SHAKESPEARE AND THE SOLILOQUIY
in Early Modern English Drama

EDITED BY
A. D. Cousins and Daniel Derrin
Encompassing nearly a century of drama, this is the first book to provide students and scholars with a truly comprehensive guide to the early modern soliloquy. Considering the antecedents of the form in Roman, late fifteenth-century and mid-sixteenth-century drama, it analyzes its diversity, its theatrical functions, and its socio-political significances. Containing detailed case studies of the plays of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Ford, Middleton, and Davenant, this collection will equip students in their own close readings of texts, providing them with an in-depth knowledge of the verbal and dramaturgical aspects of the form. Informed by rich theatrical and historical understanding, the essays reveal the larger connections between Shakespeare’s use of the soliloquy and its deployment by his fellow dramatists.

A. D. Cousins is a fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and a member of the Order of Australia. He has published a number of books in the United States and Great Britain, including monographs on Andrew Marvell, Thomas More, Shakespeare’s non-dramatic verse, and religious verse of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He has been a visiting adjunct professor at the Interdisciplinary Renaissance Studies Center at the University of Massachusetts, a visiting scholar at Princeton University and at Pennsylvania State University, and a library fellow at the Library of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He holds doctorates in both English literature and political theory.

Daniel Derrin teaches in the Department of English Studies at Durham University. He has published in the areas of early modern rhetorical theory, drama, comedy, Shakespeare, and the writing of John Donne. He was awarded the S. Ernest Sprott fellowship for 2014–15 from the University of Melbourne, which was completed at the Warburg Institute, and has been Associate Investigator for the Australian Research Council’s Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions.
## Contents

*Acknowledgements*  
*Notes on Contributors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Roman Soliloquy</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tudor Transformations</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Doubtful Battle: Marlowe’s Soliloquies</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Shakespeare and the Female Voice in Soliloquy</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contemplative Idiots in Soliloquy: Rhetorical Parody,</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laughable Deformity and the Audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Giving Voice to History in Shakespeare</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Hamlet</em> and <em>Of Truth</em>: Humanism and the Disingenuous</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soliloquy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Choosing between Shame and Guilt: <em>Macbeth,</em> <em>Othello,</em></td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Hamlet,</em> and <em>King Lear</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A. D. Cousins and Daniel Derrin

* Joseph A. Smith

* Raphael Falco

* L. E. Semler

* Catherine Bates

* Daniel Derrin

* David Bevington

* A. D. Cousins

* Patrick Gray
Contents

9 ‘Too hot, too hot’: The Rhetorical Poetics of Soliloquies in Shakespeare’s Late Plays
   Kate Aughterson 119

10 Ben Jonson’s Roman Soliloquies
   James Loxley 139

11 Ben Jonson’s Comic Selves
   Brian Woolland 153

12 ‘In such a whisp’ring and withdrawing hour’: Speaking Solus in Middleton’s The Revenger’s Tragedy
   and The Lady’s Tragedy
   Andrew Hiscock 167

13 John Ford’s Soliloquies: Solitude Interrupted
   Huw Griffiths 180

14 Davenant’s Macbeth: Soliloquy, Counter-Revolution and Restoration
   A. D. Cousins and Dani Napton 195

15 What Were Soliloquies in Plays by Shakespeare and Other Late Renaissance Dramatists? An Empirical Approach
   James Hirsh 205

Notes 225
Select Bibliography 256
Index 271
We would like to thank the following people for the different ways in which they have helped in the preparation of this book: Michael Ackland, Jim and Maureen Cahillane, Helen and Neil Cadzow, Robyn Cousins, Barbara Ravelhofer, Mandy Green, and Hannah Burrows. Many thanks also to our contributors for their participation in and commitment to the project. Finally, we would like to thank Emily Hockley and Rebecca Jackaman at Cambridge University Press for their support and good counsel.
Notes on Contributors

Kate Aughterson is a lecturer in Literature, Media, and Screen at the University of Brighton. She is the author of Shakespeare: The Late Plays (2013), Aphra Behn: The Comedies (2003), and Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook (1995) as well as articles on utopia and gender in early modern drama.


David Bevington is Phyllis Fay Horton Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago and the Chair of Theater and Performance Studies. He is a senior editor of the Revels Plays and one of three senior editors of The Cambridge Edition of The Works of Ben Jonson (2012) and editor of The Complete Works of Shakespeare (seventh edition, 2014). He has published many articles and books on Shakespeare and early modern literature, including: Murder Most Foul: ‘Hamlet’ through the Ages (2011), Shakespeare’s Ideas (2008), and Shakespeare: The Seven Ages of Human Experience (2002).

A. D. Cousins is Professor in English at Macquarie University, Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and a member of the Order of Australia. He has published many books on early modern literature and culture including monographs on Shakespeare's non-dramatic verse and on early modern religious verse. His recent monographs include Andrew Marvell: Loss and Aspiration (2016) and Pleasure and Gender in the Writings of Thomas More (2010).

Daniel Derrin teaches English literature at Durham University. He is the author of Rhetoric and the Familiar in Francis Bacon and John Donne.
(2013) and a co-creator of the ‘Humours of the Past’ network. He has published articles on jesting and laughter in Shakespeare and early modern drama and in forms of religious writing, including sermons and polemic, with a particular interest in Renaissance writing about laughter and the influence of Roman comedy.

