeping silent, of choosing what to hide and what to disclose. These conflicts govern speech at court, the themes

of friendship and love, and the "burden of proof"¹ imposed upon Hamlet by the ghost of his murdered father. In Sur Racine, Roland Barthes demonstrates that Phaedra's tragic plot centers around the emergence of language, and expresses it in a parody of Hamlet: "To say or not to say? That is the question"². Elizabethan and Jacobean plays can be viewed as one form of cultural discourse between social participants such as the Royalty and its Court, the merchants and apprentices, the "citizen class", the Protestant authorities of the City of London, the law students of the Inns of Court. Since playwriting was a commercial venture, the playwrights often challenged one another's plays and their audiences' customs. Hamlet, a success with all audiences, contains paradigmatic features of the relationships between audiences, playwright, and theater companies; it serves best to illustrate the conflict between speech and silence as political actions, and the importance of this conflict for tragedy. References to silence indicate an awareness of the destructive potential of words, reminding an age so celebrated for its eloquence that words can also be evil.

¹ "Hamlet's declared purpose in simultaneously testing the Ghost's honesty and Claudius's conscience" and "the problem of skepticism ... that tragedy is the result, and the study, of a burden of knowledge, of the attempt to deny the all but undeniable," Stanley Cavell, 'Hamlet's Burden of Proof,' Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 179.

² Sur Racine (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960) 115.

Christopher Marlowe gives an early rendering of the issue. Doctor Faustus warns his fellow scholars who, during a banquet, request as a favor that he let them see Helen, "Be silent, then, for danger is in words"³. A dumb-show, in which Helen led by Mephistopheles silently walks across the stage, follows the warning against words. As Hamlet stages the taboo on speech, the play shows the tragic demands of silences and speeches.

Other forms of silence than the naming of silence occur in Hamlet. They define paraphrases of silence, rhetorical silences, and situations of silence that can only be interpreted in performance; I will briefly give a few examples, before studying at length the implications of "silence" in the whole play. In these cases, the word "silence" is not used; but silence remains in a paraphrase or a synonym, such as "soft", "break thee off", "hold thy tongue". Such phrases take the place of a command to refrain from noise and remind the characters involved to be silent in order to keep a secret. For instance, Hamlet uses "But soft, what noise" in (IV.ii.2) to alert himself and the audience of the imminent entrance of those who call on him. As the pace of the play quickens along with the rhythm of actions after

³ The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus (V.i.25). 1588?

Polonius is killed, it might be necessary to call the audience's attention to actors' entrances and exits. I will not address these utterances paraphrasing silence separately, but they will occasionally be useful in the context of naming silences.

"Silence," and one of its paraphrases neither occur in purely rhetorical silences. Implied by the context, rhetorical silences directly point to the inadequacy of language to express emotions, a favorite Shakespearian topos particularly studied in Hamlet. Marjorie Garber sees examples of such silences in Hamlet's final silence, and in Cordelia's answer to Lear ("nothing, my Lord"), after she warned the audience in an aside ("Love and be silent").⁴ Such a rhetorical silence occurs in the first court scene, when Hamlet indicates to Gertrude and Claudius the intensity of his grief. He dismisses all customary rituals of mourning because they are mere disguises which fail to express his grief:

These indeed seem;

For they are actions that a man might play.

But I have that within which passes show,

⁴ "'The Rest is Silence': Ineffability and the 'Unscene' in Shakespeare's Plays."

These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

(I.ii. 83-86).

"That within" is the marker Hamlet uses to indicate the place of his grief. These silences show a profound distrust of language, and an acknowledgement of its limits to communicate which is characteristic of the whole play. Some punctuation marks, such as hyphens, or points of suspension, would also mark these silences in the play-texts.

In his first encounter with the court, Hamlet fails to acknowledge to his mother and Claudius his anger at their hasty marriage, and their lack of respect to the memory of his father. His silence about his real feelings, which he later tells to Horatio, and in the closet scene to Gertrude, leads to Claudius' decision to keep him at Elsinore, thus increasing Hamlet's frustration and sense of helplessness. In the first court scene, Hamlet stresses the impossibility of expressing his grief by amplifying the rhetorical silence with "nor", "nor", "no", "nor", "nor" as the first words of his speech to Gertrude. Hamlet struggles to communicate the extent of his grief, and can only define it by what it is not, then leaving a pause for the imagined grief to take shape in the listener's mind. This pause is itself closed by a reassertion that the customary rituals are insufficient, and as such, become the target of Hamlet's derogatory

comment. After the failure of customary rituals to express mourning, and the failure of language to describe grief, only a demonstrative ("that within") expressing a rhetorical silence, is left to point to the ever elusive spot in his heart. In this instance, language can only indicate, and ever so vaguely, the place where the drama occurs, within the body, and defers ad eternam the process of naming. Hamlet proposes that tagging no words to his feelings brings him closer to them than actually describing it in positive terms.

Rhetorical silences refer to the Elizabethan motif of aggrandizement as they indicate disproportion in magnitude between emotions and their expressions. For Garber, "language becomes an index of humanity, while silence demarcates emotions, or experiences that transcend the human condition" (39). Rhetorical silences can be formulated in relation to Hamlet's subjectivity, as described by Catherine Belsey in her analysis of Hamlet's second soliloquy:

Who is speaking when Hamlet castigates himself for his inaction? A rogue and peasant slave? The 'I' of utterance is here identified as other, the 'I' of misrecognition, in contrast to the 'I' which recognizes the failure to act as inadequate, something to castigate. That 'I', the distinct, dif-

ferred subject of the enunciation, is the humanist subject, the sensitive prince. And yet Hamlet's subjectivity is itself un-speakable since the subject of the enunciation always exceeds the subject of utterance. Hamlet cannot be fully present to himself or to the audience in his own speeches and this is the heart of his mystery, his interiority, his essence.⁵

The distance between Hamlet's "inner self" and the presentation of self he gives to the audience and other characters is fundamentally a silence, such as is his rhetorical silence upon his grief. These silences do not pertain to dramatic action, and as such do not constitute our object of study.

Philip McGuire⁶ defines "open silences" as dramatic situations of silence the meaning of which cannot be decided by a study of the language in the play-text. As the interpretation of these silences depends entirely upon non-verbal elements in the performance of each play, McGuire analyzes how various productions of each play have interpreted these silences. He also describes the potential effects of each

⁵ The Subject of Tragedy. Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama. (London and New York, Methuen, 1985), 50, *her italics.*

⁶ Speechless Dialects. Shakespeare's Open Silences.

director's interpretations upon the audience for the understanding of the whole play. The analysis of these silences allows him to establish a different "paradigm" of criticism for Shakespeare's drama: this drama must not be reduced to the play-text, but must include various aspects of performances which may change the interpretation of a play altogether. "Open silences" illustrate the freedom of interpretation Shakespeare designed within his texts, as these texts include "strategies [...] that give full scope to the creative energies and talents of those who make performances of his plays possible"(XX).

McGuire studies "open silences" in A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, the Tempest, Measure for Measure, and King Lear. He does not study Hamlet, because no silence in this play corresponds to his definition of "open silences." He discards the silences associated with death, such as Hamlet's final silence because they do not leave room for contradictory interpretations in performance, as do, for example, Hippolyta's silence in the first act of A Mid-Summer Night's Dream, and Isabella's silence in the conclusion of Measure for Measure. "Open silences" are an important kind of dramatic silences. The silences in Hamlet, silences which combine dramatic conventions with the naming of silences call attention to the multiple possibilities of

dramatic interpretation in the play, while simultaneously precluding any authoritative reading of the play.

Women feature in great number among Shakespeare's silent characters, such as those studied by Harvey Rovine⁷. In Hamlet, female parts are approximately one tenth that of men in number of lines. Laura Keyes mentions that "the Signet edition of the play has some 3765 lines, of which Gertrude's, Ophelia's, and the Player Queen's number less than 367"⁸. Ophelia is silent about her love for Hamlet, her grief for her father, and her knowledge of being used as a pawn in the King and her father's spying upon Hamlet. Her silences are the only silences in Hamlet which corresponds to the OED definition of silence as "absence of speech and noise." Because they are not even named as such, they are "pure" ontological silences in the sense given by Derrida in Speech and Phenomena, and by Bernard Dauenhauer in Silence. The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance⁹. Ophelia does not even express her grief in rhetorical silences like Hamlet does in the first court scene. All the audience knows about her motivations must be inferred from the words

⁷ Silence in Shakespeare. Drama, Power, Gender.

⁸ Silence in Shakespeare. Dissertation Abstracts International (P.60).

⁹ Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1980, see below note 16.

of other characters. Critics and directors who interpreted Ophelia as a whore, for example, do not indicate the distortion introduced in her character by the fact that every problem about her is represented in the words of others: this is what I call the silence of representation.

The controversy about Ophelia's death illustrates the discomfort with undecidable issues in the symbolic world of the play, a discomfort reproduced in criticism: Gertrude depicts it as an accident, the grave-diggers as a suicide. Her funeral rites, an unsatisfying compromise between the two possible causes of her death, mirror the undecidability about Ophelia, an undecidability caused by her complete silence upon her motivations. Ophelia's character portrays the tragic effect of such silence upon emotions and experiences: it leads to "the virtual silence of madness." Laurence Danson outlines this silence upon her grief, a grief ultimately deeper than Hamlet's:

Here is the genius of great grief: Ophelia, no longer able to contain or express her experience within the bounds of 'normal' behavior, finds in the virtual silence of madness the most effective, and for Claudius the most damning speech of all.¹⁰

¹⁰ Tragic Alphabet. Shakespeare's Drama of Language. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974. 30.

