Part Two

LITERATURE OF MONOLOGUE

You know that I have long been accustomed to the art of soliloquy. If on leaving a social gathering I return home sad and troubled, I retire and ask: What is the matter? . . . a mood? . . . Yes . . . Are you doing badly? . . . No . . . I press myself; I wrest the truth from myself. Then it seems to me that I have a gay soul, tranquil, honest and serene, which interrogates another that is ashamed of some stupidity it is afraid to confess. However, the confession comes. If it is an act of stupidity I have committed, as happens fairly often, I absolve myself. If it is one that has been done to me, as occurs when I have met people disposed to abuse the facility of my character, I pardon. The sadness dissipates; I return to my family, a good husband, a good father, a good master, at least so I imagine; and no one feels the effects of a disturbance that was about to expand to all who approached me.

I will advise this secret examination to all those who wish to write; in this way, they will at once become more honest people and better authors.

—DENIS DIDEROT, Discours de la poésie dramatique
5 Pre-Shakespearean and Shakespearean Soliloquies

If there is no true solitude for the believer who conceives God to be omnipresent, then the earliest soliloquies are necessarily divine. Medieval religious dramas present God (and the rebellious angel, Lucifer) in solitary speeches, while human solitude typically involves expressions of prayer or conscience, piety or guilt. Later the anguished contemplations of Marlowe’s Faustus appear in conjunction with the addresses of good and evil angels. Renaissance drama retains the connection between solitary speech and communication with divine beings.

Shakespeare’s Richard III, Macbeth, and Hamlet introduce a vivid mode of psychological soliloquy. Malformed by nature, distanced from society, and unaware of God, Richard proclaims himself “determined to prove a villain.” He opens as a secret schemer and does not collapse under the strain of defeat until a dream of ghostly curses condemns him. At that point, an unsettling internal dialogue disrupts his efforts to attain unswerving self-determination. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are also destroyed by solitary hallucinations. Hamlet’s soliloquies unfold as equally conflict-ridden meditations, while Ophelia’s deviant monologues express the threat of madness he occasions.

Dramatic soliloquies develop together with the evolving representation of English individuality. Freeing itself from narrative uses of soliloquy, in which characters rehearse a sequence of events, drama reveals the psychological complexity or theological transcendence of
solitary characters. When solitary speech loses its foundation in prayer, anguished conscience and madness grip the soliloquist. Just as the subject appears on the verge of appropriating a unified discourse, monologue uncovers internal divisions.

The development of soliloquy in drama combines monological representation and performance, for the history of monologue is a monological history, a history of swerves or deviations that border on the madness of so many literary monologues. Rhetorical differences manifest themselves as intimate forms of psychological doubling, which often resemble encounters with supernatural beings.

"Alas, sinner, what have I done?"

The Anglo-Norman Ordo Repraesentationis Adae (or Jeu d'Adam) opens as a dialogue of God with Adam and Eve, followed by subversive dialogues initiated by devils. The stage direction for God, "Figura," perhaps shows an awareness of the questionable nature of representing God on stage; God's image is only a figural illusion. As traditions of monologue evolve, drama makes represented spirits into figures for psychological turns. Following a brief retelling of the biblical story of creation, God instructs Adam and Eve through dialogue:

Adam! Let him respond: Sire?

FIGURA
Of the earth.
ADAM
I know it well.
FIGURA
I have formed you
ADAM
Of the earth.
FIGURA
I formed you in my image.

The drama is at first essentially a narrative and only faintly dramatic. God observes that he has given Adam his equal (pareil), Eve, who also recognizes Adam as her equal. The tensions in the representation revolve around the error of this pair in attempting to become the equal of God. Adam and Eve are created for perfect dialogue, but

1References to the Ordo Repraesentationis Adae (which I shall cite as ORA) and to the Corpus Christi Cycle from Wakefield and Brome follow the line numbers and the inconsistent orthography retained in David Bevington's Medieval Drama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975). I have slightly altered his translations. I shall henceforth cite the Wakefield Master's "The Creation" as "Cr." and his "Mactatio Abel" as "MA." Brome's "Sacrifice of Isaac" I shall designate as "Sl."
their first sin propels them further from the parity with God they seek and brings monologue into the world. At a distance from God, expelled from Paradise, human language takes on a new potential for solitude.

Adam's first words, "I know it well," anticipate a crucial moment of dialogue just before the Fall (ORA 281): all is well as long as Adam and Eve's knowledge corresponds with God's, but knowledge of the devil (Diabolus) soon undoes them. When the "Figura" retires to a church backstage, Adam and Eve are left to enjoy Paradise in the company of demons. The perfect dialogue turns out to be a polylogue of demonic temptations, as the Latin stage directions indicate: "Meanwhile, let demons run about the platea, making appropriate gestures; and let them come, one after the other, close to paradise, showing Eve the forbidden fruit, as if tempting her to eat it. Then let the devil come to Adam and say to him: 'What are you doing, Adam?' " (ORA 113). A dialogue ensues in which the devil tempts Adam with the prospect of becoming God's peer ("per," ORA 167, 190). Adam resists steadfastly and labels the evil being "Satan" (ORA 196).