**Raphael Falco** is Professor of English at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. His books include *Charisma and Myth* (2009), *Charismatic Authority in Early Modern English Tragedy* (2000), and *Conceived Presences: Literary Genealogy in Renaissance England* (1994). He has also published widely in the areas of literary history, Neo-Latin poetics, modern poetry, and intellectual culture.

**Patrick Gray** is Assistant Professor in English Studies at Durham University. He is the author of *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* (forthcoming, 2018) and co-editor of *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics* (2014) and has published articles on Shakespeare in relation to early modern Christian culture and representations of Rome.

**Huw Griffiths** is a lecturer at the University of Sydney. He has edited *Shakespeare: Hamlet: A Reader’s Guide to Essential Criticism* (2005) and has published widely on early modern drama in the areas of politics and sovereignty and the discourse of friendship.

**James Hirsh** is Professor of English at Georgia State University. He is the author of *The Structure of Shakespearean Scenes* (1981) and *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies* (2003) and many articles on the history of soliloquy, particularly self-address, in relation to Shakespeare.

**Andrew Hiscock** is Professor of English at Bangor University and the recipient of several research awards (including the Ben Jonson Discoveries Award, 2014). He has published several books on early modern literature and culture including, most recently: *Reading Memory in Early Modern Literature* (2011) and *The Uses of This World: Thinking Space in Shakespeare, Marlowe, Cary and Jonson* (2004).

**James Loxley** is Professor of Early Modern Literature at the University of Edinburgh. He has written widely on Renaissance poetry and drama, with a particular focus on Ben Jonson and Andrew Marvell and on the literature, politics, and culture of the civil war period. His recent co-edited books include *Ben Jonson’s Walk to Scotland: An Annotated Edition of the ‘Foot Voyage’* (2015) and *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Claims of the Performative* (2013).
DANI NAPTON is an honorary associate of Macquarie University. She has published widely (as both Dani Napton and Daniella E. Singer) on English early modern and eighteenth-century literature and culture, with special attention to the history of ideas, rhetorical theory, landscape, and political theory, including articles on Shakespeare, Charlotte Turner Smith, and Sir Walter Scott.

LIAM SEMLER is Professor of Early Modern Literature at the University of Sydney. He is the author of The English Mannerist Poets and the Visual Arts (1998) and Teaching Shakespeare and Marlowe: Learning vs. the System (2013) and has published widely on early modern drama and poetry, including articles on Margaret Cavendish and Robert Herrick.

JOSEPH A. SMITH is Associate Professor of Classics at San Diego State University. He is editing the Encyclopedia of Roman Drama and has written articles on metrics in Roman drama, market economies in Terence, and the ‘Senecan’ Octavia.

BRIAN WOOLAND is a writer and theatre director. He was a senior lecturer at the University of Reading until 2005. He is an author of educational and academic books and has published widely on early modern theatre. He edited Jonsonians: Living Traditions (2003) and co-edited Ben Jonson and Theatre (1999). His most recent plays are This Flesh Is Mine (2014) and When Nobody Returns (2016).
Ask someone to quote from a Shakespeare play and you will probably hear, ‘To be or not to be; that is the question’ or ‘Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow’ or maybe ‘But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?’ The reply will probably come from one of the famous soliloquies. Yet although early modern English drama is so widely taught across the world and the soliloquy is no slight component of that drama – and although there is so much research published on early modern plays and playwrights – there is no single scholarly volume that examines the soliloquy’s antecedents, diversity of form, theatrical functions, cultural significances, and history in the period from Marlowe to Davenant. The aim of this book is to offer a comprehensive, albeit not complete, response to that need.

Beginning with an account of paradigmatic precedents in Roman drama (given its prominence in early modern English education), the book then proceeds to discuss the soliloquy’s roles in English plays from the later fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries. After those preparatory chapters, the book moves on to study the soliloquy from Marlowe to Davenant. The chapters on playwrights trace variations in theatrical conceptualizing of the soliloquy and in its use to represent individuated characterization (or, versions of selfhood). They also trace how, as indicated by a range of soliloquies, authors revisit and rewrite one another’s texts in order to suggest authorial identity (for instance, how Davenant reworks Shakespeare). In addition, the chapters explore the soliloquy’s relations with cultural history: the ways in which playwrights employ the soliloquy to highlight engagement with preoccupations and concerns in early modern English culture. There are, for example, analyses of it in relation to ethical discourse (as in the chapters by Smith, Hirsh, Falco, Semler, Derrin, Gray, Loxley, Woolland, and Hiscock), issues of gender (as in those by Aughterson, Derrin, and Bates), debates about cognition (those by Hirsh, Cousins, Aughterson, Griffiths, and Napton), and political theory and practice (those by Smith, Bevington, Loxley, Hiscock, and...
Napton). The book concludes by positing a typology of the soliloquy in early modern English drama. The chapters are not narrowly focussed and are designed to interact in several ways. They cohere but do not necessarily agree with one another. Central to *Shakespeare and the Soliloquy in Early Modern English Drama* is a study of the soliloquy’s functions throughout the Shakespeare canon. Approximately half the book examines Shakespeare’s deployment of the soliloquy across his plays.

Here we shall consider, by way of a prologue to the ensuing chapters, techniques through which soliloquies from that time proffer exposition, deliberation, praise, dispraise, or elements of forensic argument. That is to say, we shall consider the rhetorical manoeuvres through which, as is so frequently the case, they open individuated perspectives onto social and political concerns that go beyond those presented by their immediate dramatic contexts. In light of that discussion, we shall then more broadly consider the scope and function of the soliloquy on the early modern English stage. A useful place to start is with the soliloquy that begins Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, which presents an explicitly challenging evaluation of Humanism.