From her first appearance on stage, Ophelia is denied self-expression by other characters: the members of her family advise her not to listen to Hamlet's love, Laertes because Hamlet's rank is above hers, Polonius because Hamlet's favors may only indicate lust. Before Ophelia has the chance to express herself, the male characters prescribe this expression by making it irrelevant. When mad, her songs and rimes about flowers, by their very irrelevance to the questions asked her, exemplify the only position left available to her. Laertes, Polonius, Hamlet in the nunnery scene, and the King ascribe their own feelings to her, using her as a receptacle for their fantasies. She becomes an empty, silent space available to them as a background against which they freely speak their interpretations of the events. As she is not disengaged from these events, as would occur in a psychoanalytic situation, the play dramatizes in her madness the consequences of men's speech and women's silences.

Ophelia's silent presence offers a dramatization of the silences prescribed to all women in Elizabethan and Jacobean society, silences described in numerous pamphlets and treatises advising women to refrain from public speech, and equating women's silence with chastity. Ophelia's silence indicates to audiences a silence of representation, and the

dangers the distorted view which prevents women from expressing themselves, affords them. The silence of representation in early modern drama, when no record indicate that plays written by women were ever performed, and when women appear as characters in plays written by men, deserve a broader treatment than can be afforded in the scope of my study.

4.1 Enter Ghost: the silence of audiences.

The Ghost of Old Hamlet appears silently three times to several characters (I.i.42, 128, I.iv.39) before it talks to Hamlet (I.v.) These silences ensure that Hamlet alone hears the story of his murdered father, but they are prescribed by timing and dramatic contingency. In order to speak, the Ghost needs a favorably receptive space created by the response of other characters. As Hamlet is the only character who affords him this space, the Ghost tells him his story. These repeated silent appearances on stage before the Ghost actually speaks calls special attention to its words. The Ghost's silences in Act I propose that the occasion of its speaking depends as much on proper listening conditions as on who listens. When the Ghost finally delivers his lines, the audience of the play is prepared to receive them as a crucial element to understand the plot.

In addition to preparing the reception of his words, the Ghost's silent apparitions at the opening of the play help establish good conditions for the performance. They pointed out to the potentially undisciplined London audience that actors need a reasonable amount of silence in order to be heard. These silences also introduced the audience to the necessary courteous behavior for the performance to take place. Thereafter, I refer to these conditions of speech delivery as the etiquette of communication.

The conditions of theater-going at the Globe where Hamlet was produced around 1600 were somewhat different from those enforced today, when audiences are trained to keep quiet and arrive on time. Audiences paying one penny were standing in the court-yard and submitted to the rigors of the London weather: outdoor performances and a standing crowd did not necessarily comply with silent gazing. The wide-spread practice of nut-cracking during performance was a noisy favorite habit, and pleas for silence were customary in the prologues of plays¹¹. Silent audiences were not the rule, and, direct vocal response to the actors a real possibility, accounted for in John Lyly's prologues for his

¹¹ The Shakespearean Stage, 209.

plays at private theaters¹². London audiences did not hesitate to interrupt a play with hisses and calls when it was not to their taste, or in extreme cases, demand that the actors perform a different play; it was then necessary to remind them that the success of a performance partly depends on good communication between actors and audiences. Shakespeare, always finely tuned to the conditions of play-acting, and often reflecting on these conditions in his plays, put a strong emphasis on requiring silence from his audiences by presenting the effects of inadequate behavior in Hamlet.

Horatio, Barnardo, Fransisco, and Marcellus witness the ghost's first silent appearances, and form an audience on stage to these appearances. They exemplify an improper response to the Ghost's silences, with the result that the Ghost cannot deliver his message. Its reluctance to speak matches the watchmen's who recall seeing it twice in time prior to the opening of the play¹³. In the Ghost's silent presence the four characters describe its physical

¹² "...wishing that although there bee in your precise juedgementes an universall mislike, yet wee maye enjoy by your woonted courtesies a general silence." John Lyly, Campaspe, c.1584, quoted by Andrew Gurr, Playgoing in Shakespeare's London (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 45, 207.

¹³ "this dreaded sight twice seen of us" (I.i.28).

appearance and their own reactions. They urge each other to "question it" (I.i. 48), instead of directly engaging it with questions. The ghost's initial silence points out the lack of oral space, as dramatic conventions usually preclude having several characters speak at the same time. Although popular belief held that a ghost must be spoken to first in order to speak¹⁴, no one has yet attempted to address it when Horatio enters, a silence he later ascribes to the watchmen's cowardice:

whilst, they, distill'd

Almost to jelly with the act of fear,

Stand numb and speak not to him. (I.ii 204-6).

The watchmen believe that Horatio's education gives him an advantage in addressing the Ghost in the proper way. Jenkins indicates the necessity of having "a man of superior learning" address the ghost, because if improperly addressed, it could be offended (425). Horatio speaks to the Ghost in spite of his fear, but his words contain a threat:

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,

Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark

¹⁴ Jenkins, 424-5.

Did sometimes march. By heaven, I charge thee,

[speak...

Stay, speak, speak, I charge thee, speak. (I.i.49-54)

Horatio accuses the Ghost of a double usurpation, and commands it to speak, as if he had the power to do so. The Ghost disappears without speaking because, as Marcellus points out, "it is offended" (I.i.53). Horatio's education does not help him when he must address the Ghost, and his offending words provoke the disappearance of the Ghost, rather than encouraging him to speak. Horatio is unable to provide it with the silent space within which it needs to speak and with a favorable reception devoid of threats. With the Ghost's first silence, the playwright calls attention to a condition of performance that I have called the etiquette of communication, according to which the bearer of a message needs to be ensured of sufficient silent space to deliver his message. Threatening remarks are not the appropriate way to provide this space.

In I.i, Old Hamlet's Ghost makes a second silent apparition, presumably during the same night, giving Horatio the chance to explain to the watchmen the reason of their duty between its appearances. Horatio admonishes it to

speak in a lengthy speech that, once again, does not afford the Ghost sufficient time to speak:

Stay illusion:

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,
Speak to me.

If there be any good thing to be done
That may to thee do ease, and grace to me,
Speak to me;

If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid,
O speak;

Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which they say your spirits oft walk in death,
Speak of it, stay and speak. (I.i. 130-42)

Horatio's urgings to speak distinguish various reasons why the Ghost would speak, each one introduced by a repetition of "if." The flow of pentameters explaining these reasons is repeatedly broken by short verses, emphasizing Horatio's demand that the Ghost speaks. The interruptions of pentameters by Horatio repeating "Speak to me," "Speak to me," "O, speak," lend his words the rhythm of an incantation, and the quality of a ritual calling, while summing up in the last verse the main argument of the plea, "Speak of it, stay and speak". Yet, for all its rhetorical success,

Horatio's prayer fails to prevent the disappearance of the Ghost when the cock crows. In this example, the half-verses do not provide the Ghost with an oral space in which to speak, nor do they call for a silence in the delivery of Horatio's lines, as half-verses sometimes do. The ghost is silent during his second appearance because, as the action has reached the end of the night, the timing of his speeches has become inappropriate.

The contrast between Horatio's educated language and the watchmen's simple remarks is striking. It even seems that his learned expression prevents Horatio from getting the intended result of having the Ghost talk. It is Marcellus who points out that Horatio's threatening language is ineffective, which induces Horatio to change his tone when the Ghost appears a second time. When the spirit disappears again, Marcellus comments on the two reasons why the Ghost did not talk:

We do it wrong, being so majestic,

To offer it the show of violence,

For it is as the air, invulnerable,

And our vain blows malicious mockery (I.i.148-51)

Far from displaying fear of the Ghost Marcellus offers a different, commonsensical viewpoint. He gives another example of his common sense in his comments about the cock:

It faded on the crowing of the cock.
 Some say that ever'gainst that season comes
 Wherein our Saviou's birth is celebrated,
 This bird of dawning singeth all night long;
 And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
 The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
 No fairy tales, nor witch hath power to charm,
 So hallow'd and so gracious is that time. (I.i.
 162-169)

Marcellus' knowledge is rooted in oral culture, rather than books, as it is for Horatio. His stylistic expression displays oral techniques as his scant use of words with Greek and Latin words attests. His repetitions of "some say," "and then, they say" contrast with Horatio's rhetorical style. They betray his reliance on hearsay to sustain his beliefs about ghosts. Marcellus' oral style of expression provides a tone of optimism at the opening of the play, because, for him, the approaching Christmas season will prevent new appearances of the Ghost. The four characters, Horatio, Marcellus, Barnardo, and Francisco illustrate a wide range of expression and various degrees of education. In this domain, they reflect the diversity of the Globe audience, whose members could identify with one or another style of expression. Thus the different responses of each character to the silences of the Ghost presented the Globe

audience with various forms of expression they could identify with. These are also examples of unfavorable conditions for speaking, as the Ghost remains silent.