The devil then gives up on Adam, walks through the audience, and comes to Eve. She also recognizes Satan, but for her the name apparently connotes no evil. Eve listens with interest while the devil tempts her by describing her and Adam as an ill-matched pair. Adam reproaches Eve for talking with Satan, recalling the tradition that this traitor sought to place himself higher than God (ORA 289–90). When she has eaten the forbidden fruit, Eve commits Adam to the same sin by reminding him that "you are my peer" (per) (ORA 313).

After he joins Eve in sin, Adam begins a guilty self-reflection: "Alas, sinner, what have I done? / Now I am dead without escape." The breach of God's commandment opens up a new possibility of soliloquy. Adam reflects that, through the folly that has led him to abandon his Creator, he now knows sin (ORA 321–28). While he complains of his distance from "my Creator," "my Lord," the "King of Glory" (ORA 321, 339, 348), this proliferation of names does nothing to bring God closer. The separation makes it possible for Adam to speak God's name as an expletive, without referential significance ("Deu!"). He bemoans his new solitude that results from Eve's betrayal, Eve whom "God gave me as an equal [pareil]."

Tempted by the devil's own wish to become God's equal, the human pair is gripped by a kind of madness. Adam both speaks of his
own "madness" (folor) and refers to his wife as a "crazed woman" (femme desvee) (ORA 357). He turns to Eve and curses the hour "when you became my equal [parail]" (ORA 372). Because his human equal cannot help him, Adam thinks of God, but recognizes that sin has disrupted their communication:

I will be redeemed thence by no mortal,  
Unless by God in his majesty.  
What do I say, unfortunate? Why did I name Him?  
Will He help me? I have angered Him...  
I don’t know where to turn,  
When we have not kept faith with God.  
[ORA 378–84]

The drama traces the development from divine dialogue, in a Paradise before sin, to the isolated monologue that results from the Fall. The sinless Adam and Eve never appear to be alone, for they always engage in dialogues with the "Figura," with each other, and with the devil. Yet Adam receives the possibility of worldly dialogue from God only to find that this dialogue with Eve destroys him; and to deviate from the path decreed by God is to open up the possibility of monologue. Adam and Eve express their new solitude by hiding themselves, for they recognize that—by attempting to become God's equal—they have lost all rights to be His peer.

The Fall occurs in the tension between man's likeness to God and his desire to become God's equal. God has formed Adam in His likeness (a mun semblant), and has given him an equal (ta femme e tun pareil). Provoked by the devil, man deviates by seeking to become God's equal, thus striving to usurp the divine dialogue. Consequently, the devil promises Adam:

Eat it, and you'll do well.  
You'll have nothing to fear from God;  
Instead you will be in everything His peer.  
[ORA 165–67]

The devil further tells Adam he will be "without a lord," freed of God's sovereignty. If Adam's fantasy is to usurp the divine Logos, Eve only wishes to become privy to all He says, and the devil promises, "He won't be able to hide advice from you" (ORA 266). From the moment of creation, Adam is God's likeness (semblant), but the
forbidden fruit brings this figurative likeness dangerously close to an experience of literal equality. After tasting the fruit, Eve says, “I seem to be God the all-powerful” (ORA 308). From likenesses of God, Adam and Eve become feigners of God. Adam sees clearly that Eve is his peer, and only Eve shares his present plight. God, the “Figura,” explicitly interprets their sin as the misguided effort to “be my equal” (estre mon per) (ORA 415, 443). Like poor readers, they seek to transform a metaphorical relationship into literal equivalence.

Following their attempt to become God’s peer, Adam and Eve receive only “peril” and “perdition” (ORA 508, 574, 536). Driven out of Paradise, a place where one does not erroneously seek equality, Adam laments:

Alas! woe is me, how evil was that hour ....
Where was my sense? What became of my memory,  
That for Satan I forsook the king of glory?  
[ORA 519, 531-32]

To follow Satan is to attempt to displace God and also to become crazed. Loss of God’s dialogue is loss of the divine Logos and the eternal life that accompanies it. The Fall arises from folly and gives rise to new folly, for Adam wonders where his sense has gone, and Eve appears to him as a woman bereft of reason. Opposition to divine dialogue, Satan’s slander against reason, motivates the Fall of human language into solitude.

