The Gnomic Self

Counsel and Subjectivity in Shakespearean Drama

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Abstract: This essay discusses the links between counsel and subjectivity in the context of early modern English drama, with particular reference to Shakespeare's Hamlet *and* Romeo and Juliet. *Drawing on Foucault's notion of the gnomic self, which he recovers from the ancient philosophical tradition, it asks what kind of subjectivity emerges from situations of counsel in which remembered knowledge, in the form of sententiae, is supposed to act as a transformative force in the subject of advice.*[1]

A remarkable curiosity distinguishing one of our most eloquent and influential treatments of selfhood in early modernity, Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, is the fact that it is not a book about counsel.[2] For Greenblatt, the Renaissance self is fashioned under conditions that include, among others, submission to an external authority and a relation to the Other that "always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self." Most importantly, "self-fashioning is always," he writes, "though not exclusively, in language." Out of these encounters emerges a self that is essentially "an artful construct," to be studied alongside the variety of ideological discourses that participated in its shaping without necessarily eliminating its own power to form (9).

As I will argue in what follows, the best word to describe this process in the context of the Renaissance is, in fact, counsel. It is the word to which Renaissance

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2   For the outstanding status of Greenblatt's book see the recent comments by Kearney.

subjects themselves would turn when considering how they are fashioned and how they participate in the fashioning of others. Greenblatt's account of how the self is fashioned in the period identifies the same distinctive attributes that characterise the period's heavy reliance on counsel in both the construction of identity and the performance of roles individuals are expected to take in the world. To take counsel is to submit willingly to an authority outside the self while retaining the sense of agency and independence. It means reaching out to another person while entertaining the possibility that what we are told will not support but undermine us. It is an activity that always, and exclusively, happens in language, but whose chief aim is a decision that will lead to action and an engagement with the world. To take counsel is not to follow counsel mechanically and relinquish responsibility; to take counsel is to be reminded that the self is work in progress, fashioned and maintained through repeated challenges to one's own wisdom. To take counsel is not to be merely subjected to advice; it is to become an active subject of it.

We come much closer to the recognition of counsel as a central force in the history of subjectivity in the work of Michel Foucault, who is regularly seen as an important influence on both Greenblatt and new historicist scholarship more generally. However, the extent of Greenblatt's conversation with Foucault on the topic of selves, subjectivities, and identities in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* is naturally limited to Foucault's earlier work.[3] Foucault's late work, in which he goes beyond the techniques of domination that largely underpin his historical accounts in *Madness and Civilization* as well as *Discipline and Punish* in order to consider more systematically the techniques of the self, was in fact evolving just as Greenblatt published his study.[4] It is perhaps not entirely surprising that three decades later, in Greenblatt's *Shakespeare's Freedom*, a book that explicitly returns to issues of subjectivity, Foucault goes unmentioned. The change of critical climate and the withdrawal of theory from the centre of the academic stage have resulted in new figures of intellectual authority and in different explanatory frameworks. Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge that Foucault's late work continues to offer

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3   When one considers the specific mentions of Foucault in Greenblatt's book, one is in fact forced to admit that the connection between Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* and Foucault's work more generally is characterised by obliqueness, skepticism, and a tendency to dismiss.

4   The third volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, entitled *The Care of the Self*, was published in French in 1984 and in English two years later. Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* was published in 1980. It will be noticed that the account that follows departs from Lorna Hutson's assessment that the argument of Foucault's late work "locks neatly into the historical thesis of *Discipline and Punish*" (65).

valuable and provocative commentary on the questions of both self and freedom in early modernity.