Yet there is no doubt about the urgency with which the Ghost finally speaks to Prince Hamlet in I.iii. When given a chance, the Ghost speaks at length, in fact until dawn chases him away for the second time. Hamlet's response to the silent Ghost in I.iv. illustrates a favorable reception. Instead of charging the Ghost with criminal intents, like Horatio, Hamlet emphasizes his doubts:

Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs of heaven or blasts from
hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane. O answer me. (I.iv. 40-
6)

Hamlet summarizes his and his companions' doubts about the evil or good nature of the Ghost, but he does not allow one side to prevail upon the other when he addresses it. Instead, he directly questions the physical resemblance with his father, giving the Ghost the benefit of the doubt ("I'll call thee Hamlet,/ King, father, royal Dane"). The tone of

his questioning is open-minded, and his speech ends with questions, rather than accusations and prayers: "Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?" (I.iv. 57). Unlike Horatio's, Hamlet's questioning is impartial and direct. The success of his response is immediately demonstrated, as the Ghost beckons him. Again Marcellus points out the manner of the Ghost's silent gesture:

Look with what courteous action

It waves you to a more removed ground. (61-2)

As the Ghost persists in his silent beckoning, Hamlet decides to follow it. He convinces his companions to let him free to go after the Ghost; he repeats four times his intention to follow it, twice addressing the Ghost directly with "Go on, I'll follow thee." Hamlet's etiquette of communication markedly differs from his companions' because he calls the Ghost by a name fitting its shape, respects its silences, and emphasizes his willingness to follow it. The Ghost beckons to him and comes out of his silence in response to Hamlet's proper way of addressing it.

With Old Hamlet's ghost Shakespeare provides a continuity with the theatrical convention established by Thomas Kyd in the Spanish Tragedy. Shakespeare elaborates his own variations of the Ghost, and renews the convention by making the Ghost appear silently before it delivers its message.

The expectations of the audience build up as they recall memories of the dramatic convention. By contrast to Old Hamlet, Don Andrea's ghost which opens up The Spanish Tragedy with an 85-line speech seems wordy and rhetorical, its quarrel with Revenge almost farcical¹⁵. The Ghost's silences permit Shakespeare to display various possible reactions to his use of a ghost. Horatio's threats and incantation, and Marcellus' Christian beliefs are shown as inappropriate responses since they fail to elicit the Ghost's speech. Hamlet's response of benevolent skepticism is the only one that allows the play to move forward, as it is the only response that allows the Ghost to speak.

The specific silence that occurs between audience and actors during the performance of a play allow the representation on stage of our actions, dialogues, and thoughts. The expected silence of a theater audience during perform-

¹⁵ David Young sees Hamlet successfully renovating many such dramatic conventions belonging to the "dubious and unfashionable subgenre" of Senecan revenge tragedies. I contend that silences were not a means of the least importance when renewing these conventions. Although Young explores Shakespeare's "economies of structures," rather than his use of silences, my analysis leads to several similar conclusions such as this one: "If we thought Hamlet a collaboration, we might well conjecture a partnership between a verbal spendthrift, bent on novelty and abundance of invention, and a thrifty plotter, cunningly reusing the same few, apparently threadbare ideas." The Action To the Word. Structure and Style in Shakespearean Tragedy (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 31.

ance introduces an ontological displacement between theatrical and real life situations. This re-presentation is possible because we are willing to allow space and time for the play to unfold in front of us: the silence of audiences is the condition of that movement by which reality returns to us in the form of theatrical representation. Bernard Dauenhauer identifies silence as "a motivated cut which interrupts some already constituted stream of variegated, determinate experience."¹⁶ These cuts introduce various levels of discourse, during which discourse is allowed to change planes. According to Dauenhauer, silences in the dramatic arts are quite different from silences in non-performing arts, but all artistic silences share common characteristics in the relationship between author and audience:

Silence involves a yielding following upon an awareness of finitude and awe. The yielding is peculiar inasmuch as it is a yielding which binds and joins (24). The yielding at play here binds author and audience to one another in a unique way. The bonds are not pretested by time. Or better, their relationship is not motivated by what is established as a definite settled medium

¹⁶ Silence. The Phenomenon and its Ontological Significance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 78.

in which author and audience can meet. In the yielding which is intertwined with artistic utterance, both author and audience assume risks. The author risks being either unintelligible or not understood. The audience risks either wasting its resources or having its stable world shaken."

(47)

The dynamics of the relationship between "author" and "audience" is far from being predictable and smoothly regulated. As numerous studies have demonstrated, the world of Elizabethan audiences was probably more unstable and heterogeneous than stable¹⁷. With the Ghost's silences, Shakespeare introduces questions to his audience pertaining to their beliefs about the existence of ghosts. Whether they believed in ghosts as "real," accepted this Ghost as a concretization of the purely imaginary, or saw the clever reworking of a familiar convention, the Ghost's silences are sufficiently indeterminate to preclude an answer to the question, what are we to think of the nature of this ghost, and does it tell the truth? By allowing all possibilities to coexist in a non-exclusive way, old Hamlet's Ghost is credible as a dramatic representation of a manifestation of the afterlife. Its silences permit the bonding in awe of

¹⁷ See especially Dollimore, and Gurr's Playgoing in Shakespeare's London.

the infinite between Horatio, Marcellus, Hamlet and the watchmen as well as the bonding between audience, actors, and playwright described by Dauenhauer. As more questions are being asked than answered, the Ghost's silences build a dramatic situation which justifies the upcoming events of the performance. The ghost's silences in Hamlet reveal these "internal epistemic constraints" that make theatrical representation possible¹⁸.

In Hamlet, the Ghost introduces the problem of speaking and keeping silent. Its circumspect use of words, its silences, its carefulness about timing its speeches, and its choice of interlocutor display a responsible attitude towards language. The effectiveness of the Ghost, demonstrated in its use of speech and silences, points to the need for timing and etiquette of communication in order to achieve the proper transmission of a message. With a higher dramatic charge, and greater sophistication this

¹⁸ "This kind of analysis has to precede any psychological or sociological interpretation of the play. Given the universalist claims of the psychologies and sociologies usually appealed to in the psychological and sociological studies of Hamlet and other Shakespeare's plays, internal epistemic constraints tend to be ignored. The world of Hamlet is universalized or the psychological mechanisms (less often the sociological ones) are held accountable for the representational constraints." Vincent Crapanzano, "Maimed Rites and Wild and Whirling Words." Hermes' Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire. On the Epistemology of Interpretation. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard UP, 1992.

principle also applies to the end of the play. The Ghost's silences produce a conspiratorial atmosphere around its story, as they emphasize that Hamlet alone hears the details of his father's murder. This early crux in the plot depends on dramatic conditions, rather than the Ghost's "will". The analysis of the characters' responses to the Ghost indicate that the Ghost does not refuse to speak to other characters so much as it cannot speak to them. It is in fact Horatio's contention that the Ghost will speak to Hamlet ("This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him," I.i. 176)¹⁹. The Ghost's silences are tragic silences because they bestow upon Hamlet alone the knowledge of the murder. When the Ghost imparts its secret on Hamlet, Shakespeare creates a tragic situation with Hamlet as hero, as the Prince alone must reflect upon the situation and take necessary action. That an issue like the murder of a king and its consequences be the burden of a single character, rather than a public concern, stresses the tragic over the historical aspect of play.

4.2. Tragic irony and flows of silence in the taboo of speech.

¹⁹ It is particularly common among critics of Hamlet to attribute motives and intentions to a character on the basis of what another character says. The analysis of the characters of Gertrude and Ophelia particularly suffer from this flaw.

The first naming of "silence" introduces a prohibition from speaking about the appearances of the Ghost. This prohibition takes the value of a taboo in the symbolic world of Hamlet because the forces of the underworld preside over its enunciation:

Ce qu'on appelle tabou, c'est cette condition des objets, des actions ou des personnes "isolées" et "interdites" à cause du danger que comporte leur contact. En général, est ou devient tabou tout objet, action ou personne qui porte, en vertu de son propre mode d'être, ou qui acquiert par une rupture de niveau ontologique, une force de nature plus ou moins incertaine.²⁰

It becomes an operating principle of dramatic representation as it is the only taboo enacted on stage. Other prohibited acts, such as incest and murder of kin, which also justify tragic developments in Hamlet, are reported, as when the Ghost tells its story, and suggested, as when Hamlet accuses his mother in his soliloquy after the first court scene²¹. These acts occur in the play as memories and conjectures. By contrast, the prohibition about revealing the murder is

²⁰ Mircea Eliade, Traité d'Histoire des Religions, quoted by Pierre Brunel (88).

²¹ "To post/ With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" (I.ii. 156-7)

actualized on stage, the characters participate in its elaboration and the audiences witness it. Unlike taboos purporting to actions, the oath of silence pertains to speech. The taboo binds the characters concerned in different degrees, and with different meaning. After the Ghost's revelations, the prohibition applies to Hamlet with tragic significance: bound by his own oath, Hamlet becomes isolated from the other characters who have seen the Ghost but not heard it, so that the problem of truth in the Ghost's revelations and its consequences for the action of the play is removed from the public domain and assigned strictly to the private one.

When Hamlet orders the other characters to keep silent about the Ghost's appearances, he has not yet seen it himself, and, the Ghost has not yet spoken:

If it assume my noble father's person,
I'll speak to it though hell itself should gape
And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,
If you have hitherto conceal'd this sight,
Let it be tenable in your silence still;
And whatsoever else hap tonight,
Give it an understanding but no tongue.

