

Shakespeare Contra Nietzsche
or
How to Playwrite with a Hammer

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Contents

Abbreviations / iii

Acknowledgements / iv

Exordium / v

Epigraph/Cipher / viii

Shakespeare Contra Nietzsche, or, How to Playwrite with a Hammer / 1

I. Excess / 1

1. Aesthetic listening, aesthetic philosophizing / 1
2. Nietzsche's critique of Shakespeare, part one: *Hamlet's* skepticism / 8
3. Nietzsche's critique of Shakespeare, part two: Life and/as art / 16

II. Poiesis / 26

1. The will to philosophize / 26
2. Shakespeare's critique of Nietzsche, part one: Image / 33
3. Shakespeare's critique of Nietzsche, part two: Theater / 42

Coda / 48

Endnotes / 49

Bibliography / 58

Abbreviations

Nietzsche

A	<i>The Antichrist</i>
BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
BT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>
D	<i>Daybreak</i>
DW	“The Dionysiac Worldview”
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morality</i>
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i>
SC	“Attempt at Self-Criticism,” 1886 preface to BT
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
TL	“On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”
WP	<i>The Will to Power</i>
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>

Shakespeare

C	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
H	<i>Hamlet</i>
M	<i>Macbeth</i>
R	<i>Richard III</i>
RJ	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>

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Tina Zwarg provided the opposite side of the dialectic between my first readers, pushing me to expand creatively beyond a straightforward analysis of Nietzsche's writing about Shakespeare by embracing the wider historical context of early Romanticism and postmodernity which bracket Nietzsche's intellectual moment. The breadth of the philosophical claims I base upon my analysis of Nietzsche and Shakespeare derives from this expansion, as Nietzsche's relationship to both Goethe and Derrida has helped me to conceptualize Nietzsche's philosophical methodology in terms of its Shakespearean origins.

I also must thank three other professors my interactions with whom were invaluable in shaping my thoughts about my thesis. Kathleen Wright I thank for two wonderful courses on Nietzsche and Hegel in which I formulated my own understanding of what philosophy ought to be and do. Azade Seyhan I thank for conversations about and translations of Nietzsche which both helped me to clarify my own understanding of Nietzsche and guided me to a number of other writers whose views on Nietzsche are oft-quoted in the following essay. And Kim Benston I thank for two excellent courses on Shakespeare and lyric poetry during the course of which I formulated not only my conception of Shakespearean tragedy, but also an understanding of the power of literature as an alternative mode of knowing, of what Plato called the ancient quarrel between the philosophers and the poets.

In the best spirit of this list of philosophers and literary critics who have influenced my thesis, the following aims to bridge that quarrel.

Exordium

I have taken this as presenting philosophy in its sense of itself as forbearing to speak first... this must constitute a claim to responsiveness, which I have assigned to philosophy as its first virtue.

-Stanley Cavell,

Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare

Walter Kaufmann writes in *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* that “in the development from Shakespeare to existentialism no figure is more important than Nietzsche” (207). “Few writers of any age equal his fusion of scope and passion, of range and depth,” Kaufmann claims, concluding that “in this respect there is something Shakespearean about Nietzsche” (207). Kaufmann habitually compares Shakespeare and Nietzsche throughout his text, convincingly arguing for the consonance of the two writers’ thought regarding the fundamental aspects of human existence. Yet for all this Kaufmann does not take up the question of the actual, rather than the merely thematic or stylistic, relationship between Nietzsche and Shakespeare. For there is not simply “something Shakespearean” about Nietzsche, accidental to his intellectual context. Rather, Nietzsche self-consciously cultivates in his writing a profoundly Shakespearean nature.

Nietzsche autobiographically asserts that his writing is “certainly warlike,” and “prove[s] that I was no Jack the Dreamer, that I take pleasure in fencing” (EH, 276). Does this clear play upon Hamlet demonstrate “something Shakespearean about Nietzsche,” attesting a thematic resonance between these great writers? Or does Nietzsche’s text demand of us an analysis of what it means to be a fencing philosopher in the mode of Hamlet, or of Shakespeare himself?

Though none have so thoroughly drawn parallels between Bard and Philosopher, other writers than Kaufman have addressed Nietzsche’s explicit relationship to Shakespeare, and to *Hamlet* in particular. But, for all their useful deployment of Nietzsche’s commentary on *Hamlet*, these critics do little beyond such deployment. In order to leverage his own claim about the intensity of Hamlet’s individuality, Harold Bloom tells us that “in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche memorably got Hamlet right [as] the man who thinks too well” (393). Contrarily, Steve Roth, describing the epistemic limitation thematized by *Hamlet*, argues that “Nietzsche’s assertion of Hamlet’s problem—that he has achieved ‘true knowledge’... is wrong by a hundred and eighty degrees” (§26). Roth and Bloom take Nietzsche’s relationship to Shakespeare and to *Hamlet* as little more than accidental, and consequently use it instrumentally for their own theses.

Given the critical deployment of Nietzsche’s analysis of *Hamlet*, the question of influence has of course arisen. But treatments of Shakespeare’s influence upon Nietzsche fail to

transcend the assertion and elaboration of such influence. Never foregrounding Nietzsche's *self-conscious* influence by Shakespeare, they interpret the *import* of neither this influence nor its self-conscious quality. Elsewhere than his discussion of *Hamlet*, Bloom does go so far as to suggest that *Hamlet* profoundly influenced Nietzsche: Hamlet himself is a "precursor whose mark is always upon the aphorist" (740). Yet *Hamlet's* impact on Nietzsche, and Western thought generally, serves only to bolster Bloom's argument that our understanding of human nature derives from Shakespeare. Eric Blondel, in contrast, takes up *Hamlet's* influence upon Nietzsche in order to explain—by figuring Hamlet as the archetype of "playing with appearances"—Nietzsche's claim that untruth is a condition of life (163). But Blondel thereby does no more than explicate Nietzsche by analyzing one of Nietzsche's own examples. Duncan Large offers the most comprehensive narrative of Nietzsche's Shakespearean connection:

For Nietzsche, then, Shakespeare is an exemplary philosopher, psychologist, [and] anti-Christian... Nietzsche appropriates Shakespeare as his own model, creates [Shakespeare] in his own image: Nietzsche the dramatizing philosopher is drawn to Shakespeare the philosophizing dramatist. But just as Nietzsche himself changes over the course of his philosophical career, so, inevitably, Shakespeare is ceaselessly refigured and recontextualized: the jobbing thespian is constantly assigned new roles in the drama of Nietzsche's own self-overcoming/self-becoming... I want to ask the question, Who is Nietzsche's Shakespeare? (47)

Here, however, Large dissects Nietzsche's changing views of Shakespeare as benchmarks to demonstrate the evolution of Nietzsche's own philosophy, and one feels that Nietzsche's relation to Goethe, Wagner, Schopenhauer, or Socrates would serve equally well.

If scholarly attention to Nietzsche's relationship with Shakespeare gives any indication—as if alone Nietzsche's figuration of his writing qua Hamlet's fencing were insufficient—we must therefore take seriously this relationship and its import for Shakespeare criticism *pace* Bloom, Nietzsche criticism *pace* Blondel, and intellectual history *pace* Kaufmann. But we must address this relationship in a far deeper fashion than has yet been undertaken by Bloom, Blondel, or Kaufmann. Shakespeare's influence upon, or mark within, Nietzsche's corpus cannot be understood instrumentally, but rather the Shakespearean ghost which haunts Nietzsche's texts must be understood for itself, on its own terms, as it self-consciously figures itself.

We need not be so bold as to claim with Bloom that Shakespeare invented human nature, nor so crass as to trace Shakespeare's presence in contemporary pop music, in order to assert Shakespeare's profound impact upon Western literature, philosophy, and society. Perhaps in equal measure, Nietzsche radically altered the course of Western intellectual history, particularly

in the currently dominant modes or moments of continental, modernist, and postmodernist literature, philosophy, and criticism. Thus, I argue, two of the primary frameworks by which the academy currently conceives of the human subject fundamentally intertwine, as the Nietzschean thought which has dominated postmodernity conceives of itself on the most basic level as arising from and being like the tragic Shakespearean conception of humanity Bloom describes as paradigmatic for all post-Shakespeareans. Contemporary philosophy and criticism, I believe, may therefore be said to stem from the intersection of Shakespeare and Nietzsche. And so, if we wish to know our own intellectual origins in the crux of Nietzsche and Shakespeare, we would do well to heed Nietzsche's own figuration of their relationship.

We need first to *adjust* and *justify* the goal of a Shakespearean drama, that is to say, not to understand it.

-Friedrich Nietzsche,
Daybreak, §240

I. Excess

We believe that when we speak of trees, colours, snow, and flowers, we have knowledge of the things themselves, and yet we possess only metaphors of things... Here one can certainly admire humanity as a mighty architectural genius who succeeds in erecting the infinitely complicated cathedral of concepts on moving foundations, or even, one might say, on flowing water.

-Friedrich Nietzsche,
“On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy

-William Shakespeare,
Hamlet

Alas, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have let themselves dream!

-Zarathustra,
Thus Spoke Zarathustra, “Of Poets”

1. Aesthetic listening, aesthetic philosophizing

Shakespeare always escapes us. In the sublimity of their most beautiful and most terrifying moments, the worlds created in his plays and inhabited by his characters transcend either characters’ or audience’s human power of comprehension. No map could ever order the worlds in which Lear, Prospero, or Hamlet move. We grasp Juliet’s ecstatic love not because her speech verbally represents it, but because her speech gestures outside of itself to a “boundless” rapture so beyond normal human experience that no language could give it voice (RJ, II.2.134). Likewise we perceive Hamlet’s vast genius and pathos not because he lays them bare to us, but because we recognize that in their vastness they could never be laid bare, that Hamlet has “that within which passes show” (H, I.2.85). T.S. Eliot criticizes this transcendence—a literary reality which wildly escapes our understanding—because it renders Hamlet’s character “inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear” (24). The hurly-burly of the reality crafted in the Bard’s plays always exceeds anything about it which we could say, or any logical scheme by which we could comprehensively comprehend it—there are more things in (Shakespeare’s) heaven and earth than finite human beings can ever know, or even dream. Faced with the world as conceived of in Shakespearean drama, we ultimately must accept our basic epistemic limitation, stoically embracing Hamlet’s equivocal, Zen-like attitude of “let be” (H, V.2.225).