The Howison lectures Foucault delivered at Berkeley in 1980, where he had already been a visitor twice (in 1975 and in 1979), are entitled "Truth and Subjectivity."[5] Their topic is the emergence of specific types of techniques associated with the government of one's own life in both the ancient philosophical tradition, especially Epicureanism and Stoicism, and in early Christian thought. According to Foucault, if we are to understand how people are governed in the modern world, we need to consider together techniques of coercion and techniques of the self within the larger framework of governmentality. The term encompasses the governing of people in a state, a city, or a household, but also the conduct of one's own life and the work one undertakes, often with the assistance of another person, in attending to oneself, or taking care of the self (all of these meanings are active in Thomas Elyot's *The Book Named the Governor*, to take a familiar Renaissance example). In techniques of the self, be they pagan or Christian, truth plays an important role, but Foucault's principal aim is to identify the different relationships that exist between truth and subjectivity in these two traditions of thought. The "gnostic" self of Christianity is under an obligation to discover and verbalise the hidden truth of the self, typically through an act of confession; the "gnomic" self of Greek and Roman philosophy does not reveal a hidden reality, but instead allows truth, in the form of remembered knowledge, to become a force united with the will, leading to a transformed way of living. While consultation and confession are already constitutive of the gnomic self, their function is not to reveal a secret reality but to allow *gnomē* (in Latin, *sententia*, "a brief piece of discourse through which truth appeared with all its force") to act within the subject (Foucault, "About the Beginning" 209–210). The chief role in this process of releasing the force of the truth is played by the counsellor, who by means of discourse and through the art of persuasion assists the memory of the advisee—"and memory is nothing else than the force of the truth when it is permanently present and active in the soul" (225).

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5   The lectures, delivered at Berkeley in the same year in which *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* was published, were recorded and can be accessed online: http://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/mfaa. The summary that follows is based on the recording as well as the published version (Foucault, "About the Beginning"). These ideas are developed further in a series of lectures Foucault delivered during the remaining years of his life; see Foucault, *Government*; *Courage of the Truth*. On the practices of *parrhesia* in the context of early modern England, see Colclough. See also Foucault, *History of Sexuality* (vol. 3, 37–68); *Ethics*; *Subjectivity and Truth*.

It is significant that in attempting to recover the gnomic self from the ancient philosophical tradition Foucault turns to Seneca as his primary source. The text he chooses, *De tranquillitate animi* ("On Tranquility of Mind"), is found among Seneca's moral essays, but it is in fact an imperfect dialogue, an incomplete scene of counsel in which Serenus solicits advice from Seneca, and Seneca responds by sending Serenus a long letter in which he provides an abundance of advice on different aspects of life. The point of this advice is to remind Serenus of the precepts with which he is already familiar, to help him remember them and translate them into a way of living. According to Foucault, Seneca uses "persuasive arguments, demonstrations, examples" not in order to discover a secret truth hidden inside the soul of his disciple, but in order to explain "to which extent truth in general is true." In other words, in this game (the term is Foucault's) between Seneca and Serenus, truth is defined as "a force inherent to principles" that has to be "developed in a discourse" ("About the Beginning" 209). Despite the length of Seneca's discourse, however, this scene of counsel is incomplete: we never hear back from Serenus, and so we never learn whether Seneca's counsel proved efficient. It is only in Seneca's plays that subjects of advice are given an opportunity to respond to the counsel they are given, by practicing themselves the art of rhetoric, and it is only in Seneca's plays that we witness the consequences of truth when it is remembered by those whose subjectivity is at stake. The various precepts offered by Seneca to Nero in *Octavia*, one of the most influential Senecan plays in the early modern period, are matched by precepts offered by Nero in response; where precepts are offered through equally persuasive arguments and examples, one begins to wonder what exactly happens to truth.

This is an important complication that presents itself when we attend to subjectivity and counsel in Renaissance contexts. As Joel B. Altman observes in his book-length study of Shakespeare's *Othello*, Renaissance humanism promoted "a fundamentally rhetorical sense of self" (*The Improbability of Othello* 20). This rhetorical consciousness that pervades the period is directly related to the dictates of the humanist educational program and the importance of rhetorical training in the humanist classroom.[6] Within this program, distinctions between truth and flattery are as central as they are increasingly impossible to maintain. This is exactly why

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6   In an earlier study, Altman suggested that a mind trained to argue on both sides of the question (*in utramque partem*), the practice that defined the rhetorical education of the Renaissance classroom, becomes capable of "a great complexity of vision" (*The Tudor Play of Mind* 3). This vision Altman sees

Hythloday, the champion of plainly spoken truth, is annoyed by More when they discuss the issue of counsel in *Utopia*. Handling the matter "wyttelye and handesomely for the purpose" and presenting it "with a crafty wile and a subtell trayne" might dull the edge of truth and deprive it of its transformative force (F6v–F7r). As in the course of the sixteenth century dissembling in the conduct of politics becomes less a matter of essence and much more a matter of degree, the exercise of plain speech can no longer escape the possibility of being perceived as a form of bad counsel.[7]