(I.iii.244-50)

Hamlet requires complete secrecy from his companions, stressing that they must keep silent about past and future

events. He requires that they do not speak about what they have seen so far and about what they may hear and see later. As the sight of the Ghost can disrupt the world of Elsinore, Hamlet asks his companions to think privately about the events they are about to witness, but not to talk about them. By granting Hamlet the privilege of interpreting the events to come, Shakespeare gives to him alone the power to act upon these events. The playwright emphasizes Hamlet's superior position as Prince ruling over his people when Horatio and the soldiers answer collectively to Hamlet's demand, speaking all together: "Our duty to your honour" (I.iii.253). Therefore, Hamlet possesses the main authority over the story, authority over what is disclosed to the public, over what to conceal, and over what action to take if any. This authority is also recognized by his companions. When Hamlet decides to speak to the Ghost and demands silence about related past and forthcoming events he takes upon himself the role of narrator of history at Elsinore.

Silence assumes a tragic irony for Hamlet when he does not share his knowledge of the principal plot with other characters, a knowledge second only to that of the theater audience. Mikhail Bakhtin points out that "irony [is] a form of silence" in scattered late notes made in 1970-71

about forms of discourse²². Without further discussion, Bakhtin relates irony and silence to his discussion of multiple voices in culture, and to laughter and seriousness. We can nevertheless compare his arguments on silence with the silence mentioned above by Hamlet, as Bakhtin assigns silence to the strictly human world and the comic, whereas Hamlet invokes the silence of a transcendental domain:

The disturbance of silence by the word is personalistic and intelligible: it is an entirely different world. In quietude nothing makes a sound (or something does not make a sound); in silence nothing speaks (or somebody does not speak). Silence is possible only in the human world and only for a person... Silence--intelligible sound (a word)--and the pause constitute a special logoshere, a unified and continuous structure, an open (unfinalized) totality.²³

Hamlet poses his visual recognition of his father as a condition for speaking to the Ghost. In his fancy, hell enforces silence to prevent him from speaking (I'll speak to it though hell itself should gape/ And bid me hold my

²² Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1986.) 134.

²³ Speech Genres, 134, his italics.

peace"). Hamlet defies hell to silence him before the Ghost in order to rebel but hell does not respond to Hamlet's provocation and remains silent. The Ghost eagerly speaks to Hamlet about revenge, but it also refuses to describe the underworld ("But this eternal blazon must not be/ To ears of flesh and blood. I.v.21-22). As the play is very careful to distinguish between hell and the Ghost, both Hamlet's defiance of hell and the Ghost's refusal to speak about hell emphasize the silence of hell. The audience does not hear the voice of hell per se, nor does it hear a description of it. As hell remains silent, the audience is left to ponder alone about the consequences of Hamlet's choice to speak to the Ghost. The silence of hell frames his choice between speech and silence, and in the imaginary world of the play, hell, by its very silence to Hamlet's defiance, retains the final judgment on this decision.²⁴

Hamlet's defiance of hell to silence him carries tragic irony for Hamlet because these words bear larger consequences for him when he utters them than they may appear.

²⁴ Soren Kierkegaard neatly summarizes this judgment in terms of a paradox: "If I go further, then I stumble upon the paradox, either the divine or the demoniac, for silence is both. Silence is the snare of the demon, and the more one keeps silent, the more terrifying the demon becomes; but silence is also mutual understanding between the Deity and the individual" (Fear and Trembling, quoted by Patricia Ondek Laurence, The Reading of Silence. Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition, Stanford UP, Stanford 1991, 62.)

This irony is perceptible to the audience of the play from the start, and perhaps, Hamlet's final comment "the rest is silence" implies an awareness of this irony. Hamlet defies hell before he has heard the revelations of the Ghost, and this defiance seems to be uttered as a mere figure of speech. This defiance, and the familiar terms with which Hamlet addresses the Ghost in the swearing scene indicate that Hamlet uses the image without taking seriously the possibility of hell. Hamlet casually invokes hell silencing him, but hell does not respond. The audience of the play, who has seen the silent appearances of the Ghost and the companions' reaction to it, cannot take this silence lightly and ignore the silence of hell, as Hamlet does in the first act. For the audience of the play, the silence of hell takes the symbolic value of an omen. It is tragically ironic because Hamlet defies hell in a metaphor without considering the literal implications of his words.

The silent response of hell to Hamlet's metaphor reflects upon Hamlet's use of words. As the silent response to Hamlet's invocation becomes the hero's reason for speaking to the ghost, it calls the attention of the audience to Hamlet's use of words. Hamlet's image demonstrates a complete lack of responsibility towards speech, particularly towards poetic and religious images, as Hamlet does not take

into account the possibility of understanding his words literally. As the play develops, he will show an increased awareness of the consequences of his own words. Hamlet, faced with the choice to speak or not to speak enters a tragic situation as he does not know the implications of his words.

In Hamlet's defiance, hell's command of silence is only a possibility. It is created by Hamlet's words which present the image of a gaping mouth of hell, speaking to command him to silence. It differs from Hamlet's command of silence to his companions as Hamlet's command is actual, while hell's command is only virtual. The two commands to silence indicate a difference between several kinds of words in the play, and highlight the links between action and intention. Some words contain an intention but provoke no action, such as Hamlet's command to his companions; others contain no intention and yet provoke action such Hamlet's defiance to hell. This difference is visible to the audience of the play because, as plays belong to the domain of representation, some words which do not provoke action for the characters in the play, such as Hamlet's command to silence, nevertheless provoke theatrical action for the audience to see in the play.

Tragic irony playing upon Hamlet is also present in the oaths of silence Hamlet demands of his companions in the swearing scene as the oaths isolate Hamlet from them. With tragic irony, Hamlet's command to silence is an insight into an important mechanism of the plot unknown to the character who utters it because this command comes before the ghost's revelations, and it binds Hamlet to something he does not know. The oaths create a special bonds between Horatio, Marcellus, and Hamlet, of which Barnardo and Francisco are excluded although they were the first to witness the ghost's appearances, because they do not reenter the stage after the court scene. Bound by his own oath, Hamlet alone carries the burden of revenge. As the outcome of the play shows the danger for the society described in Hamlet to entrust such knowledge to a single character, these silences highlight the tragic potential inherent to the role of narrator of history.

Of the group bound to silence in the swearing scene, only Horatio the scholar remains at the end of the play. Marcellus the soldier is no longer named on stage after this scene, though he may be present in the soldiers bearing Hamlet's body at the end. The prince dies, and the soldier returns to the anonymous mass out of which he arose. In dramatic perspective, the fact that Hamlet alone must find a

resolution justifies his monologues and the play-within-the-play as a device to prove the King's guilt. Since words prove so treacherous, the theatrical performance of the play-within-the-play is Hamlet's way of testing the situation without breaking his oath, giving it "an understanding but no tongue." Anticipating the end of Hamlet, Shakespeare thus affirms his confidence in plays as successful modes of expression to resolve a situation in which speech is prohibited and silence precludes discussion and collective actions.

Silence creates a continuity between the characters on stage and the audience in the theater because silent characters constitute the first audience to a speaking character. Silent characters were not simply the attendants, guards, court dignitaries who, in the Elizabethan theater, a theater devoid of elaborate stage constructions, served as human props²⁵. As Laurence describes it for the novel, the narration of interiority, "a prelude to creativity" (55), would occur in dramatic soliloquies, rather than in silent observers. For a more precise account of silence than Rovine's, a silent character designates any character present on stage who does not speak at a particular moment, notably because

²⁵ For the visual impact of silent characters on stage, see Rovine "Silent characters as scenery" in Silence in Shakespeare.

another character delivers his or her own lines. This kind of silence circulates between characters, constantly broken in one character, and reestablished in another. The image of "flows of silence" on stage is appropriate to describe this phenomenon, and its dramatic effect best illustrated in the swearing scene.

In this scene, Hamlet swears his companions to silence several times, and the flows of silence are delineated by very short verses in which Hamlet, Marcellus, and Horatio speak only a half-line at a time. The separation between Hamlet and his companions is mirrored in dramatic style as Hamlet always speaks alone, and once in an aside, while Marcellus and Horatio speak together twice, and often repeat each other's lines

Hor. My lord, my lord.

Mar. Lord Hamlet.

Hor. Heavens secure him.

Ham. [aside] So be it.

Mar. Hillo, ho, ho, my lord.

Ham. Hillo, ho, ho boy. Come, bird, come.

Mar. How is't, my noble lord?

Hor. What news, my lord?

Ham. O wonderful!

Hor. Good, my lord, tell it.

Ham. No, you will reveal it.

Hor. Not I my lord, by heaven.

Mar. Nor I, my lord.

Ham. How say you then, would heart of man once think it-- But you'll be secret?

Hor.} Ay, by heaven.

Mar.} (I.v.112-125)

Horatio and Marcellus deny that they will reveal the secret. The repetition of their lines at 119-120, and 124-125 culminates in their invocation of heaven, speaking together. The alternance and repetition produce an agonistic effect of stychomachia within the conspiratorial circle of friends. Marion Trousdale studies the pattern of repetition with amplification and variation of motif as Erasmus exposed in De Copia²⁶. In her informative study of Act I, she shows that this rhetorical device was instrumental in Shakespeare's formulaic composition. Its importance for the tragic qualities of the play must also be understood in the context of dramatic performance. Within the circle of Hamlet's companions, the broken rhythm of the sentences accelerates, and it allows speech and silence to shift with increasing speed. This motif in the patterns of speech is

²⁶ Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 1985).

repeated a second time when Hamlet insists upon a formal oath:

Ham. Never make known what you have seen tonight.

Hor.} My lord, we will not.

Mar.}

Ham. Nay, but swear't.

Hor. In faith, my lord, not I.

Mar. Nor I, my lord, in faith.