Nietzsche, too, criticizes the human drive to know, “the will to truth that still seduces us into taking so many risks,” saying with Shakespeare that the reality of “heaven and earth” exceeds our knowledge of them—except, as in Shakespeare, via the dream of poetry (BGE, §1).

The body of knowledge by which we cognize and navigate our world consists merely—though mightily—of a series of anthropomorphic, hominine metaphors built on top of the shifting, flowing, becoming reality in which we move. Thus in the retrospective 1886 preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, his “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” Nietzsche writes that the central issue of his first book, which would come to form the core of his lifelong philosophical project, consists of “the problem of science itself” (§2). For Nietzsche “science” signifies not only the physical sciences but the entire scientific mindset. As a general, formal stance toward the world, science proposes the possibility of achieving accurate, true knowledge through the theorization and formulation of reality. But for Nietzsche this theoretical, formulaic, conceptual edifice fundamentally *misses* the vibrancy of reality, the “many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have let themselves dream.” As an address to “the problem of science itself,” *The Birth of Tragedy* therefore constitutes a philosophical attack on the fantasy of accurate theoretical knowledge, launched from the vantage point of the Hamlet-ian vitality Eliot figures as “excess.” *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, Peter Sloterdijk writes, “represents at the same time the birth of the Gay Science out of the spirit of excess” (7). Like the worlds of Shakespeare’s plays, Nietzsche’s Gay Science, his new philosophy to critique and supplant theoretical science, arises from and deals authentically with excess. And so it is in the excessiveness of reality that we must locate our analysis of Shakespeare contra Nietzsche.

Insofar as the excessiveness of reality problematizes scientific, theoretical, rational means of knowing, Nietzsche’s Gay Science proffers an alternative, excessive mode of philosophy—a way of philosophizing in accordance with reality’s excessive vibrancy, rather than seeking to still that vibrancy in scientific formulae. And Nietzsche’s understanding of this new mode of philosophy derives strongly, this paper proposes, from his engagement with Shakespeare. For both Shakespeare and Nietzsche, I will demonstrate, the revelation of reality’s excess and the means of dealing authentically with that excessiveness—in philosophy or life—exist in the aesthetic domain. Therefore in Shakespeare’s tragic art Nietzsche discovers the necessity and means of philosophizing perspectively in an excessive world. This paper moves dialectically between Shakespeare and Nietzsche in order to portray their art and philosophy interacting intertextually to conceptualize excess, its implications for the human subject, and its impact upon philosophical methodology. Chapter one performs a Nietzschean reading of Shakespeare, particularly *Hamlet*, in order to understand, from Nietzsche’s pithy comments on it, what *Hamlet*

means for Nietzsche. Guided in my reading by Nietzsche's reading of *Hamlet*, the conclusions I reach about Shakespeare's insights into reality and human subjectivity will delineate a theory of excess from which I will argue Nietzsche's philosophy derives. Chapter two, therefore, returns to Nietzsche, deploying my Nietzschean reading of Shakespeare as an exegesis of Nietzsche's conception of philosophy and his own philosophical practice. Nietzsche's philosophizing, I will argue, self-consciously cultivates in itself a Shakespearean nature, as Nietzsche qua philosopher theatrically performs his philosophy by himself acting the part of Shakespeare.

The remainder of this section establishes a Nietzschean framework by which to conceive of the opposition between art and science as means of knowing, and will posit that, for Nietzsche, Shakespeare represents the possibility of a new tragic, artistic way of philosophizing. This conceptual framework opposing art to science will guide the Nietzschean reading of *Hamlet* in the second and third sections of this chapter. From Nietzsche's commentary on the epistemology and ethics of *Hamlet*, section two will read Hamlet as a character of profound skepticism and ethical paralysis. I will interpret Hamlet's relationship to the Ghost as a figuration of human social relationships, and thereby argue that the Ghost's equivocal, spectral nature motivates and exemplifies a profound skepticism of the possibility of knowing other minds. This skepticism, by precluding knowledge of others' intentions—the truth of their claims, or the guilt of their consciences—precludes knowledge of the morality of one's actions in the social realm, and therefore prevents Hamlet from acting. The third section of this chapter will seek to understand how, despite his epistemic limitation and ethical paralysis, Hamlet is able to act to take revenge. In the face of a skeptical world, Hamlet, I will argue, adopts a theatrical relationship to his own subjectivity, treating himself as the artist who writes the part which he himself en-acts. Hamlet's ability to kill Claudius therefore depends upon the artistic creation of his own morality—a creation of values I will conceptualize through Nietzsche's understanding of the will as a force of interpretation.

Returning to Nietzsche in chapter two, this paper will deploy the Shakespearean understanding of skepticism and artistic self- and value-creation in an excessive world as a way to understand the activity of Nietzsche's philosophy itself. Given Nietzsche's self-figuration as the fencing Hamlet, both Nietzsche's self-conscious self-creation as a philosopher and his positioning of the philosopher as an exemplary human being will be understood through the artful nature of Hamlet's subjectivity. Nietzsche's ability to offer positive philosophical claims in

the face of an excessive, skeptical world will be found to consist in his self-dramatization as a literary character within his philosophy, in the same way in which Hamlet comes to act by artistically creating himself and his values. Therefore Nietzsche's self-figuration as Hamlet constitutes a role-playing by which Nietzsche assumes the personas of Hamlet and Shakespeare in order to philosophize at all. Understood in this way, Nietzsche's philosophy becomes a theatrical staging of philosophy, a dramaturgical instantiation of theory which allows theory to deal authentically with excess by only ever being artistically en-acted, offered as a performance on the written stage (page) of philosophy rather than as an objective formulation of the world. Consequently the role of art as an epistemological alternative to science will be modeled in Nietzsche's very relationship to Shakespeare, as Nietzsche's dramatic assumption of Shakespeare's persona allows Nietzsche to philosophize perspectively in accord with excess.

To model excessive philosophy through my analysis of Shakespeare contra Nietzsche, however, I must first delineate the opposition between excess and traditional philosophy. In Kant and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche claims, German philosophy theorized the limits of theory (BT §§18 & 19). Kant's rational exploration of what reason can and cannot know represents for Nietzsche science itself coming to know its own limitation as a means of seeking knowledge. Something about the world, about the human experience of living, necessarily exceeds what science can theorize, and at the end of the Enlightenment the exuberance of science turned scientific analysis upon itself and realized its epistemic finitude. Thus Nietzsche asserts that science comes "to its limits time after time, at which point it must transform itself into *art*" (BT, §15). Kant writes in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the rationally knowable "land of truth" lies encircled "by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape" (354). But for Nietzsche, rather than recoiling from the edge of its island to remain within its scientific limitations, knowledge can and should leap into the dangerous unknown of human experience—the "boundless" sea of Juliet's love, or the ocean of Hamlet's metamorphosis—by transforming itself into art. According to Nietzsche, philosophy ought to become artistic, rendering science into art, so that by the *Gay Science* we may know the "many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have let themselves dream."

Through its focus on Greek tragedy, over and against post-Socratic Greek philosophy,

The Birth of Tragedy aims precisely at this transformation of philosophy from science into art. For, while *The Birth of Tragedy* addresses “the *problem of science* itself,” “the problem of science cannot be recognized within the territory of science,” but must “be communicated, located in the territory of *art*” (SC, §2). That is, analyzing reason from within reason itself, Kant remains content to abandon the stormy ocean in favor of the “land of truth.” For Nietzsche to launch his attack on science from the vantage-point of Hamlet-ian excess consequently requires a standpoint outside of science capable of authentically thinking excess. Thus it is from the territory of (Greek tragic) art, the perspective of the poet and his dreams, that Nietzsche can and does assert the necessity of venturing onto the stormy ocean.¹ “There is an eternal struggle between the *theoretical* and the *tragic views of the world*,” Nietzsche claims, and exalts the tragic worldview as that which accesses the truth of human life (BT, §17). Only in tragic art—not in the scientific formulae of Kantian practical reason or Platonic morality—can we know human life, human vitality, what Nietzsche calls “the Will,” “the fearful drive to exist... the *excess* of pleasure and suffering and knowledge in nature” (DW, §2). Liberated from the “land of truth” and beholden only unto the rapture of its own appearance, art paradoxically achieves a vital truth about life which science can never reach. While science asserts a universal, theoretical truth, art operates in accord with “*perspectivism*, which is the fundamental condition of all life,” portraying the excessive pain and pleasure of living which escape the universalizing perspective of science (BGE, Preface). Freed from attempting to find objective truth, art achieves free play, aesthetically representing the myriad sides of human nature and giving non-representational insight into the terrible Dionysiac truth of our tragic existence. *The Birth of Tragedy* therefore aims “to look at science through the prism of the artist, but also to look at art through the prism of life” (SC, §2). From the territory of tragic art Nietzsche critiques science—but he thereby also critiques art from the perspective of its relation and import to life.²

The tragic art central to *The Birth of Tragedy* thus plays two roles, serving both as analyst/opponent of science and as instrument of life. On the one hand, as a revelation of the Dionysiac truth of existence, the “*excess* of pleasure and suffering and knowledge in nature,” tragic art provides a specific set of insights counter to those of science. The tragic knowledge of suffering embodied in Aeschylus and Sophocles, for Nietzsche, belies the moral realism Kant or Plato achieve through ratio-scientific analyses of morality. Oedipus’ fated suffering, his *moira*, refutes Socrates’ simultaneously ethical and ontological claim that justice is “something to be

valued by anyone who is going to be blessed with happiness, both because of itself and because of what comes from it” (*Republic*, 358a). Conversely, tragic knowledge of the excessive joy of living figured by the vitally anthropomorphic Greek pantheon, particularly Dionysus, belies the sterile theorization of life in rationalistic or moralistic terms which banish pleasure and passion from ethics or politics. Offering its own tragic view of the world, tragedy denies the capacity of scientific theory to meaningfully comprehend human relationships and human life.