For students of literature, the striking potential of flattery to grow into truth is neatly captured in the gradually changing conception of the figure of Echo from Ovid's episode of Narcissus and Echo in *The Metamorphoses*, one of the foundational literary texts in discussions of subjectivity and its transformations over time. Whereas in the late Middle Ages, particularly in the influential interpretations of Boccaccio, Echo is seen as the symbol of absolute flattery—repeating, indiscriminately, everything that is said—in mid-sixteenth-century England she begins to assume a more questionable shape. Thomas Howell, an early translator of Ovid's tale into English, appends to his 1560 translation a long moralisation of the tale in which, despite the obvious indebtedness to Boccaccio, Echo is implicitly made to speak for a new and different generation of subjects. Echo is not simply the voice of flattery; Echo is the voice of good counsel. The paradox, indeed, is the point. The tragedy of Narcissus consists in his obsessive focus on himself and thus his inability to hear the voice of the other, represented by Echo. Counsel works, we could extend this logic somewhat, not by complete opposition but by appearing to echo the person counselled while introducing somewhere along the way its crucial difference.

Good counsel, like Echo, is here made to resemble our own words, but the meaning these words carry has changed significantly. It is as if we have come up with the words ourselves; it is as if we have discovered something in ourselves that is true and familiar but that we never knew existed. The realisation, unfortunately, may be an act of self-deception. Just as we have convinced ourselves that

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realised in certain kinds of Tudor plays, which turn out to be "essentially questions and not statements at all" (6). While Altman's study obviously informs my thinking about plays, my understanding of the problem is less essentialist and more historical in orientation: even the most rhetorical of Renaissance plays (such as *Gorboduc*, or George Buchanan's biblical dramas) were often made out to be statements, which did not stop them from continuing to be questions.

7   Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), for instance, distinguishes between three kinds of deceit: small, medium, and large; or dissimulation, deception, and perfidy. Of these, the first is to be encouraged, the second tolerated, and only the last condemned. See Burke 485.

we are agents, in full charge of the situation, we become actors ruled by the seductive accidents of language. The point is brought home poignantly in the final act of John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*. As Antonio and Delio are engaged in conversation, the echo from the ruined walls of the abbey reminds Antonio of his late wife's voice. "Hark," says Delio, "the dead stones seem to have pity on you / And give you good counsel." Antonio is unmoved: "Echo, I will not talk with thee, / For thou art a dead thing." To which Echo responds: "Thou art a dead thing" (5.3.36–39).

Who is alive and who exactly dead here? Whose self is affirmed and whose undermined? As truth and flattery, as the voice of the self and the echoing voice of the other, counsel is clearly crucial, but what role it plays in the history of the Renaissance subject is a question that early modern scholarship has not yet answered. There have been attempts, since the publication of Greenblatt's influential study, to think about Renaissance subjectivity from other perspectives, but counsel has not played a prominent part in them.[8] In *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*, Michael C. Schoenfeldt rightly points to Foucault's later work as the more relevant framework for considering subjectivity in the early modern period. What interests him, however, is "the way that individual subjectivity, and individual liberty, is secured through the individual's exercise of self-discipline" (13).[9] Similarly inspired by Foucault, the more recent studies by Cynthia Marshall and James Kuzner come somewhat closer to the versions of subjectivity explored here. Marshall operates with the concept of violence, but in her work violence is not a force that consolidates or discovers the subject but a force that potentially shatters and disperses it. Unlike Greenblatt's self-fashioned subjects, who are artfully in control, Marshall's subjects are volatile, conflicted, and unstable, "paradoxically affirmed in . . . moments of self-cancelling or shattering" and "simultaneously pulled toward opposite extremes of dissolution and coherence" (14). Marshall sees these emerging subjects in opposition to the familiar humanist narratives of development, autonomy, and control, but when we study Renaissance subjects of advice we realise that it is the contradictions within the humanist project

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8   Elizabeth Hanson offers an adversarial model, defined by "the hostile discovery of another's innermost being," most notably through scenarios of torture. Understandably, she is influenced by Foucault's earlier work, especially *Discipline and Punish*; see Hanson 8–10, 24–54, the quoted phrase at 1.