Ham. Upon my sword.

Mar. We have sworn, my lord, already.

Ham. Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

Ghost. (cries from under the stage) Swear.

(I.v.149-57)

As Horatio and Marcellus display a notable reluctance to swear, by pretending they have sworn enough already, intertwining currents of speech and silence exist side by side. The currents are always present at the same time, and exemplify Marcellus' and Horatio's greater awareness of the consequences of their own words. The repetition of motif stresses the increasingly agitated flows of speech and silence, resulting in the climactic crying of the ghost calling from under the stage. It is not until the Ghost's cries that Marcellus and Horatio accept to swear. Upon Horatio's suggestion, Hamlet proposes the oath, and they finally swear three times as the ghost repeats his command

(I.v. 163, 169, 189). In addition, they must swear silently, since the stage directions to which they swear "must be inferred from the text."²⁷

The necessity of swearing several times is explained in Hamlet's oaths. The first oath emphasizes the visual aspect upon which silence is to be kept ("Never to speak of this that you have seen," I.v. 161). The second oath, occurring after the ghost's cries stresses the oral aspect ("Never to speak of this that you have heard." I.v. 168). Silence upon having heard the ghost's voice may be more important than silence upon having seen it because the ghost's command to swear at this oath becomes more explicit and threatening: its reference to the sword contains the promise of death ("Swear by this sword" I.v. 169). The third oath refers to what the companions know about Hamlet (That you, at such time seeing me/ ... to note/ That you know aught of me. I.v. 181, 186).

The flowing movements of silence between the characters, and within the oaths, emphasizes the secret about the murder but it also includes other information, such as the physical characteristics of the ghost, its appearance, and its voice. They point to the importance of choosing the

²⁷ Jenkins, 459.

proper audience for the transmission of knowledge because the message must remain secret until larger audiences are ready to hear it. The flows of silence in the swearing scene are metonymic of the silence of hell as they provide the background against which Hamlet's prohibition to speak is decreed. Bound by his own oath, as his companions are bound to it, Hamlet is unable to disclose the murder to the public by verbal means. He is cast as the sole revenger of the public offense of his father's murder.

In the first Act Shakespeare draws a web of intertwining flows of silence, and speech interrupted by various utterances which comment on these flows. The silences thus established create a physical and psychological space with a tragic framework within which the plot can develop. This framework is defined within the expectant silence of the theater audience which allows the players to deliver their lines and perform their actions. Hamlet will lift the prohibition on speech at the end of the play once he has revenged his father, and cleansed the pollution at the Danish court. When the time comes to release information about past events to the ignorant masses, it no longer bears consequences for himself and his family. Horatio, in his quality of scholar, is entrusted with that mission.

4.3. Poetic similes of silence in the Pyrrhus speech.

Silence draws attention to the poetic images of which it is part. The second and fourth naming of silence are attributed to the First Player in his Pyrrhus speech, and to the Queen during Ophelia's funeral. The Queen and the First Player use "silence" in poetic similes to describe the pauses in action that anticipate resolution. While the Queen's image directly anticipate resolution of the plot in Hamlet, the First Player's use of silence in the Pyrrhus speech has no direct bearing upon it. His image occurs during the recitation of a speech belonging to a forgotten play at Hamlet's request. The parallel between the action described and the action in Hamlet is left to the audience to discover. Silence in the First Player's simile indicates various ways by which the speech metaphorically describes the relationship of words to actions. This relationship will be enacted on stage by Polonius' disappearance behind the fatal arras.

The arrival of the Players at Elsinore in II.ii. provide a detour in the construction of the plot, as they occasion Hamlet's commentaries upon the theater and exemplify styles of speech delivery. This arrival also serves dramatic purpose as it allows Hamlet to display a wide range

of histrionics as well as testing the story of the Ghost. Deliberately confusing the shifting roles of theater acting and the pose of madness, Hamlet is free to move between various levels of representation: he prepares the theater audience to increase their distance and to the double vision necessary for understanding the Players' interlude. Cued by words and silences, the Elizabethan audience is expected to watch and hear Hamlet as through various zooming lenses, and to focus its attention upon a small detailed scene while at the same time keeping in mind the broader picture. When under focus, the small detail will contain the larger theme, and the audience must display an agility perhaps lost to us to constantly adjust their vision to what David Young calls the "dilating text."²⁸ This effect is particularly visible in the Player's speech because it arrests action to contemplate silence in its midst.

When the Players arrive at Elsinore Hamlet requests "a passionate speech" and gives an example by reciting verses from a past play on the fall of Troy. He describes Pyrrhus seeking Priam in order to kill him, and the First Player

²⁸ In The Action to the Word, Young distinguishes four directions of dilation: "a past that tends to produce despair, a future that holds only mortality, a weight of flesh and chthonic drag that can only be encountered by rising heights of contemplation and spiritual detachment."
(28)

takes over for the climactic moment when the Greek finds the old man. The First Player's speech contrasts with Hamlet's as he emphasizes images of sounds, when Hamlet stresses colors of red and black. Hamlet mentions Pyrrhus "black as his purpose" (II.ii.449), his "black complexion" (451), and the "blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, and sons" (454). He describes the "damned light" (456) of the scene of battle, and Pyrrhus "roasted in wrath and fire," (457) "with eyes like carbuncles" (459). This description recalls the "sulph'rous and tormenting flames" (I.v.3) described by the Ghost, and "hellish Pyrrhus" (459) reinforces the parallel. Yet, in spite of its visual emphasis on "coagulate gore," Hamlet's speech is less dramatically effective than the First Player's that follows.

The First Player lays his emphasis upon actions and noise. He describes Priam's fallen sword and his lame arm as Pyrrhus approaches him:

Unequal match'd,
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide;
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
Th'unnerved father falls.(II.ii. 467-470)

Describing Priam and Pyrrhus with three verbs of actions, "drives," "strikes," and "falls," the First Player gives movement to his speech. The contrast in movement between

Pyrrhus's rage and Priam's weakness is sustained by sensory perceptions of wind and air. Unlike Hamlet's static picture, the First Player's description captures the action of the battle and concentrates upon the gestures of the protagonists. He also conveys the outdoor background of the battle by mentioning wind, smell, and air. His description further develops the idea that the scene takes place in the streets of the city. When the towers of Troy collapse at the very moment of slaying, the speech emphasizes the effect of noise upon Pyrrhus, and allows the theater audience to hear the din of battle²⁹:

Then senseless Ilium,
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear. For lo, his sword,
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seem'd i'th' air to stick;
(II.ii.470-5)

The alliterations in "s" make a whistling sound when one would more likely expect alliterations in "r" to reflect the thundering crash of the towers. However, given the possibilities of the human voice, a whistling sound may be more

²⁹It is striking that the rest of the Player's speech is absent from Q1. If one would make a case for additions by a poetic hand in Q2, rather than a dramatic one, this would be an example of choice.

appropriate to deafen the audience. The spondee "i'th'air" slows down the iambic rhythm, a combination which arrests the delivery of the speech upon the last foot "to stick," as upon a stumbling block. Just as Pyrrhus' ear is caught by the noise of the crash so that his arm stops in mid-gesture, the audience's attention is captured by the diction of the speech, regardless of its aesthetic value.

The First Player's speech then introduces a silent image that the audience must pause to consider. The rhythm and alliterations of the verses above, and their sudden broken flow point to a moment when the audience must shift the focus of their attention and adjust it from the movement of battle to Pyrrhus's gesture suspended in mid-air above Priam's head:

So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
And like a neutral to his will and matter,
Did nothing.

But as we often see against some storm
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,
The bold wind speechless, and the orb below
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region; so after Pyrrhus' pause
Aroused vengeance sets him new awork,
And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall

On mars's armour, forg'd for proof eterne,
 With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword
 Now falls on Priam. (II.ii.476-488)

Several aspects of silences are at play in the simile of Pyrrhus as "a painted tyrant," silences which indicate a change in the levels of representation. From a dynamic description of the action of battle we move to the static representation of paintings. No longer describing movements, the speech now appears like a miniature painting inlaid within dramatic action. The description of Pyrrhus as a "painted tyrant" mirrors the change in levels of representation, and cues the audience to perform a necessary adjustment in visual focus. Silence after the crash of the towers permits the association of the description of action with that given in paintings, which are silent. The isomorphous correspondence between poetic rhythm and content of the images demand that the speech be examined in the more general context of the play.

The noise of the crash of the towers freezes Pyrrhus's will and purpose to kill Priam. As a result Pyrrhus "did nothing," a verse with three syllables. This short verse breaks the flow of pentameters and stops the delivery of the speech in a manner even more striking than the previous stopping point introduced by "seem'd i' th'air to stick."

The silence introduced in the scansion of verses by the short verse anticipates in poetic form the image of "silence in the heavens" immediately following. The simile of silence before a storm is amplified by the speechless wind, and the orb "as hush as death." The repetition of stopping points and the amplification of silence punctuates the similes: Pyrrhus "as" a painted tyrant, and the setting of the scene "as we often see against some storm/ A silence in the heavens." The accumulation of similes suggest possible parallels between Hamlet and Pyrrhus, but the similes are more striking by the differences between Hamlet and Pyrrhus that they underline.