In that tragedy’s opening speech, Marlowe’s protagonist claims to be deciding the future direction of his intellectual pursuits. ‘Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin / To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess’, he initially instructs himself. His speech goes on to tell us about the possibilities before him and is expository; moreover, inasmuch as it seems about choosing among those possibilities it appears deliberative. But Faustus’ soliloquy is disingenuous, for Faustus has in effect already made his choice. Near the end of his soliloquy, he enthuses: ‘These metaphysics of magicians / And necromantic books are heavenly, / Lines, circles, signs, letters, and characters – / Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires’ (1.1.51–4; cf. 1.1.56 and 1.1.112). His deliberative set piece really serves, then, to fabricate a rationale for the inclination that Faustus will ultimately confirm as his choice, and so develops an elaborate lie.

According to Quintilian, underpinning a deliberative speech are the generally antithetic considerations of honour and expediency. Ambition for the greatest possible honour motivates Faustus, and he will ruthlessly practise expediency in order to justify gaining it through illicit means, that is, magic. Honour and expediency, in his case, support rather than oppose each other. Thus, when he surveys the licit arts and sciences to which he could commit himself, each is trivialized or misrepresented because each is an inconvenience – an obstacle between him and the means to fulfil his hubristic fantasy of honour. He does not ‘sound [their] depth[s]’ (1.1.2).
Seeking to metamorphose himself, he first metamorphoses them. Logic, he therefore says, is only about disputing well (1.1.7–10); medicine is simply about wealth and fame (14–15); law is finally about ‘trash’ (30–5, at 35); divinity is about determinism and so, ironically, he bids it ‘adieu’ (49–50). By this process of transformation or, more accurately, deformation he diminishes their human value.

There are in fact several aspects to his doing so. First, he downplays the importance of each to the community. They are hindrances to his over-reaching and hence their benefits to other human beings do not much matter. Second, his repudiation of them consequently implies his retreat from a theocentric into an egocentric universe – and, at the same time, denial of what Shakespeare’s contemporaries would have recognized as caritas (a God-centred love for others) in favour of what they would have seen as cupiditas, or concupiscentia (self-centred, inordinate desire). This dream of inhabiting a self-centred universe aligns him with Lucifer, as Mephistopheles obliquely remarks (1.3.69–70); and his self-centred appetite, the vast concupiscence that will link him to Jonson’s Volpone or Sir Epicure Mammon, receives acknowledgement at an even earlier point in the play (1.1.80, as ‘glutted’ indicates). His turning away from the human arts and sciences is, hence, a turning away from his own humanitas: from his quintessential humanity, his higher and better self. Transforming them, he initiates in fact a lessening of his own humanity. Yet he seeks dehumanization, after a fashion. What he ‘aim[s]’ at by way of ‘advantage’ – to cite the terms used in Ad Herennium – is metamorphosis into the more than human.

Faustus’ process of contaminated deliberation reveals that – glories in that thought – when he dismisses ‘physic’ (1.1.12–27). After a moment spent in extravagant praise of his own medical triumphs (19–22), he says: ‘Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man. / Wouldst thou make man to live eternally, / Or, being dead, raise them to life again, / Then this profession were to be esteemed’ (23–6). He fantasizes about becoming Christ’s secular counterpart (cf. John 11:25). He does not, however, so much reject Galen by blasphemously appropriating scripture as repudiate a classical authority in order to pursue a dream formulated by an older generation of Humanists. He simultaneously attacks an established Humanist view of medical practice and intimates endorsement of long-standing, ambiguous Humanist theorizing about humankind’s potential for self-transformation and self-perfectibility. According, for instance, to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in his Oration on the Dignity of Man and Juan Luis Vives in his A Fable about Man, human beings are unique within the creation
because they have the power to transform themselves. True, they can undergo degradation if they so choose (and this will prove to be Faustus’ actual choice); they can also metamorphose ‘into... higher forms, which are divine.’ The question remains in each treatise as to whether people can do this by exertion of will alone or are dependent, to whatever extent, on grace. Faustus’ interest in ‘higher forms, which are divine’ centres of course not on enablement by grace but on empowerment by magic. His aspiration to become Christ’s profane equivalent suggests a darkness within the older Humanist vision of self-transformation and self-perfectibility, laying bare the will to illimitable power that informs it and implying that pursuit of it will most likely involve unreason and ruin, descent not ascent.

So too does the manic, magniloquent fantasizing near the end of his soliloquy:

All things that move between the quiet poles
Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;
But his dominion that exceeds in this
Stretceth as far as doth the mind of man.
A sound magician is a mighty god.
Here, Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity. (1.1.58–65)

Such is the honour, if we return to Quintilian’s thinking on deliberative rhetoric, towards which Faustus reaches. Like man-the-actor in Vives’ *Fable*, he would achieve apotheosis – though, unlike Vives’ protagonist, he would not gain it by wisdom (*sapientia*). Faustus’ opening speech thus presents a double attack on Humanism: his expedient subversion of more or less conventional Humanist learning and Marlowe’s indirect if distinct subversion, through him, of earlier Humanists’ claims that humankind can transform and perfect itself. As we soon see, Faustus’ attempt to make good on those latter claims – to metamorphose himself and achieve virtual deity – leads not to transcendence of his humanity but to diminution of it, and nowhere is that more apparent than in his episodes of comic violence.