Like the Ordo Repraesentationis Adae, the Wakefield Corpus Christi Cycle opens with God’s speech, an introductory address that begins “The Creation” as a divine soliloquy. Before He creates man, God alternates between the first person and the royal “we” of His heavenly court. In a striking example of soliloquy as the divine Logos, God narrates and creates simultaneously:

[DEUS] Ego sum alpha et o:
I am the first, the last also,
Oone God in mageste ....

......

All maner thing is in my thoght
Withouten me ther may be noght,
For all is in my sight.
Hit shall be done after my will;
That I have thought I shall fulfill
And manteyn with my might.

[Cr. 1–3, 13–18]

While God’s soliloquy serves a narrative function, it also indicates that the divine *Logos* is primary and that only this *Logos* is genuinely *solus*. As in the biblical account, the first-person plural form is either a royal “we” or a hint that angels are also present:

At the beginning of oure dede
Make we heven and erth, on brede,
and lightys faire to se.

[Cr. 19–21]

The excitement of this pageant begins after the fifth day of Creation, when Lucifer presumes to usurp God’s place. This competing soliloquy parodies God’s speech, for while God creates light, Lucifer revels in the light he possesses:

I am so fare and bright,
Of me commys all this light . . .
And ye well me behold;
I am a thowsandfold
Brighter then [sic] is the son.

[Cr. 82–89]

A typical monologist, Lucifer mistakenly considers himself to be autonomous. Wakefield thus represents him as a comical fool, full of pride, who blithely sits in God’s throne: “I am so semely, blode and bone, / My sete shall be theras was His” (Cr. 102–3). Evil angels debate about his presumption until suddenly they find themselves in hell with demons, foretelling man’s Fall.

One moment in Wakefield’s “Mactatio Abel” further reveals the development of monologue in relationship to prayer. After the Fall, Cain and Abel can only strive, by means of sacrifice and prayer, for the dialogue Adam and Eve have lost. Wakefield’s comic realism makes Cain a likable rogue in contrast to his pious brother, who sermonizes:

And therfor, brother, let us weynd,
And first clen us from the feynd
Or we make sacrifice;  
Then blis withouten end  
Get we for oure service,  
Of Him that is oure saulis leche.  

[MA 78–83]

Cain answers as the audience may wish to answer:

How! let furth youre geyse; the fox will preche.  
How long wilt thou me appech  
With thy sermoning?  
Hold thy tong, yit I say,  
Even ther the good wife strokid the hay!  
Or sit downe, in the dwill way,  
With thy vain carping.  

[MA 84–90]

As often as Abel repeats the name of "God," Cain refers to "the dwill." Unable to grasp divine relation, or confusing God with Satan, Cain commands his offering to "bren, in the dwillys name!" (MA 278). When Abel comments that "thy tend shuld bren withouten smek," Cain answers, figuring himself as the devil, "Com kis the dwill right in the ars!" (MA 287).

God speaks to Cain at this point, responding to his inadequate dialogue with Abel: "Cam, why art thou so rebell / Agans thy brother Abell?" Cain responds in one of his funniest blasphemous speeches, mocking the "small" voice that has addressed him:

Why, who is that hob over the wall?  
We! who was that that piped so small?  
Com, go we hens, for perels all.  
God is out of his wit!  
Com furth, Abell, and let us weynd.  
Me think that God is not my freynd.  
On land then will I flit.  

[MA 297–303]

Cain misunderstands God as a "hob" (goblin) localized in space and consequently believes he can go where "God shall not me see." Intensifying the disobedience of Adam and Eve, Cain hears God's words and refuses to take them seriously. After he murders Abel, Cain first confronts his guilt only by threatening the audience in an aside: "If
any of you think I did amis, / I shal it amend wars then it is” (MA 331–32). The staged soliloquy retains an element of address to the audience. Cain continues, however, in a new vein of conscience:

Bot now, syn he is broght on slepe,  
Into som hole fain wold I crepe.  
For ferd I qwake, and can no rede;  
For, be I taken, I be bot dede.  

[MA 336–39]

This drama exemplifies the use of soliloquy in conjunction with rejections of God’s words. Unable to pray, at a distance from God, Cain (like the fallen Adam) breaks into solitary speech. Dialogue and monologue compete through the interaction of piety and impiety, good and evil, relationship to God and to devils.

In contrast, the Wakefield and Brome cycles represent Noah and Abraham in a mode of pious soliloquy. Wakefield’s “Noah” first acknowledges “mightfull God veray, maker of all that is,” who “maide both night and day, beest, fowle, and fish; / All creatures that lif may wroght thou at thy wish” (1, 3–4). Brome’s “Sacrifice of Isaac” opens similarly, combining address to God with a review of the Creation narrative:

Fader of hevyn omnipotent,  
With all my hart to the I call!  
Thow hast goffe me both lond and rent,  
And my livelod thow hast me sent.  
I thanke the heyly, evermore, of all.  
First of the erth thou madist Adam,  
And Eve also to be his wiffe.  