9   Schoenfeldt takes embodiment as the analytical starting point: "In early modern England, the consuming subject was pressured by Galenic physiology, classical ethics, and Protestant theology to conceive all acts of ingestion and excretion as very literal acts of self-fashioning" (11).

itself that enable conflicted, unstable, and vulnerable subjectivity. Humanist ideals and humanist results, in other words, are often at odds.[10]

Vulnerability, mostly affective in nature, is the defining characteristic of Kuzner's "open subjects," who are imagined in terms of bodies and their passions. "Selves are vulnerable in constitution," Kuzner argues, "incapable, on their own, of fully mastering either the passions threatening to undo them from within or the violence threatening from without" (18). Open subjects are contrasted with bounded, discrete selves; they are "opened up to a broad spectrum of the experience of vulnerability, from more mild forms—such as being captivated by another's seductive arguments, or sharing another's suffering—to more intense ones, such as draining the self of agency or allowing personal boundaries to be violated and changed" (Kuzner 4). One's subjection to others' seductive arguments, which Kuzner sees as a mild form of vulnerability, can, however, prove to be the source of one's undoing.

Subjects of advice are not mildly but intensely vulnerable, because, in choosing to be counselled, they make themselves available to the government of others. A succinct representation of this problem is found in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the two principal figures of counsel apparently derive from the two traditions of thought Foucault focuses on in his discussion of truth and subjectivity: the Friar is a counsellor associated with Catholic confession; the Nurse is a typical counsellor figure found in Senecan tragedy. Neither conforms to the type, however, and their function in the play is not to embody distinctive theories of counsel in relation to subjectivity. Rather, both are used to highlight the position in which subjects of advice find themselves when they turn to their counsellors for help. Juliet's case is especially instructive because it shows us how Shakespeare dramatises the threat to subjectivity once it binds itself to counsel. When Juliet hears that Romeo has been banished, she immediately turns to the Nurse for advice, figuring her subjectivity as tender and malleable: "Comfort me, counsel me. / Alack, alack, that heaven should practise stratagems / Upon so soft a subject as myself" (3.5.209–211). But Juliet proves tough enough to reject quickly the Nurse's suggestion to marry Paris and forget Romeo. Instead, she goes to Friar Laurence "to make confession and to be absolved" (3.5.234). Yet the confession turns out to be just another solicitation of advice. "Give me some present counsel," she exclaims (4.1.61), threatening to commit suicide if her urgent request is not satisfied. The Friar's counsel is presented in dramatic

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10   For a fully developed argument along these lines, focused on the humanist classroom, see Grafton and Jardine.

terms as a special potion that will literally suspend Juliet's subjectivity. Juliet's great speech ("I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins, / . . ." [4.3.15–58]), in which she envisions the possibility of dashing her brains out "with some great kinsman's bone" (4.3.53–54) when she comes to life again among the dead bodies interred in the family vault, offers a vivid depiction of the subject's struggle in deciding whether or not to submit to counsel.

In this, Juliet is far from being alone. How counsel travels and what it does to subjectivity is dramatised by Shakespeare most memorably in the character of Ophelia, the daughter of one of the best-known counsellors in early modern English drama. While the most revealing dramatic links between subjectivity and counsel in *Hamlet* are to be sought in Ophelia, the play's principal subject of advice, this cannot be meaningfully accomplished without first considering Polonius, the play's chief counselling agent. "A foolish prating knave" is how Hamlet describes Polonius after killing him at the end of Act 3. "I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room" (3.4.213), Hamlet tells Gertrude, and then stops to pass judgment on Ophelia's father while carefully placing his own mother on each side of the pronouncement:

> Mother, good night. Indeed, this counsellor
> Is now most still, most secret, and most grave,
> Who was in life a foolish prating knave.
> Come sir, to draw toward an end with you.
> Good night mother. (3.4.214–218)

The judgment is harsh but not inaccurate; the situation macabre but not without humour. Most still, most secret, and most grave is one of Hamlet's characteristic pun sequences. Here is the model counsellor, typified not by garrulity but patient silence, ready to listen rather than just talk, able to keep counsels (the word is synonymous with secrets in the period), and always serious. Literally, however, here is a motionless, heavy body hiding behind an arras. The best Polonius is clearly a dead Polonius—the best counsellor, a dead counsellor.