On the other hand, art as a means of living and philosophizing emerges as the upshot of this tragic, Dionysiac insight. Tragic art reveals both the necessity of an artful mode of analysis to accessing the tragic truth of existence, and that an artful, tragic way of being in the world constitutes the proper response to this truth. Asserting that tragedy, contrary to science, achieves insight into “the *excess* of pleasure and suffering and knowledge in nature,” Nietzsche claims that we can only come to *know* by attuning ourselves to tragedy, by becoming an “*aesthetic listener*” (BT, §22). To philosophize is to aesthetically, tragically address existence as an aesthetic, tragic phenomenon—to read the world like a tragic drama. Consequently to live in accordance with this insight is to live aesthetically, to live tragically, like the tragically creative geniuses Oedipus, Prometheus, or Hamlet. Philosophy becomes aesthetic listening, and aesthetic listening leads to aesthetic living. Seen “*through the prism of life*,” art *becomes* life. Thus the very act of pursuing “*Dionysiac Wisdom*” will lead to “a new form of existence” in which philosophers and humanity will “dare to be tragic human beings” (BT, §§19-20). Art is our font of knowledge of ourselves, and from it we learn that we ought to live artistically: “art—and not morality—is the true *metaphysical* activity of man” (SC, §5).

Thus with the recognition of its own limits by science, Nietzsche hails a consequent and catalytic instauration of tragedy as the dominant, excessive mode of philosophizing and living. He writes, “only when the spirit of science has been carried to its limits and its claim to universal validity negated by the demonstration of these limits might one hope for a rebirth of tragedy; the symbol which we would propose for this cultural form is that of the *music-making Socrates*” (BT, §17). Emerging as it does after a scientific period, after two millennia of Socratic theory, tragedy cannot simply be reinstated as the successor of Aeschylus and Sophocles, but must be *reborn* as a mode of tragedy which has passed through theoretical culture.³ Both changed by science but also with its Dionysiac wisdom intact, Nietzsche writes that art must come to be “a necessary correlative and supplement to science,” symbolized not by a purely musical composer

like Wagner but by the music-making Socrates, a musical philosopher blending the Socratic will to truth with the non-representational power of musical composition (BT, §14). Jochen Schulte-Sasse argues that, in order to establish and maintain the dominance of reason amongst human intellectual pursuits, modernist political thinkers like Weber and Habermas attempt to create “functionally differentiated social practices” parallel to the physical division of labor in society (Sloterdijk, x). Consequently, Schulte-Sasse claims, these thinkers defer “the Other of reason” to a “delimited and relatively autonomous aesthetic realm,” rendering art a mere play abjected from the realm of thought (Sloterdijk, x). In contrast—guided largely, I think, by the excessiveness and artfulness of Shakespearean drama—Nietzsche denies this intellectual division of labor, seeking to hypostatize art for the purpose of blending it fully with reason and thereby creating an artistic, playful, tragic philosophy figured by the composing Socrates.

Yet in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche remains vague about the music-making Socrates, mentioning him only as such and describing a new tragic age more by analogy to Greek tragedy than as a reborn synthesis of art and science. Consequently, in order to illuminate the nature of the Gay Science as a reborn tragic philosophy, I posit that Shakespearean tragedy, understood in its excessive analogy to Nietzsche’s Dionysiac worldview, figures for Nietzsche the music-making Socrates, the instauration of tragic culture as a response to tragic knowledge. Though he only analytically references Shakespeare twice in *The Birth of Tragedy*—in seemingly accidental moments, as explanatory analogs of Greek tragedy—Nietzsche’s notebook of 1870-71, during the composition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, assigns Shakespeare a central role in tragedy’s rebirth:

Apollonian and Dionysian.

Lyric.

Tragedy. Tragic.

Dithyramb.

The death of tragedy. Socrates: ‘What was at issue was finding the tragic idea.’

Shakespeare: ‘The poet of tragic knowledge.’

Wagner. (*Early Notebooks*, 7[130])

Euripides on the path of science seeks the tragic idea, in order to attain the effect of dithyramb through words.

Shakespeare, the poet of fulfillment, he brings Sophocles to perfection, he is the *Socrates who makes music*. (7[131])

Shakespeare: the fulfillment of Sophocles. The Dionysian has been completely absorbed into images. The omission of the chorus was completely justified, but at the same time the Dionysian element was allowed to fade away. It breaks forth in Christianity and gives birth to a new music.

The task of our time: to find the culture for our music. (7[134])

Euripides and Socrates signify a new beginning in the development of art: *out of tragic knowledge*. This is the task of the future, which so far only Shakespeare and our music have completely appropriated. In this sense Greek tragedy is only a preparation: a yearning serenity. (7[166])

Nietzsche embeds Shakespeare within the integral fabric of *The Birth of Tragedy*, analyzing him in terms of the critical conceptual oppositions which structure *The Birth of Tragedy* and thereby hailing Shakespeare as the upshot of *The Birth of Tragedy*, as the Socrates who makes music. Michael Tanner asserts that Nietzsche abandoned his attempt to assimilate Shakespeare into *The Birth of Tragedy* because the portrayal of tragedy as basically musical meant that Shakespeare's a-musicality "put [Nietzsche] in an awkward position, which he dealt with by almost total evasion" (15). Yet Nietzsche clearly wanted to understand "*the culture for our music*" through Shakespearean drama, even if he could not do so in *The Birth of Tragedy* itself, and Nietzsche continued to offer partial analyses of Shakespeare throughout his career—with some of the most important coming only in *The Will to Power*. Taken altogether, then, Shakespeare's presence in Nietzsche's notes, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and throughout Nietzsche's corpus offers the possibility of (re)constructing Nietzsche's reading of Shakespeare for the purpose of determining the culture of and for the music-making Socrates. This is the task the remainder of this chapter sets for itself.

2. Nietzsche's critique of Shakespeare, part one: *Hamlet's* skepticism

Christening Shakespeare "the poet of tragic knowledge," Nietzsche styles Shakespearean drama as an epistemological breakthrough in which tragedy resurfaces and reaches "fulfillment" after the long dominance of thought by theory. The locution "poet of tragic knowledge" returns us to the duality by which tragedy operates—articulated above as the dual role of opponent of science and instrument of life—indicating simultaneously that body of knowledge which is tragic and the tragic, poetic means by which knowledge arises. I seek to read Shakespeare as Nietzsche did, or might have, framing their mutual excessiveness through Nietzsche's opposition of art and life to science. My Nietzschean reading of Shakespeare consequently revolves around Shakespeare's "tragic knowledge," both the tragic body of knowledge which his plays offer, counter to science, and the quest for knowledge which they dramatize in their characters' tragic lives. Alongside Nietzsche, I critique Shakespearean epistemology.

Nietzsche's only sustained commentary on *Hamlet*, from *The Birth of Tragedy*, supports the centrality I ascribe to Shakespearean epistemology. Limning "the ecstasy of the Dionysiac state" essential to tragedy, Nietzsche offers Hamlet as an archetype of artist, thinker, and human:

In this sense Dionysiac man is similar to Hamlet: both have gazed into the true essence of things, they have *acquired knowledge* and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion—this is the lesson of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he reflects too much, out of an excess of possibilities, as it were. No, it is not reflection it is true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action, both in the case of Hamlet and in that of Dionysiac man. Now no solace has any effect, there is a longing for a world beyond death; beyond the gods themselves; existence is denied, along with its treacherous reflection in the gods or in some immortal Beyond. Once truth has been seen, the consciousness of it prompts man to see only what is terrible or absurd in existence wherever he looks; now he understands the symbolism of Ophelia's fate, now he grasps the wisdom of the wood-god Silenus [that it is best never to be born, and next-best to die soon]; he feels revulsion. (BT, §7)

Forming the core and the guiding principle of the reading of *Hamlet* which follows, Nietzsche's complex analysis of *Hamlet* will need to be unpacked slowly, testing its particular assertions against Shakespeare's text in order to illuminate both *Hamlet* and Nietzsche's analysis of it.

I want to explore Nietzsche's absurdist, nihilistic conclusion about Hamlet and Dionysiac man by explicating over the remainder of this chapter the precise movement between Nietzsche's claims regarding three levels of epistemological analysis in *Hamlet*. Nietzsche begins with Hamlet's quest for knowledge, Hamlet's own epistemic and epistemological project of gazing "into the true essence of things." Nietzsche then articulates the knowledge which Hamlet has "*acquired*," the recognition that he "can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things." Finally, Nietzsche distills the knowledge which the play itself—in its dramatization of Hamlet's quest for and achievement of knowledge—embodies for and offers to the spectator, calling it "the lesson of Hamlet" by which the viewer now "grasps the wisdom of the wood-god Silenus." This third level synthesizes the previous two because, in its positioning of the spectator as an interrogator of the play's "lesson," it renders the spectator *as* Hamlet, occupying the role of seeker and finder of knowledge which in the play belongs to Hamlet. Consequently this third, synthetic level of epistemological analysis presents the tragic epistemology which is Hamlet's *modus operandi* to the viewer as the dualistic means by which the viewer can know and be in the world. The process of interpreting "the lesson of Hamlet"—by becoming "*aesthetic listeners*" attuned to Hamlet's tragic character—morphs the spectator himself into the Dionysiac man Hamlet exemplifies. Thus, explicating Nietzsche's analysis of *Hamlet* will illuminate tragedy's

dualistic function for both Nietzsche's philosophy and Shakespeare's tragedy.

Rather than constituting an acquisition of knowledge, however, *Hamlet* seems to be an endless querying of the world. "Who's there?", the play begins, and even unto the last scene no character knows fully the thoughts and actions of his or her neighbors (H, I.1.1). Therefore, in order to interpret Nietzsche's claim that Hamlet has "*acquired knowledge*," I want to begin with the paradoxical assertion that Hamlet ultimately does not and cannot know. Far from embodying a positive "tragic knowledge" of the world, *Hamlet* manifests a profound, pervasive, and corrosive skepticism. In fact, Stanley Cavell argues that Shakespearean drama represents the first skepticism in Western intellectual history to embrace such a profound corrosiveness, writing that "the advent of skepticism as manifested in Descartes' *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare" (3). In its staunch, if anxious, agnosticism regarding God's role in human affairs, Shakespearean drama constitutes for Cavell the first full secular questioning of the possibility of knowing and living "at all in a groundless world," surpassing in degree Descartes' uncertainty by refusing God as a basis for knowledge (3).⁴ *Hamlet*, that is, thematizes the practically endless questions which it contains as a skeptical statement about the impossibility of grounding knowledge and the consequent impossibility of knowing. In its characters, plot, and even its language, Shakespearean tragedy therefore remains always "obedient to a skeptical structure," refusing to settle on positive truths or resolutions (Cavell, 5).