The silences in the First Player's speech, in the use of a short verse and in the naming of silence by the First Player, allow the change in levels of representation. They demonstrate the dramatist's method in showing the change to his audience, and his demand for a change of visual focus from this audience. These levels interplay with the common Elizabethan confusion between action as deed, and action as acting. They provide a pause, a stasis in the accelerating pace of dramatic action provoked in the play by the entrance of the players. Silences are operational in the style of delivery of the speech, with the result of making the Pyrrhus speech a mise-en-abyme of the rhythms of dramatic

action in Hamlet. As silence is also the tenor of the similes, the speech is self-contained, and mirrors the action of Hamlet, although in a distorted way. The parallel between Pyrrhus' arrested gesture and Hamlet's hesitations to take revenge must not conceal the essential difference in what they try to achieve. Pyrrhus does not hesitate to kill Priam: he is stopped in his gesture by the noise of the crash. Hamlet tries to find a solution by various unsuccessful means: the play portrays the modalities of his failures.

Pyrrhus is twice distanced from the theater audience, as a character in a speech given by the First Player, who is himself a character in Hamlet. So, when Pyrrhus does nothing, the First Player describes lack of action. The First Player gives the audience some action of battle, but his action consists of speech, and for this moment, it is couched in speech. Hamlet's Pyrrhus speech gives no action, even in speech: it is a description. When Hamlet chastises himself for not revenging his father after the Players' departure he displays a new awareness of the difference between theater action and action in deed. Wondering what the Player would do in his circumstances, he predicts: "He would drown the stage with tears,/ And cleave the general ear with horrid speech" (II.ii.556-7). According to Hamlet,

the First Player would give a speech and make public what he knows. Hamlet appropriately laments that he "can say nothing" (564), as using words is forbidden by his oath to the Ghost. Saying nothing sets Hamlet apart from the First Player, doing nothing from Pyrrhus. As a character who has at his disposal both words and actions, unlike Pyrrhus who can only act, and the First Player who only speaks, Hamlet faces a more difficult challenge. Staging the Murder of Gonzago is his response: the relationship of words and actions, when understood within the group formed by Pyrrhus, the First Player, and Hamlet, shows that the purpose of the staging is as much to make his knowledge public without breaking the oath, as it is to prove the King's guilt. It fails in both purposes because the representation of the murder is silent in the dumb-show, and the play-within-the-play is interrupted by the King.

4.4. Polonius: action versus words

Hamlet treats the question of what should be given priority, between speech and action in the theater. It indicates several possibilities according to the two aspects of action, as theatrical action and as deed. It also presents self-conscious examples of speech accompanying action, speech replacing action, and of acts of speech. The first

and last uses of "silence" by Hamlet, in I.ii.248 and V.ii.363, define the framework within which the taboo on speech functions. Within this framework, Hamlet spells out the rules of the game, and, in doing so, he gradually achieves control over his own speech. His self-imposed silence allows Hamlet to discover his growing responsibility towards speech, and to distinguish between two kinds of words: the words that provoke action, and the ones with thwarted purposes. Polonius allows the audience of the play to make this difference when he presents the cross-purposes of words and actions, in his advice to Laertes and Reynaldo. Polonius' death dramatizes this difference, and causes Hamlet's departure to England, as he unwillingly starts uncovering his mastery of the game of life and death to the King by this first murder.

In the closet scene, Polonius uses "silence" just before he disappears behind the arras to be killed, after he admonishes Gertrude to talk to her son:

A will come straight. Look you lay home to him,
Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear
with
And that your Grace hath screen'd and stood
between
Much heat and him. I'll silence me even here.

Pray you be round. (III. iv. 1-5)

In silencing himself, Polonius, the man of words, enacts a symbolic death soon followed by the real one. He parallels Hamlet who also dies after pronouncing "silence", as his last word. Both display an acute interest in the possibilities of language, but their positions on each instance of its use are radically opposed. For instance, Hamlet's enforced silence about his father's murder is psychological torture, and a cliché of Renaissance medical theory: "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" I.i 159.³⁰ For Polonius, keeping silent about what he really thinks is the mark of a successful courtier, and the impulse at the core of his success. As the King's favorite adviser and Gertrude's "unseen good old man (IV.i.12), he bestows this advice on the departing Laertes ("Give thy thoughts no tongue,/ Nor any unproportion'd thought his act." I.iii.59-60). Polonius uses words as a form of action, for the sake of pronouncing them. What counts for him is less the meaning of his words than the delivery of his speech, and the rhetoric he uses. As a result, his disappearance enacts the separation between words and action for the other characters, in particular for Hamlet who kills him.

³⁰Jane Donaworth. Shakespeare and the Sixteenth-Century of Language.

Polonius's tone before he disappears behind the arras is that of a father whose child has overstepped the limits of permissible actions by offending the King. Ironically, Polonius's words to Gertrude indicate that, in regards to the boundaries of action, Hamlet can go much further than Polonius predicts. Polonius does not scold Hamlet directly, but admonishes his mother to make him come to his senses. Ultimately he remains suspicious about Hamlet's madness. Coming after the play-within-the-play, and Claudius' admission of guilt to the audience in the prayer scene, Polonius's remark about Hamlet's "pranks" can refer to the Prince staging The Murder of Gonzago in order to force Claudius to confess. Both Claudius and Polonius entertain the hope that Hamlet will let his mother know of what he knows, which motivates Polonius's fatal decision to hide behind the arras to spy on the conversation between mother and son. The central part of the play focuses as much on proving guilt as on acquiring knowledge, that is, on acquiring certainties. The King uses Polonius because it is of utmost importance that he finds out exactly what his enemy knows without disclosing his position. But this task fails even at the end of the play, since Claudius realizes that Hamlet is a threat when he murders Polonius, but never finds out what the Prince knows. The failure to resolve this crisis with any certainty leads Hamlet to violence, and forced exile.

By silencing himself behind the arras, Polonius announces in the play that words will not simply be uttered to fill the silent space necessary for the performance of the play to take place, nor to disguise real intentions with verbiage. Because Polonius prefigures his own death in words, words are now the preliminaries to action, if not yet their cause. The archetypal action in Hamlet is the murder of Old King Hamlet, because it is the cause of all the actions that take place on stage, in particular, it is the reason for the play as an instance of "action". The common Elizabethan confusion between two meanings of "action," as the word describing the purposeful movement of a person, and theater action does not apply to Hamlet. Hamlet is aware of this distinction in its most acute form, and uses it to his own purpose: proving his uncle's guilt. By staging the Mousetrap, and counselling the players, Hamlet demonstrates that he makes the difference between theater action, and real action. The distinction that Hamlet does not make at the beginning of the play but that he learns is between words that provoke action and those that have no effect, because nothing in the reality of his world has permitted him to make the distinction.

The effect of "action" in the world of Elsinore becomes clear to Hamlet when he succeeds in his own eyes at proving

Claudius' guilt, although the theater audience can never be completely convinced until Claudius confesses his murder in the prayer scene. That Claudius rises asking for light becomes the proof of his guilt in Hamlet's eyes, but a proof that he cannot disclose because his evidence is insufficient. The old counselor stands in the path of making the distinction between words and action because he never understands the different symbolic levels between words provoking action, and words precluding it. As the murder of Polonius moves the plot forward, his silence allows us to differentiate between two kinds of words: the confusing, theatrical, and rhetorical ones that stand for action, and prevent it from taking place, except in the world of fiction (such as the play-within-the-play), and the words that belong to the realm of truth, and henceforth provoke action.

This debate represents the fierce conflict between two worlds: an old, disappearing world in which chivalric values were upheld, and to which Old Hamlet, Old Norway, and Polonius belong, almost a mythical heroic age; and a new emerging world of ruthless political ambition, hypocritical, lustful queens, and interested friendships. Prince Hamlet who is caught between the two fits in neither, but tries to fulfill his own design without disappointing the expectations of the world around him, particularly those of his

father's ghost. The old world represented in the play by Old Hamlet, Polonius, and Yorick vanishes with the death of Polonius. At Elsinore, the counselor is the last representative of the old order still alive at the beginning of the play. The dichotomy between "old" and "new" worlds does not refer to the "Elizabethan World Picture" as it is conveyed in Shakespeare's plays, and the emergence of a new world order of which the Elizabethan audience was more or less aware. Rather, it concerns with the symbolic orders of the play, the fictional world of Elsinore, as it is represented on stage in Hamlet.

In addition to the distinction between words and action made in the play, silence allows a confusion between the two kinds of words that the play distinguishes: the words which provoke some action, and the words which fill within the blanks between action. In this respect, the whole play functions as a demonstration that the words of the ghost belong to the first category, rather than to the second. This issue is complicated by the play-within-the-play because Hamlet uses it to produce a cathartic effect on Claudius, and to prove the latter's guilt. Words are what make catharsis possible in that they provoke Claudius's confession of the prayer scene, but the action of the Murder of Gonzago is what forces Claudius to rise and seek light.

With the use of the dumb-show, Shakespeare demonstrates that action by itself is insufficient, because it remains buried in silence. By presenting to his audience, both the dumb-show and the Murder of Gonzago, beyond theatrical conventions about dumb-shows, the playwright demonstrates the necessary power of sound over silent action to achieve a cathartic effect in the parties concerned. This is why Polonius is the first character to be murdered: as for him, silence equals death, when he pronounces the word silence, it is soon to be followed by his death. Jenkins notes the irony that Polonius in fact does not silence himself, since he is unable to repress his cry of "What ho! Help!" behind the arras, when Gertrude cries for help. This inability to silence himself leads Hamlet to thrush his sword through the arras. Images or paraphrases have less power to result in actions, but they are the only available means of provoking action in a world ruled by a prohibition on speech.