Hamlet's post-mortem judgment of Polonius, and by extension his judgment of what constitutes a good counsellor, has been interpreted as Shakespeare's own. In a recent study of the question of counsel in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's Polonius is understood to be both an ineffective humanist and a crafty Machiavellian, while Horatio is promoted, instead, as the vehicle of good counsel in the play because it is Horatio who relates the lessons of history just as books would do: without ornamentation,

without dissembling. Horatio is thus to be seen as embodying the most recent political ideas, especially those of Justus Lipsius, who in his *Six Bookes of Politickes*, translated into English in 1594, concludes that the best counsellors are the disembodied voices of books and "treaties of histories" (14). In other words, the dead. Without their bodies, authors cannot dissemble.[11] One would want Lipsius to go back to his Ovid and read again the tale of Narcissus and Echo from *The Metamorphoses*. It is not an accident, as I argued above, that the disembodied Echo has been understood over the centuries both as the voice of flattery and as the voice of good counsel.[12]

The more interesting thing about Lipsius' invocation of counsel and history is that it occurs in a chapter primarily concerned with memory. It is this word that takes us directly to the world of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and its preoccupations with counsel. Hamlet's triumph over one silent body, that of Ophelia's father, can be read as an expression of the wish for another body, that of his own father, to be silent. When the Ghost appears to Hamlet for the first time, revealing the murder and urging revenge, his closings words are "[r]emember me" (1.5.91). The response it prompts is not easy to interpret. "Remember thee?" (1.5.97), and Hamlet asks, and goes on to assure the Ghost that his memory will from now on allow room for nothing else:

> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
> That youth and observation copied there,
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmixt with baser matter: yes, by heaven!
> O most pernicious woman!
> O villain, villain, smiling damnèd villain!
> My tables—meet it is I set it down
> That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
> At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark. [*Writing*]

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11 Paul, "Best Counsellors" (652). Lipsius attributes the thought to Alphonsus Siciliae (Alfonso the Magnanimous).

12 Paul further argues that by the turn of the seventeenth century the humanist counsellor (focused on precepts) and the Machiavellian counsellor (focused on abusing rhetorical skill) are dislodged by a third option: "Counsellors would be simply mouthpieces for the lessons of history, given without rhetorical ornamentation or consideration of interest" ("Best Counsellors" 652). All of these versions of counsel, in my view, coexist and overlap throughout the sixteenth century. Lipsius' Ciceronian sentiment, that all examples are dark until learned authors cause them to shine (*Sixe Bookes* 14), instead of constituting a solution describes the essence of the problem.

So uncle, there you are. Now to my word:
It is 'Adieu, adieu, remember me.'
I have sworn't. (1.5.98–112)

The scene is an early and clear sign that the promise Hamlet makes is unlikely to result in immediate action. Hamlet's memory is figured as a writing table from which all knowledge—gained from both books and experience—will be erased, to make room for the Ghost's injunction. But as soon as this decision is made, Hamlet is reminded first of his mother, then of his villainous uncle; the only action he does take is to locate his actual writing tables and to record in them the hardly profound observation that there are dissemblers in the world.[13] "There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave / To tell us this" (1.5.125–126), we are tempted to say. Hamlet's obsession with the commonplace brings him dangerously close to the wisdom of Polonius, for it is exactly this kind of commonplace wisdom that Polonius dispenses as he advises his son Laertes how to behave in France, using the same figure that Hamlet will use in the encounter with his dead father: "And these few precepts in thy memory," Polonius says, "look thou character" (1.3.57–58). What follows is a series of commonplaces based on a number of familiar proverbs: "Neither a borrower nor a lender be, / For loan oft loses both itself and friend, / And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry" (1.3.75–77).[14]

Commonplaces are an inevitable part of the Renaissance science of counsel, and Shakespeare employs them in *Hamlet* to create meaning across different levels of the drama. To begin with, the play's principal advisor literally embodies a Renaissance commonplace, with a name like a remembered, twice-told tale: in the first quarto edition Ophelia's father is not called Polonius, but Corambis. Appropriately, the name lends itself to both Greek and Latin etymologisation. Two Latin words are featured here, *coram*, meaning before, in front of, and *bis*, meaning

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13 There is a suggestive parallel in earlier morality drama. After being counselled by Mercy at length, Mankind speaks the following lines: "Now, blessed be Jesu, my soul is well satiate / With the mellifluous doctrine of this worshipful man. / The rebellion of my flesh, now it is superate. / Thanking be God of the cunning that I can. / Here will I sit, and title in this paper / The incomparable estate of my promition. [*Sits and writes*]" (*Mankind* lines 311–316, in *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays* 20).