Radical skeptical uncertainty lies at the very heart of *Hamlet*, perfectly embodied by the disembodied Ghost of Hamlet's father which sets in motion and maintains the energy of the play's action. On the "bitter cold" battlements of Elsinore where we enter the play, at the "dead hour" of midnight which strangely makes the Danish guard "sick at heart," the Ghost appears and "harrows [Horatio] with fear and wonder" (H, I.1.8, 65, 9, &44). The Ghost inspires such fear and wonder, such cold sickness in the dead dark of night, because its very existence is questionable, inexplicable, liminally hovering betwixt reality and unreality. It arrives at the witching hour, what Macbeth calls "this pernicious hour" which stands "accursed in the calendar," a liminal setting between night and day the darkness of which occludes perception of reality (M, IV.1.133-134). And mirroring its setting, the Ghost's own reality lies in question. Prior to the Ghost's appearance, Barnardo reports that "Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,/And will not let belief take hold of him/Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us" (H, I.1.23-25). Fantastic, the Ghost exceeds the bounds of normal empirical experience—a disembodied spirit

ought not be sensible—and so even though “twice seen of us” the Ghost is not an entity which may be *known* via its perception, but only ever admits of belief or disbelief.

Even faced with the Ghost’s presence on the battlements (and stage), Horatio withholds a claim to knowledge. Barnardo asks if the Ghost is “not something more than fantasy?” to which Horatio replies that “I might not this believe/Without the sensible and true avouch of mine own eyes” (H, I.1.54 & 56-58). His ontology founded upon the sensible and his epistemology upon the power of sensation, even with the sensible Ghost before him Horatio hedges his response in the conditional terminology of “believe” and “might.” Thus Horatio addresses the Ghost as a simultaneously existent and non-existent entity, “stay, illusion,” positing its presence as a being which can “stay” even as he reduces it to mere appearance (H, I.1.42). “Thou art a scholar,” Marcellus declares, “speak to it, Horatio” (H, I.1.42). But Horatio’s scholarly power reaches its epistemic limit with the Ghost. Horatio elaborates multiple theories of ghostly existence, but though he solicits the Ghost’s response to his theories—“speak of it” (H, I.1.139)—his question hangs in the air and the Ghost escapes the guards’ comprehension.

Why does such a dubious entity impel the action of a play about the consummate thinker, Hamlet? And why precisely is the Ghost so dubious for those who see it? Why, that is, is *Hamlet* a skeptical play? Shakespearean drama, Alessandro Serpieri argues, arises amidst the

great structural and epistemological crisis that occurred between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries... that can be summarized as the conflict between a *symbolic model* of the world (a classical-medieval-Renaissance heritage) and a *syntagmatic model* of the world, inaugurating the relativism of modernity. (125)

On the symbolic worldview of medieval thought, things mean as symbolic substitutes for God. Epistemologically, Catherine Belsey argues, this worldview meant that “knowledge was ultimately knowledge not of the world and the self but of God... God, the *Logos*, at once divinity, concept and word, was pure meaning and pure being” (56). Calling the symbolic model one of “discursive knowledge,” Belsey asserts that to know is simply to accurately discern the meaning of divinity by properly reading the discursive knowledge of the Bible as symbol and Word of God (56). In contrast, on the syntagmatic worldview of later 17th century thought—which can be characterized as scientific in the modern sense—things mean through their material relations to other physical objects. Labeling this a model of “empirical knowledge,” Belsey claims that “since things themselves... cannot implant knowledge of themselves in the subject [as can God], it is experience, lodged in the subject itself, which is now the source of

knowledge” (65). Knowing things merely as a syntagmatic relation of material objects which do not symbolize a transcendental signified, scientific knowledge is knowledge of objects themselves as experienced in their syntagmatic empirical relation with the knowing subject.

Shakespearean drama erupts in the middle of the shift between these two modes of knowing, and therefore in it the empirical and the discursive models of knowledge “converge and conflict” (Belsey, 71). “Shakespearean drama,” Serpieri writes, “encodes the crumbling of the symbolic model, with its centripetal ideology and its stabilizing rhetoric, but rarely permits a positive perception of the syntagmatic model that erodes it through its centrifugal ideology and its destabilizing rhetoric” (126). The impossibility of knowing the Ghost thus emerges from the conflicting worldviews at play amongst those who would know it.⁵ On the discursive epistemological worldview, the Ghost would directly symbolize God or Satan’s will on earth. Contrarily, on a purely scientific, empirical worldview, the Ghost would be simply another object in syntagmatic relation with the human subject who knows it. Yet the Ghost exceeds either material objectification or transcendental reification. Beyond the realm of what he can know through mere sensory interrogation, Horatio must address the Ghost as both real and unreal, transcending materiality to be a symbolic simile “in the same figure like the king that’s dead” (H, I.1.41). Simultaneously, Horatio cannot but address the Ghost from his scientific, scholarly perspective, only able to analyze it through “the sensible and true avouch” of his eyes, and thereby reducing its transcendence. Shakespeare writes the Ghost—one of only two roles we know Shakespeare himself to have played (Bloom, 385)—such that it exceeds understanding by either the outgoing religious framework or the incoming scientific one, rejecting either worldview’s capacity to think all of human experience because each captures something which the other cannot. Faced with the fantastic, Horatio *must* withhold a commitment to knowledge.⁶

Descartes’ skepticism in the *Meditations* similarly arises out of the epistemological crisis of awakening empiricism, as Descartes realizes the failure of both religious dogma and commonsense perception to accurately understand heliocentrism. But while Descartes ultimately founds his epistemology on God, trusting his senses insofar as they admit of rational, mathematical analysis, the world of *Hamlet* never recovers from the Ghost’s equivocation which “usurp’st this time of night,” dragging all reality into its own liminality at the witching hour (H, I.1.46). Hamlet himself, a far subtler scholar than Horatio, lets his worldview fall prey to the Ghost’s equivocal existence, declaring on first sighting the Ghost: “Be thou a spirit of health or

goblin damned,... Thou com'st in such a questionable shape/That I will speak to thee" (H, I.4.40-44). Oscillating irresolvably between the possibility of good and evil, even the "questionable shape" of the Ghost equivocates between indicating the Ghost's dubiousness and its ability to respond to questions (Barnet, lxiii). And even after seemingly accepting the Ghost's tale and promising revenge, Hamlet retains his sense of bewilderment, averring that "the spirit I have seen/May be a devil, and the devil hath power" (H, II.2.537-38).

Like Descartes' evil deceiver, the possibility of which casts all knowledge into doubt, the Ghost's potentially demonic constitution invades Hamlet's conception of the world itself. If the Ghost's claim of murder is true, Hamlet is straightforwardly and utterly bound to vengeance, which "all alone shall live/Within the book and volume of [his] brain" (H, I.5.7 & 102-3). Yet the Ghost's claims may be questioned—as demon or mere figure of the king—because it may be, like the dream-world of Descartes' deceiver, illusory. "Everything in the play depends upon Hamlet's response to the Ghost," Bloom claims, foregrounding the centrality of Hamlet's reading of the Ghost to the whole of the play's action (387). Thus his skepticism regarding the Ghost's nature renders all of his actions and all of the play's reality suspect for Hamlet—as A.C. Bradley writes, "thought is the element of [Hamlet's] life, and his thought is infected" (87).

The Ghost's dubiousness might, of course, be passed off as a fictional quirk of the stage, inapplicable to reality. But Hamlet's skepticism about the Ghost metaphorically represents, I believe, a profound inability to know the minds and motives of other human beings.⁷ The Ghost rebuffs empirical analysis because its partly transcendental nature exceeds Horatio's sensible epistemology. Likewise, the contents of human minds exceed the capacity of others to experientially know them. On an existentialist view of human beings as transcendental subjects, the ability to intend makes us what we are as subjects because intentionality necessarily transcends materiality—rendering others' intentions in social interaction empirically unknowable. Marcellus asks Horatio if the Ghost "is... not like the king?", to which Horatio replies "as thou art to thyself" (H, I.1.58-9). Horatio's syntagmatic, empirical relation to Marcellus is precisely like Horatio's experience of the Ghost. Knowable only as a "figure like the king," the Ghost's transcendence figures Marcellus's empirical appearance to Horatio as a "figure like" Marcellus, without Marcellus ever fully being able to "stand and unfold" himself (H, I.1.2). Polonius's fatal misreading of Hamlet's madness thus confirms on a less fantastic plane the very real skeptical danger represented by the Ghost. While physical objects may be

known by the emerging empiricism, the more important, potentially fatal social interactions with which Hamlet is concerned in his quest for revenge exceed empirical analysis—“one may smile, and smile, and be a villain” (H, I.5.108). Consequently, experientially limited to its appearance and not its intent, Hamlet cannot *know* the verity of the Ghost’s claim. Hamlet cannot even ground his knowledge in Claudius’s overheard confession because, as we know from Iago’s stage-managed deception of Othello, speech may be manipulated and meaning occluded. The meaning and truth of another’s assertions or actions always admit of doubt, and so Hamlet remains skeptical in the social sphere in which his own guilt or innocence as a revenger lies.