Nonetheless, Marlowe will also show Faustus reaching back to Humanist learning in order to recover contact with the *humanitas* that he has abandoned. The nostalgia with which he does this expresses itself strikingly through the allusion to Ovid’s *Amores* in his desperate, final soliloquy: ‘*O lente, lente currite noctis equi!*’ (5.2.74: ‘O slowly, slowly run, horses of the night’). Seeking at the last to re-direct his trajectory – we hear
the forensic undertones, that is, the undertones of legal argument to his rhetoric at 98–104 – the man who has turned from Humanist learning and at the same time embraced Humanist dreams of self-deification instinctively words his desire in classical terms, evoking a Roman portrayal of mundane happiness. Yet, beyond that sudden glance at mutual human joy (at shared, private, powerless delight), the man who once would be singular, pre-eminent, would now, just before the demons return, be anonymously, undetectably merged with the rest of creation (5.2.118–119). He would in fact experience a final metamorphosis into unconscious matter, one that recalls Heraclitus’ dictum, ‘For souls it is death to become water’.

Faustus’ initial soliloquy engenders a critique of Humanism by way, in part, of considering Christian belief; but the attention devoted to religious doctrine in the speech seems evasive. For example, when Faustus reads 1 John 1:8 (42–5), he ignores the immediately following verse, which complements its predecessor and is surely among the best known in scripture: ‘Si confiteamur peccata nostra: fidelis est, et iustus, ut remittat nobis peccata nostra, et emundet nos ab omni iniquitate’. Faustus must know that verse, and, in any event, it lies before him. Nevertheless, he erases it and thereafter lives as well as dies with the consequences. Faustus avoids an inconvenient truth. Marlowe leaves open the question as to whether Faustus’ act of avoidance is freely willed or predestined, as he will similar questions throughout the play. The fall of this particular Icarus, to revisit the Chorus’s trope (Prologue, 20–2), may or may not be an act of God – an issue the harder to resolve since this variant of Icarus is also a man of intellectual achievements and, thence, likewise implicitly akin to Daedalus. We see that Marlowe’s tragedy begins by querying Humanism, subsequently affirms elements of it, and gestures towards Christian belief as a context for Humanism that is no more stable than is Humanism itself.

The potential for soliloquies to display and explore rhetorical procedures themselves becomes even clearer when we consider the entranced speech of Brutus that begins act two, scene one, of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. This self-addressed soliloquy begins as a deliberative speech. Honour, here, is in tension with expediency. Unlike Marlowe’s Faustus, Shakespeare’s Brutus will not refashion honour to suit what is expedient that he may thus ruthlessly follow it. In his soliloquy, Brutus moves quickly towards a clarification of the issue:

It must be by his death. And for my part I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
But for the general. He would be crowned.
How that might change his nature, there’s the question.  (2.1.10–13)\textsuperscript{11}

It would be expedient and honourable simply to support his friend, but it would be dishonourable not to protect the republic from the approach of tyranny. Brutus develops an enthymeme to convince himself that Caesar is on a course that leads to tyranny.\textsuperscript{12} He convinces himself by arguing that Caesar, having accepted sovereignty (what the Romans would have called \textit{imperium}), would naturally then become a tyrant:

It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
And that craves wary walking. Crown him: that!
And then I grant we put a sting in him
That at his will he may do danger with.
Th’ abuse of greatness is when it disjoins
Remorse from power. And to speak truth of Caesar,
I have not known when his affections swayed
More than his reason. But ’tis a common proof
That lowliness is young ambition’s ladder,
Where to the climber-upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.  (2.1.14–27)

The growing enthymeme contends with Brutus’ repeated recognition (in lines 11 and 20–1) that there is no evidence of this tendency in Caesar as he is; thus, it addresses an implied lack of legal evidence. That contention crystallizes further in the last lines of the speech:

Then lest he may, prevent. And since the quarrel
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities;
And therefore think him as a serpent’s egg,
Which, hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell.  (2.1.28–34)

Increasingly desperate for resolution, and lacking forensic evidence, Brutus instructs himself that the man would ‘run to . . . extremities’ (31), perhaps half concealing, even from himself, the evident fact that he is deciding how to ‘fashion’ (30) Caesar for his own purposes. In Brutus’ soliloquy, the deliberative rhetorical mode reveals a disjunction between rhetorical decision-making and rhetorical effect that is usually concealed.
In one sense, then, like Faustus though less disingenuously so, Brutus has already made his choice, even though honour and expediency remain in this case separate and his is a genuine deliberation. His increasing clarity in resolution attends upon a decreasing clarity in representing the past and the present. That is to say, in resolving his deliberative problem, Brutus’ search for forensic evidence concerning what has been hitherto the case regarding Caesar becomes more and more half-hearted and overrun by the force of the enthymeme. He begins with ‘I know no personal cause’ (11), moving to ‘I have not known when his affections swayed / More than his reason’ (20–1), and thence to the vague recognition that ‘the quarrel / Will bear no colour for the thing he is’ (28–9), with its awkward if not cryptic syntax. The personal and the concrete have morphed into the merely concrete and thence into something comparatively general and vague. This connects him not only with Marlowe’s Faustus but with Shakespeare’s other tragic heroes, such as Hamlet, Othello, Lear, and Macbeth. (Patrick Gray, in his subsequent chapter, explores how each goads himself into action by way of self-addressed speech.) Brutus’ soliloquy therefore offers us an interesting window onto politically focussed rhetorics because it puts on display rhetorical practice that is in progress, formative, and where the struggle to articulate a way of seeing things in relation to a public code of behaviour has not yet been finalized. Moreover, his speech evokes several concerns of early modern society. It implicitly touches, for example, on worries about casuistry: about cases of conscience in relation to constraints of political power. Likewise, it points to debates over republicanism and tyrannicide.