[SI 1–7]

As the story of the sacrifice of Isaac continues, Abraham speaks asides that are essentially addresses to God: “A, Lord, my heart brekith on twain, / This childys wordys they be so tender!” (127–28). Onstage, however, prayer is presumably not prayer and constantly interacts with elements of performance. The attempted dialogue with God turns into an indirect communication with other human beings. Prayer, when it has lost the exclusive relation to God, becomes dialogue with the community. To separate oneself from this community is to risk an even greater Fall. The earliest monologues are speeches of God
and of the dissenting Lucifer; Adam and Cain exclaim their solitary pangs of conscience that result from disobedience; Noah and Abraham pray to restore the dialogue. After Babel, the confusion of tongues makes uniform speech, or divine *Logos*, into a distant dream.

"Divinity, adieu!"

In later drama, soliloquy emerges as the strongest stylistic expression of guilt and madness. Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* works through the dynamics of an individual fate in relation to divine *Logos*. Like medieval dramas that represent the Fall and Cain’s murder, Marlowe’s play explicitly presents the soul’s choice between heaven and hell, God and Lucifer. This metaphysical stage is set by Faustus’ decision to cut himself off from God and to communicate with Mephostophilis. But Marlowe advances beyond the medieval tradition both by individualizing Faustus and by adding to the psychological significance of the supernatural beings he confronts. *Doctor Faustus* stages the human potential to perform vastly different roles and to receive or refuse guidance from a conscience that is figured by debates between good and evil angels.

Marlowe’s play opens with Faustus’ renunciation of the God he seeks and never successfully finds. For Adam, monologue is a consequence of the Fall; for fallen humanity, solitude is a given, and Faustus first appears in the self-address of solitary meditation:

Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin  
To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess.  
Having commenced, be a divine in show—  
Yet level at the end of every art  
And live and die in Aristotle’s works.  

[I.i.1–5]²

Prior to any individual sin, Faustus is already an isolated subject who practices the “self-dissection” Shaftesbury later prescribes. Having received his theological degree, Faustus considers what it means to “be a divine in show.” He reviews his studies: “Sweet Analytics, ‘tis thou has ravaged me” (I.i.6). Ambition competes with the claims of

divinity, as Faustus longs for the forbidden arts that would "make men to live eternally / Or being dead raise them to life again" (I.i.22–23). He provisionally asserts that "when all is done, divinity is best" (I.i.35) and turns to Jerome's Bible. But a conjunction of passages leads Faustus to conclude that "what will be, will be! Divinity, adieu!" (I.i.45). Adversary of the divine, Mephostophilis later claims to have predetermined this outcome:

'Twas I, that when thou wert i' the way to heaven
Damnéd up thy passage. When thou took' st the book
To view the Scriptures, then I turned the leaves
And led thine eye.

[V.ii.100–3]

Mephostophilis blocks Faustus' "passage" to heaven by misleading him through a sequence of scriptural passages. If Mephostophilis represents evil impulses within Faustus himself, then this opening scene is a confrontation between good and evil modes of reading, an encounter between the godly and demonic speech of the self. The demonic is an introjected desire that finds expression in a kabbalistic delight over magical signs:

These metaphysics of magicians
And negromantic books are heavenly;
Lines, circles, letters, characters—
Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.

[I.i.47–50]

Faustus seeks "a world of profit and delight / Of power, honor, and omnipotence" (I.i.51–52), ultimately seeking to deify himself, like Adam and Eve tempted to become God's "per": "A sound magician is a demi-god! / Here tire my brains to get a deity!" (I.i.59–60).

In the scenes that follow, Faustus' solitary meditations turn into, or are figured as, choices between supernatural beings. Divinity and black magic stand in the balance. At several stages, good and evil angels enter the stage and externalize the options Faustus confronts. After he calls magicians to his aid, the angels represent the duplicity within Faustus' soul:

Good Angel. O Faustus, lay that damned book aside
And gaze not on it lest it tempt thy soul
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head!
Read, read the Scriptures—that is blasphemy!

_Bad Angel._ Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
Wherein all nature's treasure is contained.
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
Lord and commander of these elements!

_[I.i.67–74]_

At the moment of choice between books of Scripture and of black magic, the evil angel predictably tempts Faustus with the prospect of becoming God-like. His incantation, a performance rather than a prayer, figures God's name:

> Within this circle is Jehovah's name
> Forward and backward anagrammatized,
> Th' abbreviated names of holy saints,
> Figures of every adjunct to the heavens,
> And characters of signs and erring stars,
> By which the spirits are enforced to rise.

_[I.iii.8–9]_

When Mephostophilis appears, however, he demystifies Faustus' pompous performance. "Did not my conjuring raise thee?" he asks, and Mephostophilis answers:

> That was the cause, but yet _per accidens:_
> For when we hear one rack the name of God,
> Abjure the Scriptures and his savior Christ,
> We fly in hope to get his glorious soul.