14 As Jason Powell observes, "Hamlet is more innately comfortable with the impulse to advise and to commonplace than he is with the command to revenge." Throughout the play, he struggles "under the burden of conflicting fatherly instructions and advice" (Powell 164, 177). Powell offers a detailed analysis of the confusion of fathers in the play (the Ghost, Polonius, Claudius) and stresses the importance of the long-standing tradition of fathers' advice to sons.

twice. Whenever we encounter Corambis we are to understand that he will give us nothing new, or that whatever he gives us, he will give it to us again. He always appears in the form of things remembered. The Greek etymon is even more damning: *crambe*, with its popular variant *corambe*, is Greek for cabbage, and the word is found most commonly in the Latin saying that *crambe bis posita mors est*, that cabbage twice served, or twice cooked, is certain death (as it was, we might observe, for Corambis).[15] The word is also used to describe a style characterised by excessive repetition. In *Certain Notes of Instruction*, George Gascoigne warns his reader that he may use

> the same Figures or Tropes in verse which are vsed in prose . . . but yet therein remembre this old adage, *Ne quid nimis* [Nothing in excess], as many wryters which do not know the vse of any other figure than that whiche is expressed in repeticion of sundrie wordes beginning all with one letter, the whiche (being modestly vsed) lendeth good grace to a verse, but they do so hunte a letter to death that they make it *Crambe*, and *Crambe bis positum mors est*. (36)

It is not without interest that the Polish humanist Wawrzyniec Grzymała Goślicki (Laurentius Grimaldus Goslicius), whose treatise on counsel argues for moderation and the practical kind of philosophy familiar from More's *Utopia*, might have been chosen by Shakespeare, some scholars at least believe, as the model for his counsellor figure in *Hamlet* characterised by repetition and excess (Polonius, the Pole).[16] It is not without interest, either, that Shakespeare might have chosen as his model for Corambis a figure associated with new developments in Renaissance political thought at the end of the sixteenth century: the figure of Justus Lipsius himself. It will be immediately obvious to anyone who opens Lipsius' *Six Bookes of Politickes* that his text is stitched together mostly from quotations of other authors, all of whom are dutifully listed in the margins. A leading historian of Renaissance political thought rightly describes Lipsius' *magnum opus* as "not so much a treatise as an anthology of quotations from classical writers"; Montaigne memorably styled it "this learned and laborious tissue" (Burke 485).

In fact, when Polonius is advising Laertes how to behave in France, Shakespeare seems to be borrowing directly from one of Lipsius' published works. His *Epistola de peregratione Italica* was adapted and published in English as early as 1592 under the title *A Direction for Trauailers*, "enlarged for the behoofe of the right honorable

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15   For further discussion, see Falk.

16   For an extensive survey of critical opinion, see Bałuk-Ulewiczowa.

Lord, the yong Earle of *Bedford*, being now ready to trauell." In the book, the young Earl of Bedford is instructed to observe three golden rules: "Frons aperta, lingua parca, mens clausa. Be friendlie to al, familiar to a few, and speake but sildome. In countenance be as courteous as you can, and as your state will beare; in talk as affable as you shall see cause; but keepe your minde secret vnto your selfe, till you come to those whose heartes are as yours" (Lipsius, *Direction* C3v). Compare this with the words of Polonius:

> Give thy thoughts no tongue,
> Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
> Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
> Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
> Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel. (1.3.59–63)

And further: "Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice; / Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment" (1.3.68–69). If Corambis/Polonius is made up of both Goślicki and Lipsius, two writers on counsel rarely discussed together, we should consider to what extent it is possible neatly to map Shakespeare's *Hamlet* onto the landscape of early modern political thought.[17] Instead of thinking about the play as tied to specific ideological moments or engaged in a direct dialogue with the most recent developments in Renaissance political thought, we need to consider how competing ideas about counsel travel across genres and time, refusing to be fully contextualised and inviting us, instead, to consider the possibility that the foolish and the wise (the old and the new) inhabit not just the same play but the same character. The question of character must be central to any account of the relationship between drama and counsel in early modernity.