Having seen how Faustus’ soliloquy puts on display a tragically deformed process of deliberation, and Brutus’ a tragically confused mingling of the deliberative with the forensic, we can now examine how the soliloquy that opens Jonson’s Volpone displays a comically deformed epideixis. The third ancient genre of oratory, following deliberative and forensic, epideixis categorizes those speeches that praise people for their achievements of virtue and magnanimity or, by contrast, blame their failures. However, epideictic speech does not merely display the greatness and goodness (or, as may be, evil) of its subject. It puts on display the character and skills of the performing orator. A soliloquy shows the performance of those additional rhetorical manoeuvres yet does so, of course, not always with its speaker’s full realisation of what he or she is saying. This we see spectacularly in the ironic self-revelation, by way of a comic epideixis, throughout Volpone’s address to gold at the start of Jonson’s play (1.1.1–27).
As the waking Volpone praises his gold, he unwittingly voices a reprehensible, comically idolatrous self-characterization by metamorphosing gold into divinity. He has no awareness of or interest in what that indicates about himself. He begins:

Good morning to the day; and next, my gold!
Open the shrine that I may see my saint.

[Mosca reveals the treasure.]

Hail the world’s soul, and mine! More glad than is
The teeming earth to see the longed-for sun
Peep through the horns of the celestial Ram
Am I to view thy splendour, darkening his;
That lying here, amongst my other hoards,
Show’st like a flame by night, or like the day
Struck out of chaos, when all darkness fled
Unto the centre. O thou son of Sol
– But brighter than thy father – let me kiss,
With adoration, thee, and every relic
Of sacred treasure in this blessed room.  

Volpone’s idolatrous address to his gold inverts a customary gesture of epideictic rhetoric. Speeches of praise allow the orator to display his or her own character positively, as an appropriate platform for praising the virtues of someone or something else. Aristotle had explicitly linked display of one’s supposed character with *epideixis* when claiming that ‘the ways in which to make [our hearers] trust the goodness of other people are also the ways in which to make them trust our own’. Volpone, however, speaking in epideictic mode but, as if in private reverie, produces an unguarded revelation of his character: one he does not intend or think that he needs to guard. From the perspective of an audience for whom his magniloquent, loving praise is emphatically idolatrous, he is a perfect example of the ignorance (*agnòia*) that Plato in *Philebus* made the essence of the laughable. Yet Volpone is oblivious. That is to say, he is emphatically if implicitly positioned through this scene as being from a world in which his attitude to money is normative rather than a deformity. This is, of course, the basis of Jonson’s satire. Yet Volpone’s monologue lays bare the gap between the comically deformed character visible only to Jonson’s audience and the standards of behaviour that are normative within Volpone’s own world, one unconcerned with external criticism. The soliloquy achieves this because it is an epideictic speech without obviously public auditors; it is an unguarded window onto the gap between Volpone’s personal character and the public standards of behaviour of
Jonson’s audience, a gap that the soliloquy’s rhetoric makes visible. But, given that England is then transitioning into a new kind of economy, one evidently figured by Venice’s, we are aware that the notional gap may be not so great after all. At one level, Jonson uses Volpone here, as has been for a long time suggested, to mock the acquisitiveness of the emerging consumer culture in England in the early seventeenth century.¹⁷

In keeping with conventional tactics of rhetorical praise, the structure of Volpone’s praise begins with an elaborate amplification (heightening) by way of comparison. One of the primary forms of highlighting something, writes Quintilian, involves making it seem worse or better by comparison with relatable things. The orator moves the subject into a comparative position where he, she, or it cannot be topped by anything.¹⁸ Volpone makes gold into something than which nothing could be ‘greater’, first by picturing gold as the greater son of Sol who eclipses his father. It is the initial layer of openly idolatrous comparison. Volpone metamorphoses wealth and the will to pleasure into a higher divinity than even great Apollo. Nevertheless, the elaborate comparison is not merely a positive contrast of analogous qualities – light (8–9), splendour (6), warming pleasure (4–5) – in gold’s favour.

Volpone’s comparison of gold with ‘a flame by night, or like the day / Struck out of chaos’ makes his golden heresy hyperbolically emphatic: gold is constitutive of his very world and of the goodness that is in it. Further on in his soliloquizing reverie, the idea develops and takes on a more explicitly Christian colouring:

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots \text{Dear saint,} \\
\text{Riches, the dumb god that giv’st all men tongues,} \\
\text{That canst do naught and yet mak’st men do all things;} \\
\text{The price of souls; even hell, with thee to boot,} \\
\text{Is made worth heaven. Thou art virtue, fame,} \\
\text{Honour, and all things else. Who can get thee,} \\
\text{He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(1.1.21–27)