_[I.iii.44–48]_

Faustus requests explanations of Lucifer and hell. The otherworldly meaning of Mephostophilis' answers is unsettled when Faustus asks, "How comes it then that thou are out of hell?" and Mephostophilis responds, "Why this is hell, nor am I out of it" (I.iii.75). Without losing the supernatural level of the drama, we are led to consider that the entire diabolical world may be Faustus' own projection.

Solitary, Faustus hears the voice of conscience and the voices of conflicting angels. He debates with himself: "Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned; / Canst thou not be saved!" (II.i.1–3). A struggle between conflicting imaginations ensues when Faustus attempts to conjure away thoughts as he has conjured spirits. Faustus com-
mands: "Away with such vain fancies, and despair—/Despair in God and trust in Belzebub!" (II.i.4–5). A first reading may suggest that Faustus wishes to dispel both "vain fancies" and "despair." But the noun subtly shifts toward the function of a verb, and Faustus finds that he commands himself to despair. The following line specifies his self-deluded command, "despair in God" and "trust in Belzebub," but Faustus wavers:

Why waver'st thou? O something soundeth in mine ear,  
"Abjure this magic, turn to God again."  
Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.  
To God? He loves thee not;  
The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite  
Wherein is fixed the love of Belzebub!  

[II.i.7–12]

Faustus has tried to conjure away despair but only succeeds in bringing it on himself. Hearing internal voices that argue conflicting positions, Faustus begins to refer to himself in the third-person form. Yet he refuses to turn back to God, because he has introjected Him: "the god thou serv'st is thine own appetite." Within his internalized stage, good and evil angels represent his conflict:

Bad Angel. Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art.  
Good Angel. Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable art.  
Faustus. Contrition, prayer, repentance, what of these?  
Good Angel. O, they are means to bring thee unto heaven.  
Bad Angel. Rather illusions, fruits of lunacy,  
That make men foolish that do use them most.  
Good Angel. Sweet Faustus, think of heaven and heavenly things.  
Bad Angel. No Faustus, think of honor and of wealth.  

[II.i.15–23]

The play develops as Faustus' movement toward damnation, in connection with his series of prises de conscience. The angelic mechanism again and again offers Faustus the chance to "renounce this magic and repent." While the good angel tells Faustus to repent, for "God will pity thee," the bad angel responds that "God cannot pity thee!" (II.ii.12–13). For the audience, the angels are visually present, but Faustus experiences them as voices that "buzzeth in mine ears." Faustus' externalized fantasies largely determine the world of the drama.
Though Faustus finally learns to "be silent then, for danger is in words" (V.i.27), he breaks into his most beautiful, impassioned speech at the sight of Helen:

> Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
> Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
> Her lips suck forth my soul. See where it flies!

[V.i.96–99]

Faustus relinquishes his Christian soul as he imagines himself a hero of the *Iliad*:

> I will be Paris, and for love of thee
> Instead of Troy shall Wittenberg be sacked;
> And I will combat with weak Menelaus
> And wear thy colors on my plumed crest.
> Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel
> And then return to Helen for a kiss.

[V.i.103–8]

Faustus is inescapably damned through his intercourse with a spirit, a kind of imaginative autoeroticism. Mephostophilis expounds the condition of "desperate lunacy" that grips Faustus; the chain of associations links fantasy, madness, and converse with the devil. Mephostophilis commands Faustus to despair, and finally even the good angel can no longer offer repentance. The dialogue of spirits employs the past tense (of Faustus' unalterable sin) and the future tense (of Faustus' unalterable punishment):

> Good Angel. O Faustus, if thou hadst given ear to me
> Innumerable joys had followed thee.
> But thou did’st love the world.
> Bad Angel. Gave ear to me,
> And now must taste hell’s pains perpetually
> Good Angel. O, what will all thy riches, pleasures, pomps
> Avail thee now?
> Bad Angel. Nothing but vex thee more,
> To want in hell, that had on earth such store.

[V.ii.106–12]

When the angels exit, Faustus is left with a solitude in which to reflect, but not to repent. The devils tear him apart, a logical consequence of
the "self-dissection" Faustus already performs in contradictory fantasies.

Richard III recasts the Faustus story in a more naturalistically depicted political realm. Shakespeare's schemer finds himself turned away from God and toward evil. His deviation finally results in psychological disintegration. While no evil spirits enter Richard's waking world, this may be because, as Anne recognizes, he himself is a devil. The absence of supernatural beings continues as long as Richard is confident in his subjective autonomy; when he weakens, he begins to experience spiritual powers beyond himself.