Hamlet’s skepticism thus constitutes not merely an epistemological problem, a “mote... to trouble the mind’s eye,” but also an ethical dilemma (H, I.1.112). In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates asserts that Euthyphro must know the nature of piety if he is to prosecute his father for impiety (4e). Similarly, Descartes’ skepticism leads him to posit that “it is clear by the natural light that the perception of the intellect should always precede the determination of the will” (41). Proper action requires knowledge. Yet, faced with a socially contextualized demand for action, and skeptical of knowing the contents of other minds, Hamlet cannot know before acting. Depending on the verity of the Ghost’s claim, killing Claudius may constitute either justice or murder—and Hamlet cannot ground the verity of that claim. In fact, Belsey writes of Ghosts in revenge plays that, “neither real nor unreal, they inaugurate a course of action which is both mad and sane, correct and criminal” (116). Predicated on the ontologically questionable figure of the Ghost—a formal, fantastic structure of revenge tragedy—the call to vengeance which motivates Hamlet and *Hamlet* elicits the same skepticism which applies to the Ghost itself. Necessarily skeptical toward the foundation of his revenge, Hamlet must be skeptical of the sanity and correctness of his revenge itself, questioning its necessity, morality, and efficacy in restoring justice. That is, if the Ghost represents the impossibility of knowing other minds, Hamlet simply cannot achieve sufficient knowledge to justify killing.⁸ Taking a life in vengeance, even if “examples gross as earth exhort” one to it, lies outside the realm of rationally determinable morality because the guilt of the victim and the necessity of revenge cannot be sufficiently confirmed (H, IV.4.46).

In contrast to Hamlet’s ethical paralysis, Thomas Nagel defends a position of moral realism in which rationality provides “*the truth*” regarding proper conduct. He writes that reason is an attempt to turn myself into a local representative of the truth, and in action of the right. Freedom requires holding oneself in one’s hands and choosing a direction in thought or action for the highly contingent and particular individual

that one is, from a point of view outside of oneself, that one can nevertheless reach from inside oneself... The applicability to us of moral concepts is the consequence of... the ability to see ourselves objectively. (118)

For Nagel, human reason can objectively analyze the proper course of action in any given situation, externally authorizing the individual's action from the perspective of "the truth" and "the right." As the rational foundation of mathematical propositions declares itself self-evidently—two plus two simply equals four—the moral propositions of practical reason, which assert "agent-neutral reasons" for acting in accord with objective precepts and treating all human beings objectively the same, make an undeniable claim upon human agents (Nagel, 120). Nagel argues that the egoistic drive to self-preservation depends upon the inescapable assignment of objective value to human beings: "Can you really believe that objectively, it doesn't matter whether you die of thirst or not—and that your inclination to believe that it does is just the false objectification of your self-love?" (122). Anyone's dying of thirst, Nagel claims, constitutes an objective wrong, but "concentrating on your own case stimulates the imagination, which is why the fundamental moral argument takes the form, 'How would you like it if someone did that to you?'" (122). Moral reason, on Nagel's view, provides objective precepts and motives for acting because it necessarily generalizes the individual's self-love to a human community, thereby rendering the individual agent's actions objectively value-laden within the agent's social context.

Yet, through the figure of the Ghost, *Hamlet* demonstrates the impossibility of acquiring sufficient knowledge about one's social context to motivate a rational judgment to act for or against one's peers. A transcendental, *human* element, figured by the Ghost, always exceeds Hamlet's capacity to generalize his situation to others, because he remains skeptical of knowing their minds. No authority can authorize Hamlet's belief or disbelief in Claudius's guilt and guilty conscience, and so Hamlet can never obtain the data necessary to make a rational, moral decision about revenging his father and killing Claudius. Given the possibility of considering oneself and one's peers as objectively similar entities, Nagel may well be right about the reality of morally reasoned conduct. But *Hamlet* utterly forecloses the possibility of considering others and the self as objectively the same, because others appear as no more than figures like themselves. Ethically paralyzed, his capacity for moral reasoning foreclosed, Hamlet thus denies morality altogether, "there is nothing/either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (H, II.2.253-54).⁹

Hamlet's moral skepticism, resulting from his skeptical epistemology in response to the (social) world's dubious ontology, returns us to Nietzsche's analysis that "knowledge kills

action.” Deferring until the following section a discussion of the *process* by which Hamlet acquires knowledge, I want to argue that Hamlet’s negative comprehension of the nullity of morality constitutes both the knowledge which Nietzsche believes Hamlet has “*acquired*” and the basis for Hamlet’s “revulsion” at the prospect of action. Echoing Cavell by arguing that *Hamlet* concludes with the “bleak prospect of eternal uncertainty, and purposes permanently mistook,” Steve Roth posits that *Hamlet*’s skepticism refutes Nietzsche’s claim that Hamlet has achieved “true knowledge” (§25). What—and all that—Hamlet knows is that “he can never truly know” (Roth, §26). Roth, I think, hits upon the truth of both *Hamlet* and Nietzsche’s commentary on it without himself recognizing it: Nietzsche’s assertion of Hamlet’s “true knowledge” rests precisely on the fact that Hamlet knows his utter lack of or ability to acquire knowledge or truth. Meaningful moral action requires a degree of knowledge the impossibility of which renders moral action similarly impossible. Thus, having “gazed into the true essence of things” and seen his inability to know, Hamlet recognizes that practical morality cannot exist. Consequently, unable to know justice, Hamlet cannot restore justice to the world—his “actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things” and so he “regard[s] it as laughable... that [he] should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint.” Thus it is “insight into the terrible truth” of tragic skepticism “which outweighs every motive for action.” Only “shrouded in a veil of illusion”—fantasizing reason’s moral power to justify action—can one act. “Is Hamlet *understood*?” Nietzsche asks, “not doubt, *certainty* is what drives one insane” (EH, 246).

3. Nietzsche’s critique of Shakespeare, part two: Life and/as art

Yet Hamlet acts. Though he does not address this fact in his analysis of *Hamlet* in *The Birth of Tragedy*, limiting himself to the nihilistic depiction of a pre-Act V Hamlet, Nietzsche certainly recognized and appreciated Hamlet’s activity insofar as Nietzsche describes his own philosophy as the play of fencing by which Hamlet accomplishes his revenge. Moreover, immediately after his nihilistic analysis of *Hamlet* in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche turns to the possibility of acting—indeed of living at all—after recognizing the Dionysiac truth of existence. Hamlet’s skepticism, that is, constitutes for Nietzsche the extreme pitch of nihilism before the possibility of living and acting reemerges. “Here, at this moment of supreme danger for the will,” Nietzsche writes, “*art* approaches as a saving sorceress with the power to heal. Art alone can redirect those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live” (BT, §7). Action requires one to “be shrouded in a veil

of illusion,” and while tragic skepticism strips away rational morality as a justificatory veil, art allows man to live and act through its artful representations, its artificially illusory veils. With this assertion of its healing power we approach and begin to understand art’s second role as the instrument of life in an excessive world, but without having first fully understood art’s initial role as the font of knowledge of excess. We know Hamlet’s tragic knowledge—that all motives for action exceed ratio-moralistic analysis and that consequently no action can right a tragic world—but we have reached this formulation of Hamlet’s skepticism without first properly articulating the process by which Hamlet has reached his insight. Permit me to step back, then, and, returning to the Ghost, elaborate more precisely Hamlet’s arrival at the “terrible truth” of existence.

Tragic art, for Nietzsche, absorbs the spectator into the Dionysiac ecstasy of “the *excess* of pleasure and suffering and knowledge” embodied on the stage. By so making the audience qua “*aesthetic listeners*” *feel* its Dionysiac ecstasy, drama grants the audience non-representational, pathetic understanding of reality’s tragic, excessive, amoral nature. Plunging back into *Hamlet*, I want to argue that Shakespeare dramatizes a similar tragic epistemology, founding knowledge—even the skeptical knowledge that one cannot know—upon a dramatic process. Hamlet comes to his skeptical attitude toward the world through a theatrical relationship to the world. Consequently, by modeling this theatrical relation of the knower to knowledge *within Hamlet*, Shakespeare models the audience’s relation to *Hamlet* itself as a drama. Because they occupy the same knowing position regarding the play as Hamlet does in relation to the world within the play, the viewers necessarily take on the skepticism which is Hamlet’s only response to his questionable world. Art is the means by which Hamlet achieves his negative knowledge of the world, thus *Hamlet* as art brings its audience to that same negative knowledge. And thus if, after reaching a peak of nihilism, Hamlet himself is (only) able to act through the healing power of art, the audience’s tragically inspired skepticism will be similarly redirected into the possibility of knowing or acting in the world by artful illusion.

Focused on the epistemological and ethical implications of the Ghost’s questionability, my earlier exegesis of the Ghost’s epistemic relationship to the characters in the play remained limited, assuming that the status of the characters’ knowledge of the Ghost could be interpreted from the first two acts alone. Though sufficient for the skeptical argument I wished to make in section two, this disingenuously limited reading of the Ghost must now be corrected, focusing not only on Hamlet’s negative knowledge of the Ghost but also on the artistic process of

Hamlet's acquisition of his negative knowledge. For Hamlet does not simply accept the fact that the spirit he has seen may be a devil. Rather, he seeks "grounds more relative than this"—grounds for the Ghost's claim of murder—before deciding how to act (H, II.2.542-43). Hamlet, that is, wants confirmation of the Ghost's allegation—appealing to more relevant grounds than another's testimony, probing the Ghost's reality as his relative, and trying the truth of the Ghost's allegation on his relative Claudius. Hamlet tests the truth of the Ghost's assertion of murder as it exists within the social nexus formed by himself, the Ghost, and Claudius.

This social testing of the truth of Claudius's guilt occurs via a theatrical re-staging of the scene of Claudius's guilt, so that Hamlet may himself observe Claudius's reenacted guilt and know Claudius's guiltiness. Hamlet, that is, will find his knowledge of the Ghost's claim only upon an observable, dramatic en-actment of guilt. Cavell describes tragedy as "the result, and the study, of a burden of knowledge," arguing that in *Hamlet* Hamlet's burden of knowledge translates into a testing of truth "by means of the play-within-the-play" (179). Rendering Cavell's claim in Nietzschean terminology, tragedy results from the discharge of its own skeptical energy, alleviating the burden of its tragic knowledge of suffering through the Dionysiac ecstasy onstage. And tragedy accomplishes this discharge by portraying its characters facing their own burden of tragic knowledge—studying Hamlet's nihilism in the face of his skeptical insight. Thus Hamlet's attempt to alleviate his burden of knowledge—to find his knowledge in the face of skepticism—will involve his own study of tragic knowledge. The nested play *The Mousetrap*, as Hamlet's composition, results from Hamlet's tragic insight, as he seeks to discharge his tragic skepticism by studying tragic skepticism within the characters of his play. Hamlet aims to overcome his skepticism by dramatizing other minds and enacting Claudius's guilt in his play. Requiring "grounds more relative than this," Hamlet declares that "the play's the thing/Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (H, II.2.543-44).