Both Hamlet and Ophelia have a naive understanding of language in the beginning, which they take at face value and are unaware of its possible deception: she thought the protest of his loves honorable, and there is no reason to think that they were not. He took Gertrude's vow of eternal fidelity to his father as genuine, and it might also have been at the moment. Other characters, Polonius for Ophelia,

his mother's remarriage for Hamlet, open Hamlet's & Ophelia's eyes to the futility, elusive quality of words that may be true one day and false the next, thus spreading to their naive understanding the contagion of language as it is practiced at Elsinore. Neither Hamlet nor Ophelia will survive this revelation. Ophelia who is always denied a space to speech is driven to suicide. Silence and noise are alike in blocking communication. Hamlet covers his real intentions with silence and gibberish, Ophelia with mad incantations.

Two recent productions of Hamlet, Joseph Papp's 1990 production at the Public Theater, and Mel Gibson's 1991 film in which he stars as Hamlet, emphasize Hamlet's violence towards Ophelia, and his mother, as they represent woman for him ("Frailty, thy name is woman"). Violence toward Ophelia has been considered gratuitous and cruel by many critics of the play, but jealousy coming from incestuous desires, and outrage at Gertrude's betrayal of Hamlet's father motivate violence toward his mother for many critics³¹. Yet, if one attempts to understand Hamlet in tragic terms, this violence seems to be directed towards woman as women, as a social

³¹Lisa Jardine asserts that Hamlet's violence towards his mother and his jealousy at her remarriage stems from the possibility of another heir to the throne whose rights would supersede Hamlet's. Still Harping on Daughters.

group, who embody values against which Hamlet is striving in himself, and which prevent him from acting upon the revelation of the ghost according to the old feudal laws of honor and revenge. Women would thus represent modernity in Hamlet? Hamlet silences the feminine in himself, that part traditionally attributed to women, and that is attributed characteristics such as indecision, frivolity, weakness, lack of the courage to face difficult situations; all scornful in the chivalric code if a knight displays them. The old order is based upon a gender split, in which women should exhibit these characteristics, and men should display courage, loyalty, a sense of honor, and alliance to their suzerains. Hamlet sees himself as a coward who lacks the courage to revenge his father promptly, without second thoughts impeding the actions. Hamlet embodies a conflict between feminine and masculine values, and he acts violently against women because he cannot act violently upon himself. By doing so, he resembles Pentheus who attempts to purge the city of his own sins by punishing the Bacchae, and waging war against the new god, Dionysus. Euripides' Bacchae can help us understand this instance of scapegoating in Hamlet, which the Prince also exercises against Polonius. His attempt to silence his own feminine side, the one that makes him ponder and delay, and to have the masculine (chivalric, active) one prevail result in violent outburst which seem

totally disproportionate to the faults committed by Ophelia, Gertrude, and Polonius. The similarities between Polonius and Hamlet become clear, their shared love for rhetoric, emphases, and grandiloquent speeches. By killing Polonius, Hamlet silences that part of him which stands in the path of action. The function of the old counselor's murder in the poetic economy of the play is to expose the scapegoating at work in Hamlet. A brief analysis of it in Euripides' Bacchae will permit to understand better. Just as the couple Dionysus and Pentheus display some traits of a double, the characters of Hamlet and Polonius at times enter a doppelganger relationship. In the Bacchae, young king Pentheus tries to impose his military rule of order and constraint upon the women followers of the foreign god Dionysus. Pentheus harshly criticizes Dionysus "long curls," "smooth hands," and effeminate attitude, and imprisoned the god for daring to oppose the king's rule with his witticism. Yet, Pentheus forceful condemnation of Dionysus' "womanlike appearance," yields to the god's temptation to disguise himself as a woman to spy on the Maenads. The mirror effect between Pentheus and Dionysus allows us to understand scapegoating in the Greek tragedy. Pentheus is trying to drive out of his city disturbing elements contained in him; when he encounters them in the women of Thebes, they become the victims of his oppression: he puts them in chains, and

intends to launch his army against them. The scapegoating which Pentheus tried to enact on Dionysus and the Maenads backfires on him: he becomes the hunted lion's head which his mother triumphantly carries back to Thebes on a spear. Dionysus and Pentheus symbolize the struggle for the repression of femininity in the Greek city of Thebes, with the outcome of massacre. In a similar fashion, Hamlet assaults those who represent what he mostly despises in himself: women for frailty, Polonius for words.

4.5. "The Rest is Silence": building a legend.

Hamlet's final words before death, "the rest is silence," open the conclusion of the play upon future events in the kingdom of Denmark, and prescribes the conditions for the reception of the play. The future events in Denmark will depend upon who will be the next ruler now that the royal family is destroyed, what he will learn about the events that brought him to a coveted throne, and how he will get to know them. Hamlet's reputation is at stake, and Horatio, who wants to die like his friend, abstains from drinking from the poisoned cup. Horatio is not prevented from committing suicide by obedience to a divine commandment, like Hamlet in I.iii. 131-2, but by his sense of duty and obedience to Hamlet. In his quality of scholar, and as

the character whose knowledge of the events is the most comprehensive after Hamlet, he is entrusted with the "burden" of knowledge. Hamlet releases him from his oath of silence, and it now depends upon Horatio's judgment to break the taboo of speech if he deems it necessary, another question that the conclusion of the play leaves unanswered. The transmission of knowledge at the end of Hamlet arrests the tragic process of revenge as Hamlet, with his dying prophesy, divides into two parts the role of narrator of history, a role he has assumed alone since the beginning of the play. Fortinbras receives the authority of the voice, Horatio carries the content of the message. Neither one can save Denmark without the other. For the brief period of time remaining between Hamlet's death and the end of the play, the audience hears how Hamlet's legend will start taking shape, and how the legitimacy of the new ruler is established. Horatio has a brief, temporary, yet definite advantage over Fortinbras who is Horatio's first audience. The dialectic interaction between Horatio and Fortinbras sketches the birth of this legend, a story depending upon what Horatio exactly will tell Fortinbras. The dialogue between the two contains the principle of growth of Hamlet's legend.

Andrew Gurr in Hamlet and the Distracted Globe reminds us that the rule of primogeniture did not take precedence in

England before 1290, and probably later in more primitive neighboring nations. Whether Hamlet reflects vestigial practices in the choice of a new king, or offers a political alternative to primogeniture when a royal dynasty is extinct, the conclusion of the play proposes a resolution to the epistemic conflicts set in motion by the burden of knowledge and the evidential crisis exemplified in the play. As Hamlet designates to Horatio his favorite for the throne of Denmark, he points to Fortinbras to continue the task of being the dominant voice in the casting of parts, a task Hamlet has assumed throughout:

But I do prophesy th'election lights
On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.
So tell him, with th'occurents more or less
Which have solicited - the rest is silence.

As Fortinbras gets Hamlet's vote in the forthcoming choice of a new ruler, he also gets his voice to shape future events. The two meanings of voice, as phone and as vote, need not exclude each other, nor should the analysis of the final act exclusively rely upon historical and political considerations. The play calls sufficient attention to the proper use of words in their written and verbal forms for considering the implications of "voice" as organ of speech in the conclusion of the play.

The play maintains the mystery around Fortinbras until the end, a mystery apt to intrigue audiences and to appeal to their curiosity. Appearing briefly in person in IV.iv. (1-7), and V.ii. (367-the end), Fortinbras is only allocated a total of twenty five lines. His relative silence contrasts with the importance of his actions for setting the main plot against the background of wars. The audiences know Fortinbras through the reports of other characters as a threat, a disobedient nephew, and a hero. Hamlet and Horatio describe him in contradictory terms, as the "delicate and tender Prince" (IV.iv.48), and as the "young Fortinbras,/ Of unimproved mettle, hot and full" (I.i.98-99). This taciturn character, who, it is predicted, will win the throne of Denmark, is begging for development, and could be imagined as the next play's main character. The fact that Fortinbras, a character who has chiefly existed in the words of others, is given preference to succeed Hamlet, the most verbal character, when he finally becomes silent, may appeal to the audiences' sense of poetic justice. It may also arise their expectations for a sequel, which Shakespeare, who produced series of plays on several occasions, never wrote.

Fortinbras is absent from stage when Hamlet dies so that the Danish Prince needs an intermediary between himself

and his favored successor: Horatio is the only character present since Act I who is not dead yet. The dying Hamlet specifies that Horatio tell Fortinbras the reasons of his sudden "advancement" and the circumstances around it ("th' occurents more or less/ Which have solicited"). These specifications are yet sufficiently vague to allow Horatio much freedom about what he will say. Hamlet proposes that Horatio give Fortinbras the support of his knowledge about the past events for establishing his new realm. But Horatio's actual support will depend upon what he chooses to disclose to Fortinbras. Hamlet proposes a founding law for establishing a new dynasty in Denmark: the absolute power given by knowledge and supreme authority will be shared by at least two characters in order to avoid the tragic disjointment of revenge occasioned in himself.