Pushing the manoeuvre of heightening by comparison to its adulatory and comic utmost, the soliloquy of course puts two worlds into contrast: first, that from which Volpone comes and, second, the one that sees him and it as comic deformities. The two worlds are, furthermore, entirely different contexts in which to fashion the self. Volpone’s idolatry implicitly excludes the world that sees it as such, that is to say, a world in which the will to power and the will to pleasure – each of which riches facilitate – are actually accountable to a higher divinity. From that world’s perspective, Volpone is
a comic deformity, a counterpart to the tragic deformity of Faustus. Both characters embody a vast, outrageous, self-centred desire. But all divinity in Volpone’s world dissolves into money. There, money is divinely generative, for Volpone’s treasure is not just his ‘saint’ but the ‘soul’ of both his world and of himself (4). In conventional Aristotelian terms, the soul as the form of the body is constitutive of its being. Moreover, ‘Riches’, despite being ‘dumb’, in Volpone’s world ‘giv’st all men tongues’ (22). It has been suggested, too, that the following line – ‘that canst do naught and yet mak’st men do all things’ – parodies the concept of divinity as ‘the unmoved mover’ (which Christian orthodoxy appropriated) because it puts in tension the fact that while riches ‘do naught’, they also do everything. Volpone unambiguously claims that riches generate honour, wisdom, and nobility (25–7).

The creative force of money in the world where Volpone exhibits himself appears, in the audience’s world, to be anarchic because it is deleterious to the fashioning of virtue. L. C. Knights observed that Volpone draws on a growing sense of social discord so as to condemn acquisitiveness; more recent scholarship has shown that writers’ responses to new economic projects were ambivalent. Those projects injected the creative energy of private enterprise into larger public benefits, many said, such as the employment of the poor. Yet Volpone’s soliloquy, putting epideictic rhetoric itself on display, gives us a lucid, subtle perspective onto the gap between alternate possibilities for self-fashioning, between espousing a moral or a financial economy. About five years later, Jonson will create as its direct counterpart the grandiose fantasizing of Sir Epicure Mammon in a famous soliloquy from The Alchemist (at 2.2.41–56 and 57–87 along with 88–94). There, like his vulpine predecessor – and Faustus, too – Mammon indulges a fantasy of Cosmopoiesis, that is, of world-making. He voices a seigniorial dream of luxury, summoning before his eyes a personal domain of incoherent, bedazzling excess and extravagant consumption. There, moreover, just as Volpone speaks in the presence of Mosca but for his own benefit, so likewise Mammon speaks in the company of Face but to himself. That particular commonality invites further consideration of what the soliloquy’s scope and function are in early modern English drama.

For a start, it asks us to reconsider what a ‘soliloquy’ actually is in Shakespeare’s time. One often-cited formula suggests that, as the term’s Latin components indicate (they mean ‘to speak’ and ‘alone’), a soliloquy occurs when a character speaks alone onstage. Clearly, nonetheless, as in the cases of Volpone and Mammon, this is not invariably so. Neither
appears by himself, but each talks to and for himself.21 Something very similar happens just before the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. When Benvolio and Mercutio exit, the latter having made fun of what was Romeo’s passion for Rosaline, Romeo says by way of response to Mercutio and his mockery: ‘He jests at scars that never felt a wound’ (2.1.43). His epigram is at once an aside and a concise soliloquy, Romeo’s point being that although Mercutio talks a lot about sexual experience, he has never experienced love. Maybe Romeo implies that Mercutio never will. In any event, Romeo’s acute observation functions as a speech for his own benefit, even though Juliet is onstage. She doesn’t hear him, of course – and therein lies a difference between this brief speech and the speeches by Jonson’s characters discussed previously – yet Romeo is nevertheless not alone. Further, his speech is very short indeed, which illustrates that a soliloquy in early modern plays need be neither voiced in solitude nor of substantial length. It exists for the speaker’s benefit and (whatever its length) might well be uttered in solitude but need not be. If not alone, its speaker either does not address anyone else onstage or does not intend to be overheard by another character.

We as the audience are always the truly significant others who witness the soliloquy. It is designed to bond our minds to the mind of the speaker. Sometimes we may be addressed directly and summoned to share a character’s perspective; we are allowed to learn something of importance to the character that other characters may know in part or, more probably, do not know at all. Usually we are eavesdroppers, unrecognized sharers in the character’s thoughts and feelings. We are bonded to the speaker through a kind of intimacy, that is to say, and thence become privileged interpreters and judges of an innermost selfhood.22 We may to some extent see ourselves in that speaker’s private words or gladly may not: he or she may hold a mirror up to us or allow us to see what we would not willingly allow into our thoughts and behaviours. Some of what is voiced may be momentary: unintended, abrupt revelations; disingenuous reactions; expressions of startled recognition; or sudden and intense emotional responses. So, as regards the last, it is with Romeo’s aside in response to Mercutio’s fashionable and facile libertinism. As the three monologues initially examined previously suggest, however, the soliloquy often enacts a character’s extended attempt to analyze someone or some phenomenon via deliberation, praise, dispraise, or forensic assessment and assertion. Such soliloquies are dramatically situated oratory that is inflected by the precedents of especially Roman rhetoric and dramatic practice (on which see Joseph Smith’s chapter). What results is then a hybridized mode of speech:
an oratorical moment set in a particularized dramatic situation. And, as has been remarked earlier, it allows the speaker to confront issues before him or her that will frequently open onto issues of larger social significance for the then- or now-contemporary audience.