Hamlet, of course, seems to view *The Mousetrap* as sufficiently mimetic of the scene of his father's murder that Claudius's reaction to *The Mousetrap* proves Claudius's guilt in the original scene of murder. Rather than enforcing his skepticism, Hamlet's portrayal of the original murder onstage conclusively proves the Ghost's knowledge of it. Thus Hamlet to Horatio:

Ham. O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a
Thousand pound. Didst perceive?

Hor. Very well, my lord.

Ham. Upon the talk of the poisoning?

Hor. I did very well note him. (H, III.2.281-85)

The Mousetrap, and Hamlet's description of it as the poisoning of a king, arouses Claudius, who flees demanding "give me some light. Away!" (H, III.2.264). And unlike the Ghost's word, which has no value in itself, Claudius's visceral reaction to the staged recreation of old Hamlet's murder admits of perception and therefore empirically finds the worth of the Ghost's word.

But *The Mousetrap* cannot be taken at face value as a mimetic recreation of old Hamlet's murder. Rather, because *The Mousetrap* inexplicably comprises *two* plays, both a dumb-show and a verbalized version, its foundational epistemological function remains dubious and it ultimately leaves Hamlet no less skeptical than before he penned it. Two salient differences between the dumb-show and verbal stagings of *The Mousetrap* indicate that, while Hamlet expresses seemingly firm conviction after Claudius's flight, he is instead trying desperately to convince Horatio and himself. First, the verbal play fails to accurately re-create the social scene of old Hamlet's murder. Claudius allegedly poisoned old Hamlet his brother, yet in *The Mousetrap* Hamlet declares that the murderer, Lucianus, is "nephew to the king" (H, III.2.240). Therefore Claudius's seemingly guilty reaction need not be taken as his response to the enactment of his crime, because the play does not enact his crime. In fact, given that Claudius's crowning has prevented Hamlet's succession to his father's throne, the Prince's presentation to his uncle-King of a play about a nephew's murder of his uncle-King amply motivates Claudius's flight: "Claudius could just as well be reacting to the blatant threat against his life, put on before the whole court" (Roth, §12). Moreover, Claudius does not react at all to the dumb-show, but only responds once he knows that the murderer is "nephew to the king." Claudius's neutrality toward the dumb-show, which potentially recreates the scene of his crime, and reaction to the verbal version, which potentially threatens his life, therefore renders impossible the firm conviction Hamlet expresses because Hamlet cannot know Claudius's reason for reacting.

Second, Claudius's reaction, even if taken as a response to old Hamlet's poisoning, fails to confirm the Ghost's claim regarding the poisoning. Claudius remains neutral upon seeing the King's poisoning through his ears in the dumb-show, and reacts only to being told of poisoning more generally in the verbal play. Hence, following W.W. Gregg, Cavell argues that *The Mousetrap* fails to ground the Ghost's allegation of ear-poisoning because Claudius confirms only the fact of poisoning, not its specific means (Cavell, 180). Thus, while it makes a likely assertion to having been murdered, the Ghost's specific claim of ear-poisoning is cast into doubt

by Claudius's two reactions to *The Mousetrap*. And if the Ghost does not accurately represent the means of its murder, how can its larger allegation of murder constitute true knowledge?

Consequently, I believe, Hamlet never finds certainty in the Ghost's claim to having been murdered, and the fact that an uncertain assertion lives "all alone within" Hamlet's brain leaves Hamlet utterly skeptical in the social realm. In fact, Hamlet never truly avenges his father's murder upon Claudius. He kills Claudius only once Claudius has killed Gertrude for Hamlet himself to see, and only then because Hamlet is caught up in the passion of the moment without rationally evaluating Claudius's guilt—for Laertes' allegation that Claudius poisoned Gertrude ought to bear no more weight than the Ghost's. Hamlet never escapes his skepticism of knowing other minds. The play-within-a-play, perhaps, is his best chance, because, while he can know the minds of neither Claudius nor the Ghost, Hamlet can empirically observe Claudius's reaction in the (recreated) original moment of his guilt. But as a play, *The Mousetrap* remains always only a "figure like" the murder, and Claudius's reaction a "figure like" Claudius without presenting Claudius himself for empirical analysis. As the play can merely represent the appearance of the murder, Hamlet can know only the appearance of guilt in another, and wallows in skepticism.¹⁰

Hamlet's process of gaining his skeptical tragic knowledge of the world's excess thus operates theatrically, as his theatrical interrogation of the Ghost and Claudius brings him to the skeptical realization that he cannot know or act justly. In the dramatic representation of life onstage, Hamlet recognizes the theatrical, figural epistemic relation he bears to other social actors. The audience's relation to *Hamlet* the play may therefore be figured through Hamlet's relation to *The Mousetrap* as the font of his skeptical knowledge. That is, functioning *mise en abyme*, *The Mousetrap* "help[s] elucidate the structure of the enfolding macro-text," modeling within *Hamlet* the operation of *Hamlet* (McHale, 194). His reading of the actors of *The Mousetrap* thus functions *en abyme* for Hamlet, as it renders salient the necessarily skeptical relation he must have to other minds within his enfolding macro-world. And Hamlet's *en abyme* understanding of *The Mousetrap* operates *en abyme* for the audience, demonstrating the necessity of their own skeptical stance toward *Hamlet*.

Hamlet's questioning of the Ghost, for instance, precisely models the audience's relation to the Ghost. Describing the formal function of fantastic literary elements like ghosts, Tzvetan Todorov writes that "the fantastic occupies th[e] uncertainty" of whether to see it as "an illusion, an imaginary being; or else [it] really exists" (25). The reader of fantasy hesitates over the

questionable reality of the fantasy, destabilizing interpretation of the text. And given the Ghost's centrality to *Hamlet*, the audience's understanding of the Ghost crucially determines their view of Hamlet's guilt or innocence as a revenger. Like Hamlet, the viewer can know the Ghost and Claudius as only "figures like" them, and therefore experiences an interpretive paralysis coextensive with Hamlet's ethical one. Hamlet's inability to know other minds in *The Mousetrap* thus forces the viewer to recognize the impossibility of knowing the minds of *Hamlet's* characters. And as Hamlet's realization of his epistemic limitation regarding the play-within-the-play demonstrates his relation to the other people in his world, *Hamlet* brings the audience to a skeptical uncertainty of knowing other minds in their world.¹¹ The minds of other, real people admit of no greater empirical analysis than do Claudius or the Ghost. Borges' seemingly outrageous claim that watching Hamlet watching *The Mousetrap* makes us fear "that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers and spectators can be fictitious," begins to take on practical meaning (46); social interactions in the real world, for Borges and *Hamlet*, reduce to unknowable exchanges between the mere figures by which we appear to one another.

Thus Hamlet's theatrical process of acquiring his tragic knowledge leads the audience to the same tragic knowledge, the skepticism represented onstage absorbing the viewer so that "now he grasps the wisdom of the wood-god Silenus; he feels revulsion." Foreclosing for us the possibility of knowing others to any greater an extent than Hamlet knows his interlocutors, *Hamlet* forecloses also the possibility of rationally justified moral action, belying any kind of moral realism. As the font of their knowledge, the audience follows *Hamlet's* portrayal of Hamlet into the negative, tragic knowledge of nature which Hamlet has acquired.

Having understood the skeptical process and result of using tragic art as a font of knowledge, then, we can return to where this section began, with the fact that, despite everything, Hamlet acts. Returning from the sea, he exchanges the play he has penned for the play of his sword and accomplishes his vengeance in a bloodbath to sate any peasant-crowd. And it is art, Nietzsche asserts, which allows Hamlet so to act. Consequently, in order to ourselves act in the face of tragically induced skepticism, we must understand how Hamlet morphs the ineffective, skeptical art of his playwriting into the effective artfulness of his fencing play. This metamorphosis occurs, I believe, through Hamlet's theatrical construction of himself, a construction which allows him to act in the theater-like realm of social appearances.

At the beginning of the play, before his encounter with the Ghost or the play-within-a play, Hamlet espouses a basically Cartesian conception of his being in the world. He famously critiques acting, casting the outward manifestations of our inner selves as mere appearance:

Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems.'
Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother...
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are the actions that a man might play,
But I have that within which passes show (H, I.2.76-85)

Positing a monolithic *cogito* which knows itself—as Richard III figures it, “dive, thoughts, down to my soul” (R, I.1.41)—Hamlet identifies a divide between this *cogito* as it authentically exists and its appearance in the world, “the actions that a man might play” which cannot “denote me truly.” The self can only communicate itself to others through conventional symbols, and so it cannot make known its personal nature which therefore “passes show.”

Hamlet at first revels in his separation from his social appearance, which gives him a private realm in which to mourn authentically. Qua solipsistic Cartesian *cogito*, Hamlet need not concern himself with others, but only with his own person. But the appearance of the Ghost turns the divide between self and representation into a dangerous problem. The Ghost’s assertion of murder places on Hamlet an ethical claim to social action. And realizing, apropos of the Ghost and *The Mousetrap*, the necessity of skepticism of knowing other minds, Hamlet recognizes that in the social realm the only way to act at all is through theatrical appearance. Feeling his own ethical paralysis, and faced with the Players’ seemingly affective performance, Hamlet cries

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...
Yet I... Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
...can say nothing... (H, II.2.560-580)

Eschewing Claudius’s play-acted smiling villainy, Hamlet remains within himself and the limited knowledge he possesses—and therefore he cannot act, “can say nothing.”