Richard's opening speech combines various rhetorical devices. His use of the royal or communal "we" anticipates his later usurpation and pretends to participation in the general celebrations:

Now is the winter of our discontent
  Made glorious summer by this sun of York;
  And all the clouds that loured upon our house
  In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.
[I.1.1-4]

The opening soliloquy serves a narrative function, raising questions about the interaction of "conventional" and "realistic" rhetoric. Yet Richard turns the generalized description into a context for his own stated divergence from norms when he finds himself excluded from the prevailing customs:

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks
  Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
  Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,

Pre-Shakespearean and Shakespearean Soliloquies

Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity.

[1.1.14–27]

This single sentence, dominated by an obstinate "I," narrates the development of a monological subject. Richard maintains that nature has formed him inadequately, such that he cannot play the role of lover demanded by the times. He is like an unprepared actor "sent before my time / ... scarce half made up." If nature has not made him the actor he wishes to be, Richard will produce his own dramatic persona. Richard's perverse delight is a self-reflective performance of himself, associated with viewing "my shadow in the sun" and de­crying "mine own deformity." Deviation becomes an impetus to per­formance. Richard III, like Doctor Faustus, centers around the individual capacity to perform diabolical, or deviant, roles:

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

[1.1.28–31]

Hatred comes as a necessary concomitant of the role Richard chooses for himself. Shakespeare combines the conventionality of a traditional self-proclaiming figure of vice (determined by fate) with the realism of a specific, self-creating villain (determined by personal will). The naturalistic pretense of Richard's soliloquy is underscored when it is suddenly interrupted by his brother's entrance, and Richard exclaims, "Dive, thoughts, down to my soul" (1.1.41).

Contrary to his claim that he cannot "prove a lover," Richard begins his career as diabolical performer when he successfully courts Anne. But he is already so "determined to prove a villain" that he combines roles to make himself a villainous lover. Though she repeatedly calls him "devil" (1.1.45,49,73), Anne is bewildered by his performance, and Richard exults:
Was ever woman in this humor wooed?
Was ever woman in this humor won?
I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.

[I.ii.227–29]

Richard’s only “friends to back my suit” are “the plain devil and dissembling looks” (I.ii.235–36). Consummate actor, he finds that dissembling makes him anew:

I do mistake my person all this while.
Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,
Myself to be a marv'lous proper man.

[I.ii.252–54]

Richard’s self-presentation transforms him, for he has learned to “seem a saint when most I play the devil” (I.iii.337). Richard knows that even devilishness is an act, and the audience, aware of his performance, is implicated in his guilt.

Richard’s downfall is a more realistic version of that experienced by Faustus. While spirits appear on Marlowe’s stage, ambiguously literal or figurative representations of Faustus’ inner conflict, the ghosts in Richard III occur as part of Richard’s nightmare. In place of good and evil angels, then, Richard dreams of those he has murdered; all tell him to “Despair and die!” (V.iii.127–64). The last of them, the ghost of Buckingham, has been more closely allied with Richard but acknowledges that “God and good angels fight on Richmond’s side” (V.iii.176). These visions are naturalized, as “Richard starteth up out of a dream” and holds a devastating soliloquy that appears as a dialogue with himself:

Soft! I did but dream.
O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.

[V.iii.179–183]

The failure of Richard’s military and political performances returns him to the limbo of indefinite identity:

“Compare Doctor Faustus, V.ii.104, in which Mephostophilis tells Faustus, ”’Tis too late, despair, farewell!”
Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.
Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why!
Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?

[V.iii.184–87]

Fragmented by his disparate performances, Richard is reproved by each tale his conscience tells:

I am a villain. Yet I lie, I am not.
Fool, of thyself speak well. Fool, do not flatter.
My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.

[V.iii.192–96]

Richard’s fall is figured as his decline into a bad performance that even he cannot grasp, and he sees that “there is no creature loves me” (V.iii.201). To himself he has become an enigma, exactly at the moment when he sees through and hence mistrusts all his personae, and to others he is only evil. Unlike the flat repentance of Adam on the medieval stage, Richard’s reflections uncover the conditions of their own performance, associating soliloquy with deviance from accepted roles. By simulating diverse characters, Richard assures the splitting of his “I”; conscience disturbs his monological schemes by bringing conflicting voices into his dreams and solitary speech.

“Alas, he’s mad”

The meaning of a stylistic device, like the meaning of a word, arises as a function of its use. The meaning of dramatic monologue, then, evolves in conjunction with diverse literary frameworks. In medieval drama, soliloquy is essentially linked to the divine Logos, prayer, and expressions of guilt. Soliloquy, in the dramas of Faustus and Richard, reveals the workings of deviant minds that deliberately choose evil. Monologue is thus associated with deviations from God, the community, and from the good in general. But while monologue turns away from dialogue with God, its alliance with demonic (or unconscious) powers assures that no unity of the solitary voice can prevail. Shakespeare extends the conventions of soliloquy, when his plays
represent psychological complexities through solitary speeches. Monologue always implies an absence, but Shakespeare shows that this lack is not merely a deficient mode of experience.