The choice of Fortinbras is motivated by dramatic action. With the rulers dead, Hamlet dying, and the doors locked, Horatio will very soon face an armed crowd without a leader. Hamlet foresees the urgency of providing this mob with a new leader, and ensuring Horatio's safety, as messenger. Horatio must brief Fortinbras on the latest developments at the court. But we never hear him transmit to Fortinbras the gist of Hamlet's message: the prophecy that Fortinbras will be the next Danish ruler. Fortinbras is

quick to point his "rights of memory" to the Danish throne, but without the collateral of Horatio's message, and his knowledge of the events, Fortinbras' legitimacy on the throne may be contested by the people (for example, Horatio was the only high-ranking court officer who explained to the soldiers keeping watch the ancient feud between Denmark and Norway). As much as Horatio needs Fortinbras for his own safety, Fortinbras needs Horatio because Horatio is also a mediator between court and crowds. And Horatio finally performs what the tragic plot prevented Hamlet to do all along: "Let me speak to th'yet unknowing world/ How these things came about" (V.ii.384-5).

With "the rest is silence," Hamlet precludes any further inquiries in his cause after he orders Horatio to "tell" Fortinbras because the "rest" will be defined by default of what Horatio tells. Anything that Horatio does not tell after Hamlet's death should thus be kept in silence. Hamlet's final phrase passes the responsibility of the knowledge of history in Denmark to other receptors, splitting this responsibility between Horatio and Fortinbras: Horatio is entrusted with the content of message ("go and tell my story"), Fortinbras with the authority of carrying its implications (he has Hamlet's "dying voice"). Distributing responsibilities between the war leader and the

scholar allows Hamlet to finally solve the crisis of meaning at Elsinore: the semantic domains of words and actions need no longer be confused.

The dying Hamlet's concern about his reputation denotes self-consciousness about the trace he will leave in memory, in heroic fashion. Q1 specifies that Hamlet asks Horatio not to die in order to clear a scandal left behind by both of them: "if thou shouldst die,/What a scandal woulst thou leave behind?/ What tongue should tell the story of our deaths,/ If not from thee?" (Q1, 356-363). Hamlet wishes that his story be told, but he predicts that too many unanswered questions may prevent a satisfactory, complete understanding of the plot. He directly addresses "audience" and "mutes" with the apostrophic "you". Jenkins literally defines "mutes" as "actors without speaking parts" (414) but there is no reason to believe that "mutes" should only refer to the silent characters on stage.

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time - as this fell sergeant, Death,
Is strict in his arrest - O, but I could tell you-
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied. (V.ii. 340-45)

On stage, at that moment, only the dying Hamlet, Horatio, and unspecified characters, the "mutes", such as "Officers", "all the State", and "Attendants" are present, in addition to the dead bodies of the King, Queen, and Laertes. The two nouns in "audience to this act" define each other simultaneously as theater audience and play, and as witnesses and events at Elsinore. Until the end, Hamlet carries along both meanings of action, as theater action, and as deed. "But let it be," recalling "let be" in his speech to Horatio about "the readiness is all," just before he enters court for the final duel, indicates a reconciliation of the character with his dual roles as agent and actor in his own life/stage. This final awareness that he cannot escape the play he is trapped in affords the character some of the human dimension he has been craving all along, by emphasizing a self-awareness of his own limitations.

For Hamlet, the timing of speeches remains inadequate until death. He laments just before his forthcoming death all the facts that he must take to his grave, and almost apologizes to audiences about the missing explanations. Here limited time because of imminent death is what prevents Hamlet from sharing his knowledge and experience with his audience, and with his people. Even dying, Hamlet still describes his audience's reactions to his fate, reactions

which become manifestations of ritual awe. As a character in the play, he describes the attendants and officers' reactions. As an actor on stage, he prescribes to the theater audience to react to the slaughter in this manner. If communication between the performing company and their audience functions, that is to say, if the public responds with pale face and trembling, then the performance of the play enacts one of Aristotle's precepts for tragedy in showing "incidents arousing pity and fear"³². Andrew Gurr mentions that "because income of players and impresarios then depended more narrowly on pleasure provided, the audiences' expectations were higher"³³. In Hamlet's demand to Horatio to defend him in front of "the unsatisfied", the playwright acknowledges to audiences a silence over the unexplained elements of the plot which possibly endanger the reception of his play.

As Horatio speaks first on the case of Hamlet, he ensures the dead Prince's reputation towards Fortinbras, the English Ambassadors, and the standing figures on stage, first links in a long chain of listeners. His reply to the English ambassadors as they announce Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths ("He never gave commandment for their

³² (Poetics, VI.2).

³³ (The Shakespearean Stage, 12).

death" V.ii. 379) works to this effect. As Horatio has no proof that Hamlet requested the killing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, except what Hamlet himself told him, he dismisses what he knows: Hamlet ordered the bearers of the commission to the English court to be killed (V.ii.46). The contradiction between what Horatio knows and what he claims may be easily overlooked. Only close reading allows us to notice the implications of Hamlet's written words to England. An inattentive audience, let alone one of "nutcracking Elizabethans", might not hear, understand or remember Hamlet's confessions to Horatio on the matter in V.ii.44-47. Hamlet's intent to kill the seal bearers is mentioned once, and not openly alluded to in the rest of the conversation. Only Horatio's "So Guildenstern and Rozen-crantz go to't" (V.ii.56) echoes their fate, before the English Ambassadors' announcement of their death after Hamlet's. Thus the repetition of the motif, a repetition necessary in oral communication in order to adequately transmit a message, is absent. Horatio seizes the opportunity offered by Fortinbras's ignorance, an audience's possible distraction, and the diffuseness and abundance of information provided in the listening experience of Hamlet, to clear his master's name with a lie.

Hamlet's companions of the first hour stage the differences between orality and literacy, differences explored

throughout the play. Soldiers compete with scholars for the possession of knowledge, a dilemma Shakespeare resolves by portraying dissemination of that knowledge in oral form. Horatio, the scholar, who represents the "high" literate culture of Wittenberg has shown his trust for the low-ranking soldiers when he provided them with an explanation for "the source of this our watch, and the chief head/ Of this post-haste and rummage in the land" (I.i. 109-110). He also provides Fortinbras with the story that will establish his legitimacy as ruler of the land. The low-ranking soldiers, who express popular beliefs, such as the ones about the ghost, are never seen handling written material as do Hamlet, Horatio, Rozencrantz and Guildenstern, and the King. Barnardo and Marcellus do not reappear as characters in the play after Act I. As actors, they may be among the soldiers carrying Hamlet's body off the stage upon Fortinbras's orders, as it was a common Elizabethan practice for actors to play several parts. In presenting his version of events to Fortinbras, Horatio's only support would be Barnardo and Marcellus's accounts of their watch, because they have seen and heard the ghost with him.

Horatio is only the first one in a long list of scholars who will, after Hamlet's death, try to tackle some of the problems of the play. The end raises the question of

which medium of expression works best to transmit Hamlet's story. The play reaffirms its confidence in an oral medium to carry out the task, as Horatio speaks to the crowd. The promise of conventional narration, and the shift from drama to storytelling is undermined by the emphasis on terms pertaining to theatrical representation, such as "audience," "plots," "stage," "performed." After Horatio's lie to the Ambassadors, Fortinbras' eagerness to proclaim his rights to the Kingdom, although he has not heard Hamlet's prophecy, and his haste to hear the story in the company of nobles ("call the noblest to the audience") betrays a desire to exercise control over knowledge. Deflating this attempt, Horatio now ambiguously refers to his forthcoming story in terms of theater representation, and emphasizes the need for a larger audience than Fortinbras' "noblest":

But let this same be presently performed
Even while men's minds are wild, lest more mis-
chance

On plots and errors happen. (V.ii.397-9)

The ambiguity of "this same," noted by Jenkins, who hastens to interpret it as referring to Horatio's single-voice narration, permits a double closure: Horatio now calls for the performance of a play that will inform the new King, his nobles, and the people of Denmark about the events at Elsinore, a play that the audience in the theater has just

been watching, and a play that eradicates the tragic perpetuation of revenge. This closure enacts an opening of the end of Hamlet, as multiple receptors are called to hear the story. Spreading his information and making sure that "the whole world," not just the noblest, knows what happened both guarantees Horatio's own safety, and prevents the loss of collective memory.

AFTERWORD

THE CRUELTY OF REPRESENTATION.

Hamlet's appeal stems from a glissement between theatrical representation, and representation of symbolic meanings, a glissement, enacted in words, as well as in actions: what counts in Hamlet is the measured distance between what is revealed through speech, and spying, and what is concealed by silence. The play presents a series of coincidences, bringing about final resolutions by chance, rather than a logically linked chain of events: "purposes mistook/ Fall'n on th'inventors' heads" (V.ii 389-390). As the events are more randomly juxtaposed, than motivated by causal necessity, the play produces an appearance of dramatic coherence, while simultaneously showing the pointlessness of all attempts at monolithic, univocal representations. Hamlet delays the action of revenge because he attempts to publicly reveal the murder, and fails to do so, forbidden by family honor, political isolation, and tragic structure. The Prologue perhaps captures best self-conscious communication to future audiences in Hamlet, and

my present account of silences in the play. The Prologue, who allows the transition between dumb-show and play-within-the-play, provides an example of bad speech, and worse acting with his untimely entrance:

For us and for our tragedy,

Here stooping to your clemency,

We beg your hearing patiently. (III.ii. 144-6)

For the final transmission of knowledge, the literate scholars from Wittenberg favor an oral medium composed of multiple voices, over written expression, a choice which reinforces the Prologue's appeal to audiences' clemency. Hamlet points out that, in a culture of limited literacy, the theater, with the ephemeral quality of its performances, can very effectively disseminate unorthodox descriptions of the world. Its orality subverts fixed interpretations, encourages a diversity of symbolic meanings, and demands a plurality of agents of interpretation: silence belongs to this subversive representational enterprise.

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