The Player, though, acts, and so it is through the artifice of dramatic playing that Hamlet can come to act. Hamlet’s resolve to act, in fact, derives from his recognition that only through artifice, fantasy, “a veil of illusion” does *anyone* act. The Norwegian soldiers whose action shames him into revenge “go to their graves like beds” all “for a fantasy and trick of fame” (H,

IV.62 & 61). The soldiers' ability to act depends upon their fantasy of their actions' importance to their fame, and so Hamlet's ability to act requires a fantasy of its just and moral efficacy. When Gertrude dies and Laertes declares that "the king's to blame," Hamlet's passion exceeds his reason and, believing that by so doing he sets the world to rights, Hamlet kills the king (H, V.2.303). From the perspective of Hamlet's skepticism toward the Ghost's allegation of Claudius's guilt, Hamlet's vengeance for Gertrude on Laertes' word lacks sufficient rational justification—yet Hamlet dies happier in vengeance than he lived in skeptical equivocation, and so the veil of illusion he makes for himself allows him to live fully in his skeptical world by acting in it, acting upon it, influencing its events by choosing his own action.

Hamlet therefore uplifts a theatrical understanding of the self and its being in the world as the means by which humanity can act. At his death Hamlet is borne "like a soldier to the stage," finally acceding to the role of violent revenger only in being merely "like" a soldier, acting the part of a soldier (H, V.2.397). Thus by living himself like a theatrical character, "playing" at swords, Hamlet comes to be an authentic self. He must exchange his understanding of himself as a monolithic *cogito* for a theatrical self-consciousness which recognizes itself as only ever a "figure like" a self. Hamlet's composition of *The Mousetrap* gauges his turn to a theatrical self as, after finding need to test's the Ghost's reality, Hamlet literally writes himself in *The Mousetrap*. *The Mousetrap* plays out the action of the play *Hamlet*, such that Hamlet seems to know that he is literally playing the role of Lucianus in *The Mousetrap*. And serving as the chorus for the play, Hamlet not only composes and mimics but also acts in the play (III.2.241). In tragic art, Nietzsche says, one becomes "at one and the same time subject and object, simultaneously poet, actor, and spectator" (BT, §5). Hamlet watches, composes, and plays his own role upon the stage, as Lucianus kills his uncle-King like Hamlet kills Claudius, and Hamlet thereby exchanges that "which passes show" for a theatrically effective self. Thus Hegel remarks that by giving his characters "the picture in which they can contemplate and see themselves objectively like a work of art," Shakespeare makes his characters "free artists of their own selves" (474). And Bloom asserts that Hamlet's intense individuality arises from his self-revisionary role-playing: "Playing a role is for Hamlet anything but a metaphor; it is hardly *second* nature, but indeed is Hamlet's original endowment" (742).¹²

Hamlet's theatrical instantiation of his own self thus allows him to dwell in his skeptical world. Hamlet's acted self, equivocating between the perspectives of "poet, actor, and spectator,"

interlocks structurally with the skeptical world around him. Like the tragic nature of reality which exceeds moralistic analysis, Hamlet's own actions as a theatrical self cannot be reduced to rational formulae. Hamlet's actions are composed, artistic, subject to aesthetics and not ethics, and thus Hamlet can evaluate the world from his artistic perspective without need for external, rational justification. Hamlet creates his own "veil of illusion" by which he can accomplish his revenge and die in (relative) peace.¹³ It is the creation of his own values—the choice to kill Claudius even without rational justification—which Nietzsche praises in Hamlet. In the face of his own negative knowledge, Nietzsche seeks to create his own values, his perspectival Gay Science beyond good and evil—which he figures as the play of Hamlet's fencing.

Beyond Hamlet, though, Brutus exemplifies for Nietzsche the creation of one's own self and values. "The height at which he places Caesar," Nietzsche says of Shakespeare, "is the finest honour he could bestow on Brutus: only thus does he raise Brutus' inner problem to immense proportions as well as the strength of mind that was able to cut *this* knot!" (GS, §98). Brutus *cannot* know if the choice to kill Caesar is the height of justice or of immorality, as Hamlet cannot know if he commits murder or revenge.¹⁴ And so Hamlet and Brutus' capacity to choose in the face of utter epistemic and ethical paralysis constitutes a massive strength of will which cuts the "knot" of skepticism. For while Descartes limits the will's scope to that of the intellect, Nietzsche grants the will the power to make its own knowledge and values. Gilles Deleuze describes Nietzsche's view of the will as a principle of interpretation, the power by which the subject, in a play of forces with the rest of the world, interprets and values the world. And in art

life goes beyond the limits that knowledge fixes for it... Thought ceases to be a *ratio*, life ceases to be a reaction... art is the highest power of falsehood... truth perhaps takes on a new sense. Truth is appearance. In Nietzsche, 'we the artists' = 'we the seekers after knowledge or truth' = 'we the inventors of new possibilities of life.' (Deleuze, 101-3)

The will, in its interpretation of the world, its artistic dwelling in an unknowable world, no longer passively perceives and reacts to the world but actively creates its own truth of the world, exceeding the Kantian or Cartesian limits of knowledge or willing. Hamlet and Brutus can act only by actively making their own truths and actions, their own "possibilities of life," beyond justification, beyond good and evil. By the illusory power of art, they *make* their good and evil, for "there is nothing/either good or bad but *thinking makes it so.*" Kaufmann writes that

Shakespeare's non-Christian outlook is particularly clear in the two tragedies in which we encounter a profound moral perplexity: *Caesar* and *Hamlet*. In the end,

it seems relatively unimportant whether Brutus or Hamlet made the right decisions. Faith, hope, and charity are out of the picture no less than conventional right and wrong. Yet a standard remains: nobility. When Hamlet dies, Horatio says: 'Now cracks a noble heart.' Antony's tribute to Brutus is, if possible, still more famous: 'This was the noblest Roman of them all.' (21-22)

Like the nobles who, for Nietzsche, create their own values through self-affirmation, Brutus and Hamlet come into being as knowing and acting subjects through their noble, artistic self-creation. Hamlet's artistically capacitated revenge, in the face of artistically revealed skepticism, "installs [him] as autonomous agent of retribution," making his self as a self in its use of art in order to live (Belsey, 114). Hamlet's exercise of will, valuing his actions for himself, constitutes the height of autonomy, elevating Hamlet to his own self-affirming law-giver and thereby bringing Hamlet into being as a subject.

This paper's cipher, that "we need first to *adjust* and *justify* the goal of a Shakespearean drama, that is to say, not to understand it," now paradoxically deciphers Shakespeare. Evading our knowledge of it, tragedy reveals the excessive nature of our world, figures for us the way in which the world evades our comprehension. And so tragedy reveals the excessive artist-subjectivity—the equivocal "poet, actor, and spectator" whose will exceeds the Kantian or Cartesian bounds of knowledge or willing—which we must adopt in order to act in that excessive world. The goal of a Shakespearean drama must be adjusted such that its goal is to not be understood, such that its goal is to reveal to us the tragic truth of incomprehensibility precisely by itself exceeding understanding. And that goal must be justified precisely insofar as our skeptical response to Shakespearean tragedy constitutes not a failing of our knowledge, constitutes not our epistemic limitation, but rather opens up the possibility for creating our own knowledge, our values, beyond good and evil. Nietzsche desires not to understand Shakespearean drama, desires that we read Shakespearean drama "not to understand it," so that in its artistic duality as font of knowledge and instrument of life Shakespearean tragedy allows us to know and respond to the Dionysiac excess of the world in which we live.

II. Poiesis

We, however, want to be poets of our lives.

-Friedrich Nietzsche,
The Gay Science

All creators are hard. And it must seem bliss to you to press your hand upon millennia as upon wax, bliss to write upon the will of millennia as upon metal—harder than metal.

-Friedrich Nietzsche,
Twilight of the Idols, “The Hammer Speaks”

Everything profound loves masks... Every profound spirit needs a mask.

-Friedrich Nietzsche,
Beyond Good and Evil

Aha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!
For if the king like not the comedy,
Why then, belike he likes it not, perdy.
Come, some music!

-William Shakespeare,
Hamlet

1. The will to philosophize

Hamlet has now given flesh to my original and originary assertion of Shakespeare and Nietzsche’s mutual conception of reality as exceeding the bounds of human comprehension. Epitome of Dionysiac man, Hamlet signifies with his very life Nietzsche’s opposition of art and life to science: art’s duality as font of knowledge and instrument of life actualizes itself in Hamlet’s theatrically realized recognition of the vibrancy and incomprehensibility of his reality, and in the theatrical self-consciousness he adopts in order to live and act within that reality. Art allows Hamlet to recognize his excessive world—and art allows him to dwell in it. Nietzsche’s opposition of the *Gay Science* to Socratic, scientific theory therefore finds its exemplars in Shakespeare—the “music-making Socrates” who “brings Sophocles to perfection”—and in Hamlet, symbol of the tragic, to whom “Dionysiac man is similar.” As an art form which, in its own incomprehensibility, portrays the incomprehensibility of reality and the artistic nature subjectivity must adopt in order to function in an excessive world, Shakespearean tragedy exemplifies the possibility of authentically theorizing excess through excessive, sublime drama.

But merely to substantiate Nietzsche’s view of art’s role in life by exemplifying that dual role in *Hamlet* would be to remain with Kaufmann in asserting “something Shakespearean about Nietzsche.” Analyzing Bard and Philosopher’s excessive worldviews posits only a thematic resonance between them, and even an exegesis of Nietzsche’s vision of tragedy’s rebirth through

Nietzsche's reading of *Hamlet* only deploys a Nietzschean reading of Shakespeare as an example by which to better read Nietzsche. Thus in this chapter I take upon myself the task of unfolding the *meaning*, for Nietzsche, of Nietzsche's use of Shakespeare and his characters to philosophize in a Dionysiac, tragic mode over against Socratic science. What does Nietzsche's self-conscious employment of art within his philosophy mean for philosophy, life, and art beyond what has already been discovered about art in the above readings of *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Hamlet*? What, that is, is the philosophical meaning, in and of itself, of Nietzsche's use of Shakespeare?

This chapter proposes that Nietzsche utilizes Shakespeare within his philosophy in order to philosophize in accord with two of Nietzsche's basic insights, perspectivism and the Dionysiac nature of reality. Both perspectivism and the Dionysiac constitute potential problems for the philosopher, because each differs fundamentally from what and how traditional philosophy can express. Thus Nietzsche must construct a new philosophical methodology capable of authentically philosophizing Dionysiacally and perspectivally. And Nietzsche, I will argue, conceives of this new methodology as basically Shakespearean; he is inspired to his methodological experimentation and invention by his reading of Shakespeare.