In *Macbeth*, supernatural beings partially constitute the subjective world. If the play opens as a gathering of "weird sisters," this scene is equally a representation of the confused ambitions within Macbeth: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," the witches exclaim, and Macbeth's opening words echo theirs: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen." Banquo apparently also experiences the strange creatures, yet "to me you speak not" (I.iii.57). Macbeth gives his secret fantasies away by his confused reaction. Banquo notices his confusion and asks, "Why do you start, and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (I.iii.51-52). While Banquo is suspicious of the "instruments of darkness," Macbeth accepts their "supernatural soliciting." Macbeth's sequence of soliloquies begins in response to them, and he is oblivious while Banquo observes him: "Look, how our partner's rapt" (I.iii.143). Brought back to an awareness of the others present, Macbeth excuses himself, saying that his "dull brain was wrought / With things forgotten" (I.iii.149-50). Macbeth's excuse is partly true, for the apparitions have reminded him of "forgotten" ambitions.

On the verge of murder, Macbeth's contemplative soliloquy stands between those of Richard and Hamlet. Already psychologically poisoned by his wife, Macbeth ties himself up in awkward assonances:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If th' assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,
With his surcease, success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all—here.


Lady Macbeth, the other central soliloquist, is reminiscent of Doctor Faustus except that she calls upon spirits to transform her. Rather than represent spirits that appear in response to her invocations, Shakespeare emphasizes the sheer act of her rhetoric: "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full / Of direst cruelty!" (I.v.41-44). Physical change acts as a trope for psychological hardening. Lady Macbeth desires assistance from figures of cruelty, since Macbeth is "too full o' th' milk of human kindness"; she plans to "pour my spirits in thine ear," poisoning his thought with her words.
Pre-Shakespearean and Shakespearean Soliloquies

But here, upon this bank and shoal of time, We'd jump the life to come. [I.vii.1–7]

Even Macbeth's solitary speech betrays him, as if refusing to be merely an instrument of his murderous intentions: the subjunctive mode of possibility confounds his present thoughts.

When Macbeth resolves to renounce their plan, stating that "we will proceed no further in this business" (I.vii.31), Lady Macbeth again acts as his evil angel to win him over. One novelty of Shakespeare's presentation derives from the absence of any good angel to balance the evil counsel Macbeth receives. Plotting to murder Banquo, Macbeth idly imagines that he must do so for the sake of his guardian spirit, as "under him / My genius is rebuked, as it is said / Mark Antony's was by Caesar" (III.i.55–57). This "genius" has already been turned inward and perverted in accordance with Macbeth's schemes. Macbeth is so far from being able to respond to the call of conscience that his wife, or evil angel, becomes the mouthpiece for his guilt. Before several witnesses, Lady Macbeth sleepwalks and gives away their secret. The form of mad monologue begins to develop in this oblivious speaking subject. Her soliloquy echoes Macbeth's first, with the difference that dramatic conventions make Banquo unable to hear the contemplations that engross Macbeth (I.iii.127–42). Shakespeare invents a new convention in which a deviant mode of nonaddressed speech becomes accessible to other characters onstage. Consequently, the attending doctor is able to diagnose her condition:

Foul whisp'ring are abroad. Unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles. Infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
More needs she the divine than the physician.
God, God forgive us all! [V.i.75–79]

Absent from the lives of the protagonists, divinity can be invoked only by an impassionate character who has no active part in the drama. The doctor, still supporting established theology, believes that Lady Macbeth requires the help of God. But Shakespeare's drama supersedes this wisdom, showing that theological conflicts have been
transferred into the realm of psychological, solitary speech: the new problem of the monologist is not God's absence but madness.

*Hamlet* is Shakespeare's masterwork of monologue, so much so that the protagonist's soliloquies have virtually become canonized as independent poems. In contrast to Richard or Iago, who dominate their plays by nearly successful monological scheming, Hamlet soliloquizes in reaction to a hostile world. One might say that Hamlet turns his anger inward, transforms longed-for actions into words, and verges on madness because he cannot withstand the internal conflicts his monologue confronts.

The tradition links soliloquy and supernatural apparitions; there is also no clear separation between mad monologue and demonic intervention. When both demons and God are introjected, self-address is always also a potential demonic or divine address. The ghost of Hamlet's father reappears while Hamlet is in his mother's bedroom, and as Hamlet speaks to the apparition, the Queen comments, "Alas, he's mad" (III.iv.106). Hamlet remains oblivious to her, like Macbeth before Banquo, until the ghost tells him to speak with her. She wonders,

Alas, how is't with you  
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,  
And with th' incorporeal air do hold discourse?  