By way of elaborating upon that idea, one could juxtapose Edmund’s soliloquy in *King Lear* 1.2.1–22 with the opening monologues by Faustus and Volpone examined previously. Like Faustus though not Volpone, Edmund is alone onstage; like each of his fellows, he begins with an apostrophe (‘Thou, Nature, art my goddess . . .’). Faustus, in his initial speech, disingenuously addresses himself and moves towards the idea of self-apotheosis. Volpone, when first he speaks, addresses ‘gold’ as the god of this world. Edmund, too, addresses something at once before him and yet beyond himself that he has chosen to be his god. When thus apostrophizing Nature, he nevertheless in fact talks about and for himself. To share his doing so is to learn much of Edmund’s status in *King Lear*, of philosophical as well as social issues in Shakespeare’s culture, and likewise of soliloquies on the early modern stage. Edmund’s monologue reveals his obsession with the inferior social status, the material deprivation, imposed on him by his being a younger son and, more than that, by his illegitimacy. In his speech, he indicates that he worships Nature because human law, ‘custom’ (3), demeans and dispossesses him. Nothing inherent in the natural order does – for natural desire generated him and he is not naturally inferior to his older, legitimate brother – but rules arbitrarily manufactured and enforced by society do. If laws are therefore merely artificial, they are unnatural and can be dismantled by assertion of a natural will to power. Edmund’s soliloquy shows, then, the more serious face of philosophic libertinism in Shakespeare’s time. Mercutio’s version justifies unconstrained sexuality; Edmund’s, freedom from all human law and social regulation. Edmund’s angrily, disjointedly deliberative argument nonetheless collapses in on itself, as we see. Repudiating the concept of illegitimacy, he cannot free himself from its lexicon. The terms ‘legitimate’, ‘baseness’, ‘base’, ‘bastard’, and ‘bastardy’ crowd his speech, implying that he cannot escape them. In addition, his argument against ‘custom’ is ironically quite conventional, being a familiar unorthodoxy within the spectrum of Humanist thought. Addressed to Nature but self-directed, deliberative but also self-disordered and self-defeating, and focussed on immediate circumstances in the play while simultaneously engaging with social and philosophic issues of the culture around it, Edmund’s speech emphasizes the widely ranging multivoicedness of the soliloquy as a convention in early modern drama.
By way of an illuminating comparison and contrast, one could cite Lear’s later soliloquy that begins with an apostrophe to the forces of nature (3.2.1–9 and 14–24). Unlike Edmund, Lear is not alone when he cries out to the elements – the Fool, whom he ignores during his monologue, accompanies him; on the other hand, like Edmund he addresses nature as a way of talking about himself and for his own benefit because, also like Edmund, Lear is preoccupied with deprivation. The world as he knew it and wanted to know it having been taken from him by his daughters, or so he chooses to believe, he calls upon nature to erase what he likewise wants to believe is its upside-down and unnatural surrogate. Thus, whereas Edmund’s speech is furiously subversive, Lear’s expresses his outrage that the innate order of things, as he perceives it, has been inverted and seems irrecoverable. We listen to the anger of a self-deposed monarch who firmly believes that he ruled by divine right and stood above constraint by the law. Finally, however, Lear’s speech furthers our appreciation of the soliloquy’s protean scope in early modern drama. His speech is not so much a deliberative, forensic, or epideictic oration as it is a mingled prayer and curse – a hybrid rhetorical mode that Lear has directed against both Goneril and Regan when in dialogue with them (cf. 1.4.251–66 along with 2.4.158–61 and 265–80). One could add that Macbeth’s last soliloquy – introduced by ‘She should have died hereafter’ (5.5.17–28) – is itself a complaint rather than reflective of a more formal rhetorical pattern. Macbeth’s complaint suggests the extent to which treason and then tyranny have at the last emptied his life of meaning and value. Like Lear’s, that is to say, his is a tyrant’s soliloquy and it is not about the glory of sole rule but absolute loss.

Lear’s and Macbeth’s monologues bring us to the speech with which we shall briefly conclude, Richard of Gloucester’s soliloquy at the start of Richard III (1.1.1–41). Speaking in solitude and directly to the audience, Richard reveals himself as simultaneously a proto-tyrant (like Tarquin in Lucrece), Vice, and Machiavel (like Iago in Othello). Several aspects of his speech are especially pertinent here. First, it displays the play’s titular character in self-revelation. This differs from Shakespeare’s way of beginning, for example, his great tragedies of the next decade – nor will their protagonists’ soliloquies be addressed to the audience. Nevertheless, it links Richard with a number of stage types, and the soliloquies of Shakespeare’s later protagonists will link them to stage types as well. More important, this speech resembles a suasoria and has an enthymematic structure. In the suasoria (which featured strongly within both Roman and Elizabethan education), a usually mythological figure determines upon a course of
action. We see the mythologized Richard doing that in his monologue, and we are invited to follow his cunningly specious reasoning (its phases occurring at 1–13, then 14–27, and finally 28–40). Among other things, his speech suggests the extent to which, when Shakespeare and his contemporaries shaped soliloquies, they stayed in contact with the Roman literary imagination.
Roman sensibilities were inimical to theatre. They were a bellicose people, as Livy puts it in his narrative of the coming of scenic festival to the city, and they were not naturally given over to the pleasures produced by playmaking.¹ Their patrician class resisted sanctioning theatrical shows for the people until the dire circumstances of crop failure compelled them (via oracular instruction) to appease hostile gods with scenic entertainments. Such an instantaneous, inorganic implementation of stage shows in a city without its own theatrical traditions required certain modifications of the form. Upon arrival in Rome, the translated theatre innovated to accommodate its new audience. The result: Rome’s newly borrowed cultural institution developed in ways unique to Rome and, in the process, derived traditions of performance that advanced the art form far beyond what it inherited.