It is in Ophelia that drama and counsel meet most memorably because they meet most tragically. More than any other character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, more even than Hamlet, Ophelia is subjected to the attention and paternalist scrutiny of others. This begins early on, with scenes of counsel in which first Laertes, as her brother, and then Polonius, as her father, direct and admonish her by means of familiar precepts.

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17 See Paul ("Counsel and Command" 127ff), for an extensive discussion of Lipsius. Goślicki, on the other hand, is excluded from Paul's survey of sixteenth-century discussions of counsel because of his "largely straightforward restatement of the Ciceronian view of the counsellor seen in Elyot" (114n431). One of the most thoroughgoing recent readings of *Hamlet* from the perspective of reason of state, a doctrine that was in the late sixteenth century increasingly associated with Tacitus (influentially edited by Lipsius), is found in Kiséry (37–88).

The topic of their advice is Prince Hamlet. That many of these commonplaces are meant to be remembered is suggested in the early quarto editions of the play by gnomic pointing printed in the margin.[18] Such inverted commas populate early modern manuscripts and books, at times as handwritten evidence of actual encounters between a reader and a text, at times as typographic evidence of how reader response was guided by an authorial or editorial hand.[19] One of their important functions is to enclose the reader in the book and thus to exert control, to point in a particular direction, to remind that without memory there cannot be self-knowledge. In a striking passage from Petrarch's *Secretum*, Augustine urges Petrarch to mark with hooks (*unci*) such passages in a text that seem to him worthy of remembrance (106, 110). The hooks in the margin will mark the place in the book, but they will also hold the thought in one's memory when the book is no longer at hand. These are the hooks that in the early counselling scenes are meant to hold Ophelia in place.

The commonplaces from the early counselling scenes do not disappear without trace; instead, they emerge as memories that disrupt the self. Ophelia's sense of self is bound up with the counsel she receives from her father and her brother, and in the course of the play this counsel is transformed by Shakespeare into an interconnected series of rich dramatic metaphors. As Margreta de Grazia argues in her discussion of generation and degeneracy in *Hamlet*, when in the scenes of madness Ophelia appears with flowers, these are not just convenient stage props symbolising virginity and wasted youth. While the flower does stand for virginity, it also stands for a particularly memorable passage, a saying, a wise thought. *Florilegia*, literally "gatherings of flowers," were anthologies of such sayings, frequently published in the period (de Grazia 116–17). "And there is pansies," Ophelia says to Laertes, "that's for thoughts" (4.5.175). Laertes' response to this strange gift is appropriately textual, and it is meant to describe Ophelia's distracted self: "A document in madness" (4.5.176). Ophelia's self, propped by both paternal and fraternal advice, is even this late in the play figured as a textual garden, but it is now a garden unweeded and gone to seed, possessed by thoughts that have lost their proper places. The counsel that was meant to constitute Ophelia as a subject erupts as a gathering of disordered memories among which the subject is dissolved.

The dead body of Ophelia adorned with flowers, Ophelia carrying and giving flowers, Ophelia receiving flowers—the insistent dramatic images prompt us to ask

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18   For an extensive recent discussion of the issue, see Lesser and Stallybrass.

19   An engaging account of such encounters in the early modern period is provided by Orgel.

how counsel travels through this play and what its transformations mean. In one sense, *Hamlet* is about generation and degeneracy—the question of succession and the future of the state. In another sense, it is about the generative and degenerative power of counsel, of the words we are expected to remember. When we consider issues of counsel in early modern drama, we need to ask how counsel is the stuff of dramatic character, the stuff of dramatic language, the stuff of the play. When Shakespeare turns to counsel, it is not to tell us whether it is good or bad but to show what it does to us, and how it undoes us. In the light of the rich dramatic tradition within which counsel had played such an important role, Shakespeare's engagements with counsel become themselves protracted labours of remembrance.

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