...O gentle son,  
Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper  
Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you look?  

[III.iv.117–25]

To the extent that other characters do not share his experience, the monological speaker is subject to accusations of madness. Hamlet insists that he sees his father's ghost, but his mother persists in her belief that "this is the very coinage of your brain" (III.iv.138). Because Hamlet speaks of private experiences, his language is incomprehensible, semantically isolated; imagination and madness oppose communal norms. When the ghost initially reveals the murder to Hamlet, he exclaims, "O my prophetic soul!" (I.v.38). The drama does not ultimately confirm either madness or prophecy, yet Hamlet is able to speak so cogently to the Queen that his uncanny experience of ghosts comes to represent the external world in which "something is rotten."

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As Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking reveals the suppressed cries of Macbeth's conscience, Ophelia's hysteria expresses Hamlet's imbalances. Ophelia first comments on his condition as the doctor comments on Lady Macbeth's, saying: “O heavenly powers, restore him!” (III.i.141) and “O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown” (III.i.150). Unable to grasp his speech or to communicate with him, Ophelia can only observe Hamlet's decline. This failure of language becomes general for her, when she lapses into song and becomes incapable of addressing others. Hamlet's insulation works itself out as critical self-analysis, while Ophelia appears to be destroyed by his communicative absence.

Hamlet's monologue arises out of an experienced impotence. Rather than perform the command he thinks he receives from his father's ghost, Hamlet resorts to meditation, an effort to “unpack my heart with words” (II.ii.571). Solitary speech takes the place of action. Hamlet also understands his difficulty as an inability to perform when he responds to the feigned emotion of a traveling actor:

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wanned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suit ing
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing,
For Hecuba!

[II.ii.534-42]

Hamlet wishes he were capable of such performance and attempts to stage the events that follow in a way that will improve his acting. Failing to preserve the distinction between actual and performed emotion, Hamlet imagines the player's response to his own condition:

What would he do
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appall the free.

[II.ii. 544-48]

Hamlet dissolves the difference between life and drama by recognizing his world as a stage and blames himself for the persona that
inhibits his act of revenge. To kill the usurping King would not suffice; Hamlet longs to perform the vengeful act in an appropriately dramatic way. But since Hamlet’s grandest performances are solus, he can only stage a scene that may provoke a guilty performance from the King:

I’ll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle. I’ll observe his looks.
I’ll tent him to the quick. If ’a do blench,
I know my course.

[II.ii.580–84]

Such a performance, Hamlet judges, will be more reliable than the words of his prompting spirit:

The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil, and the devil hath power
T’assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me.

[II.ii.584–89]

Sensing the connection between spirits and private experience, Hamlet needs firmer grounds on which to act. But the “ground” he chooses is only a stage, for “the play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king” (II.ii. 590–91).

Hamlet believes he does discover the King’s guilt through the play within the play, but an equally central moment is a double soliloquy. As the King kneels in prayer, Hamlet enters the scene and soliloquizes at a distance, concluding that to murder the King would be to send his soul to heaven (III.iii.73–78). The King’s posture of prayer implies a relationship to God that Hamlet lacks and declines to interrupt. But in their degraded world, the King has only discovered his inability to pray. Shakespeare presents an indirect dialogue between opposing characters.

The final scene requires that Hamlet turn performer. A fencing match sets the stage; when all are mortally wounded, Hamlet calls on Horatio to “report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied” (V.ii.328–29). The soliloquists longs to communicate his private thoughts:
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.

[V.ii.333–38]

Less concerned for his bodily wounds, Hamlet pleads with Horatio to tell the story that will heal his "wounded name." For a character who learns the inadequacy of solitary speech, performance is decisive. His internal narratives have been hopelessly divided; Hamlet finally commands another's narrative and its conclusion in silence.

Early English drama makes soliloquy a concomitant of sin and separation from God. As drama develops, soliloquy appears as the device by which prayer can overcome the distance between human and divine realms. Supernatural beings recurrently interact with soliloquies, as if to indicate the uncertain status of spirit, between divinity and subjectivity. The villainous world of Richard III becomes possible after God's absence is assumed: until his downfall, Richard unfolds his schemes without the interruption of spirits. While a spirit does enter into Hamlet's world, his isolation is so extreme that his doubts revolve around the question of the validity of the ghost's message. Supernatural beings become figures of inner turmoil; as the tensions between immanence and transcendence work themselves out in the dialectic of monological modes, the supposedly autonomous subject discovers its internal conflicts. To the extent that soliloquy is coupled with relationships to society and divine beings, it never entirely loses the connection with otherness and transcendent Logos. Even apparent solitude and madness show themselves as relationships to the divine. The new poetic monologue, instead of interacting with supernatural powers, turns toward contemplation on the appropriate rhetoric for imaginative expressions of the self.