One of these innovations was the dramatic device upon which this volume is focused. It has been observed that no surviving Attic drama furnishes a true instance of soliloquy.² Yet, as we shall see, classical Roman drama fairly exudes the stuff of internal monologue, appearing in many dramatic scenes prompted by many circumstances of plot. The externalization in speech of internal, psychological states – of the mind’s struggle with volatile, conflicting emotions, with fears about the future, with deliberations about courses of action, and with declarations of resolved independence – the unnatural convention of spoken dialogue with the self became a ‘natural’ part of the Roman stage. We shall explore here why that feature of the European theatrical tradition owes its origins to Rome.

Two facets of theatrical innovation at Rome, both reflections of the peculiar and unique nature of the Romans’ social practice and character, stand as core explanations for the rise of soliloquy in the history of European theatre. One of these facets involved the physical properties of the Roman acting space; the other involved the social conventions of the Roman people who assembled as audience. Together these contributed to

---

¹ Livy, History of Rome, Book I, Ch. 19

² Aristotle, Poetics, 1442a 30

---
The development of distinctive features of Roman drama that made the translated stuff and substance of Greek comedy and tragedy so very new when rendered on the Roman stage.

The Roman Stage: Play Space for the Emerging Self

The Roman stage was, unlike the Athenian orchestra, a space developed for actors. As a structure, it placed primary focus upon and directed the audience’s gaze to a raised platform upon which individual characters trod and projected their distinct and distinctive personalities. This acting space developed along two axes accommodating two dominant genres of plays. For *fabulae palliatae*, comedies that were translated from Greek New Comedy, the axis was longitudinal, which compelled audiences to imagine a world beyond the stage accessible from the wings. This world was cosmopolitan. From the visible street scene, audiences understood (thanks to the iterative conventions of typical plots) that characters could easily access the heart of an urban economy and its urbane luxuries just beyond view: the market, the harbor, the banks, the courts, the brothels. This central scene was also equidistant to the resources and necessities of domestic life—paternal holdings of the country estate or farm that called for dutiful respect and upkeep. Such a long avenue gave characters access to and gridded them into a complete spectrum of social relationships, from most private to most public. The scene was invariably populated by lesser characters created and choreographed for the seeming purpose of enticing central players left or right, to the allurements of the city or the limitations of the farm.

This allowed for all manner of isolated business to transpire as it could not in the Greek theatre. Characters could enter unobserved by others in the scene and, conversely, could observe the approach of characters and comment upon the addition of that character to the business at hand. Characters could organize deceptive plays within plays, rehearse, and perform. All characters were free to offer asides to other characters onstage or to the audience beyond the stage. This play space first authorized shared intimacies among isolated characters (that could be either unheard or overheard by other characters present). It was the same that allowed for the individual character to speak in natural isolation.

For *fabulae crepidatae*, Latin tragedies ‘translated’ by and large from classical Attic masterpieces, the stage had different requirements predominantly configured along a vertical axis of imagination. Behind the platform was the *scaena frons*, or scenic backdrop, which reinforced the grandeur of
the play space with a looming series of house facades before which actors held forth. Inside those imaginary house fronts, the theatrical illusion maintained, was the interior retreat not only of suburbanites and social climbers but also, when cued with hardly more than a prologue to give indication, an antique and mythic collection of kings, queens, their satellites, regal nurses and guards, captured princesses, and subdued heroes. The cosmopolitan street scene quickly became a palatial court. When the play space was taken over by tragedies from Greek mythology, the *scaena* offered necessary backing that placed the heavens high above the rooftop of the central palace and an infernal realm below the actors’ feet.

The Roman stage was fully baroque: actors emerging from palatial facades could gesture to a wide world of cosmic forces intersecting at the focal point of the central stage. The grandeur of this acting space, both real and implied, diminished the relative size of the individual character against the sweep to the royal rafters or the heavens even higher above. The Roman stage was capacious in all dimensions: it gave ample room for players to enter and cross the stage with the ability to have their characters, quite naturally, observe others in the scene without being observed or, contrarily, be so preoccupied in business or thought so as not to notice the gaze of others. Gods could appear from above or below not by the cumbersome, extraordinary mechanism of a crane but by the split levels built into the *scaena frons*.

Finally, unlike the open air theatres of fifth- and fourth-century Greece, the Roman theatre modified and improved upon Hellenistic theatre design. The *cavea*, or seating area, wrapped around the stage in a half circle and fully encroached upon the orchestra, which became, by the imperial age, a prestige seating area reserved for patricians. This enclosed the *theatrum*, furnishing actors and audience with greater intimacy and isolation from the bustle of the city than could be achieved in the Greek theatre. The high covering over the audience may have been no more than canvas *vela* to provide shade from the sun overhead, but this theatre, even when spaces for scenic spectacle were temporary wooden structures, provided enclosure and interiority.

**The Roman Sense of Persona**

Even before the advent of the theatre in Rome, the Romans were a people given to masking. One prominent social institution which, like so many other of their social practices, served to distinguish patrician from plebeian families involved the household display of *imagines*, or ancestral death