Both perspectivism and the Dionysiac belie philosophy's capacity to objectively represent and theorize phenomena in language. Thus in order to philosophize at all, Nietzsche, I will demonstrate, works, via his writing style, to make his philosophy deeply personal, with no claim to accurate representation. Perspectivism, "which is the fundamental condition of all life," asserts against scientific objectivity that there are no facts, only perspectival interpretations—an assertion of excess, that the world exceeds any interpretation, such that no interpretation constitutes formulaic fact (BGE, Preface). Consequently, in order to avoid dogmatism, Nietzsche must present his philosophy as itself only a perspective, only an interpretation. Nietzsche achieves this, I will argue, by creating himself as a literary character within his philosophical texts who can always claim his philosophical theses as uniquely his own, from his own perspective. And this writing style, this philosophical method, also allows Nietzsche to write in accord with the Dionysiac. The Dionysiac, tragic insight of music is non-representational and therefore cannot be presented fully in language, "it is impossible for language to exhaust [its] meaning" (BT, §6). Consequently tragic drama can express its Dionysiac truth not by *describing* that truth, but only by discharging the pathetic *energy* of the Dionysiac through the representations—characters, dialogue, and actions—it places onstage. Thus in his philosophy

Nietzsche cannot straightforwardly represent his Dionysiac insight—he cannot articulate it fully in language in the manner of a scientific formula. Like tragedy’s dramaturgical expression of the Dionysiac through representations on the stage, then, Nietzsche’s creation of himself as a perspectival character in his philosophy also allows him to serve as the represented character onstage through whom is transmitted the Dionysiac insight central to his philosophy.

I further propose that Nietzsche understands this process of literary self-creation, by which he renders philosophy perspectival and Dionysiac, to be basically Hamlet-ian. Nietzsche’s writing is “certainly warlike,” and “prove[s] that I was no Jack the Dreamer, that I take pleasure in fencing” (EH, 276). Thus as Hamlet can act only by becoming what Hegel calls a “free artist” of himself, Nietzsche can write only by simultaneously *creating* himself and his interpretations within his philosophy. And as Hamlet’s theatrical self-creation depends upon his recognition that he plays the role of himself—ironically distanced by being “simultaneously poet, actor, and spectator”—Nietzsche’s ability to create himself as a literary character in his philosophical texts depends upon his *recognition* that his philosophizing self is a role he plays artistically. Nietzsche achieves this theatrical self-consciousness, I believe, by recognizing that he plays the role of the fencing Hamlet. And to play the role of Hamlet here means to play Hamlet’s role of playing roles, Hamlet’s role of theatrically role-playing his self. Nietzsche plays Hamlet’s role of playing roles in order to role-play himself as Nietzsche—which in turn allows him to philosophize perspectivally and Dionysiacally at all. The role of Hamlet capacitates Nietzsche’s philosophy.

To ground this complex argument in Nietzsche’s conception of philosophical methodology, the remainder of this section of the chapter will work through Nietzsche’s understanding of perspectivism. Philosophy will be analyzed as an interpretive process by which the will artistically, poetically creates truth. Consequently, the philosopher will be read as the willful poetic maker of his truth while, simultaneously and reciprocally, the philosopher himself will be portrayed as arising from and constituted by his act of willing. In its personal, interpretive nature, philosophy creates the philosopher, and this literarily created philosophical character facilitates philosophy’s personal, interpretive nature. In section two, I will unite this understanding of perspectivism with my Nietzschean reading of *Hamlet* from the first chapter. Focusing on Hamlet’s theatrically acted self, I will argue that Nietzsche understands artistry and acting in basically Hamlet-ian fashion, conceiving of the proper form of subjectivity as an artistically en-acted self. I will therefore assert that for Nietzsche the Apolline image of

Shakespeare's characters onstage proffers the possibility of presenting non-representational, musical, tragic, Dionysiac insight through Apolline discourse. In their excess, Hamlet's Apolline speech and actions onstage present his Dionysiac skepticism and ethical paralysis, as well as the play of fencing by which he creates himself and acts. Thus, while Nietzsche's philosophy is necessarily representational, Nietzsche finds in Shakespeare qua "music-making Socrates" the potential to transmit non-representational Dionysiac truth through the artful construction of that truth within the Apolline discourse of philosophy. Finally, in section three, I will argue that Nietzsche's perspectivist presentation of Dionysiac truth—or, Nietzsche's philosophy—consists of Nietzsche's Apolline acting of his philosophy. As Hamlet acts through the artistic acting of himself, Nietzsche perspectivally posits his Dionysiac philosophy—"invent[ing]," as Deleuze puts it, "new possibilities of life"—by artistically constructing the Apolline image of himself as Nietzsche on the literary stage of his philosophical texts. And, as asserted above, Nietzsche achieves this philosophical self-en-acting by self-consciously seeking to play the role of Hamlet.

But first Nietzsche's perspectivism, which requires that he experiment with and invent, rather than find and formulate, truth. Perspectivism, Alexander Nehamas claims, constitutes both the central thesis of Nietzsche's philosophy and, because it is paradoxical, the central problem for interpreting his philosophy. Describing its paradox, Nehamas writes that perspectivism is

Nietzsche's famous insistence that every view is only one among many possible interpretations, his own views, particularly this very one, included. But if the view that there are only interpretations is itself only an interpretation, and therefore possibly wrong, it may seem to follow that not every view is after all an interpretation and that Nietzsche's position undermines itself. (1)

Perspectivism, the "fundamental condition of all life," precariously asserts that all assertions are merely assertions, without ever reaching a fundamental or apodictic truth about reality.

Perspectivism thereby reduces itself to mere assertion as well, and so the truth that there are no truths potentially collapses upon itself. But Nietzsche dwells in this interpretive flux, claiming his assertion of perspectivism as uniquely his own, true for him without reference to any universal truth: "My judgment is *my* judgment: other people don't have an obvious right to it" (BGE, §43). Philosophical truth, for Nietzsche, especially the truth of perspectivism—the truth that there are no truths, like the Dionysiac, tragic truth that there is no moral truth—is thus deeply personal, the interpretation offered by the unique individual to whom it belongs.

Philosophy, for Nietzsche, consequently consists of a creative interpretation of reality, the philosophical judgment of reality as it appears to the unique perspective of the individual who

philosophizes. Because the world exceeds the capacity of human reason to scientifically explain it, philosophy can only present a particular perspective upon the world, philosophy is “‘interpretation,’ the introduction of meaning—not ‘explanation’” (WP, §604). No final truth exists for the philosopher to seek—he “cannot feel but as a wanderer upon the face of the earth—and not as a traveler *toward* some final destination; for that does not exist” (HH, I §638)—and so the philosopher *introduces* truth, creates the reality of the world by interpreting meaning into it from his perspective. For Nietzsche science, “the ascertaining of ‘truth’ and ‘untruth,’ the ascertaining of facts in general, is fundamentally different from creative positing, from forming, shaping, overcoming, willing, such as is the essence of philosophy” (WP, §605). Essentially creative, the philosopher’s judgment of the world, his introduction of meaning into the world, forms the world, shapes it, brings the world into being for him. The world only exists for the perceiver as a meaningful entity, as it is meaningfully understood—Kant tells us that “‘intuitions without concepts are blind” (193). Therefore, because meaning is introduced, invented, rather than discovered, the world fundamentally exists as it is interpreted, not as a thing in itself. For Nietzsche there are no facts about the world, but only interpretations of it, acts of “willing” whereby the philosopher’s interpretation wills the world into existence in accordance with his interpretation. To philosophize is to be an “*aesthetic listener*” who addresses existence as an interpretable literary text and thereby aesthetically, artistically brings that world-text into being.¹

Nietzsche most clearly depicts this creative, willful process of interpretation in his analysis of changing interpretations of moral action in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Applying his perspectivist thesis to morality in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes that “there are absolutely no moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of the phenomena” (§108). Social action is not moral in and of itself, but only through the moral interpretation of it. Consequently *On the Genealogy of Morality* traces the historical evolution of contingent moral interpretations of social action. In the *Genealogy* Nietzsche identifies two competing styles of interpretation, which he calls noble and slave (or modern) morality, each of which interprets the same action in diametrically opposite fashion. While noble valuation actively affirms the selfish actions of the nobles, and negates their opposite as bad (GM, I §10), modern slave morality is “*precisely* the ‘good one’ of the other morality, precisely the noble, the powerful, the ruling one, only reinterpreted, only reseen through the poisonous eye of *ressentiment*” (GM, I §11). Slave morality reactively reinterprets noble valuation in order to reverse it, facilitating what Nietzsche

calls “*the slave revolt in morality*” by which the selfish activity of the nobles is limited by the negative interpretation given to it from the perspective of *ressentiment* (GM, I §7). The modern moral evaluation of selfish action, that is, results not from the reality of that action—the action lacks value in itself—but rather from the need of the slave perspective which evaluates action. Modern morality needs to limit the nobles’ selfishness and increase altruism, and so it wills that selfishness be ‘evil’ and altruism ‘good.’ The value of selfish and altruistic social action, that is, exists solely because those who interpret it need to advance themselves through interpretation, and so their interpretation is an exercise of their will by which they control others’ actions.

As argued above in the description of social interaction in *Hamlet*, human action in the social realm only exists as it is interpreted, and so the moral valuation of action, the willful act of interpretation, creates the reality of human social action. We saw that in his actions Marcellus does not “unfold” himself as he is, as he actually intends, but appears to his social others as the “figure like” Marcellus by which Horatio interprets Marcellus. Our actions with regard to one another—here called social action, interpreted as “moral phenomena”—consequently also stand as figures like our actions. The doer and the perceiver of an action interpret it based upon its positive or negative effects for them, and so action always appears as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ depending upon the will of the person to whom it appears. In a profound sense, action only ever exists as it is morally interpreted—even though that interpretation is perspectively contingent. Deleuze writes that, for Nietzsche, “the world is neither true nor real but living. And the living world is will to power... To live is to evaluate. There is no truth of the world as it is thought, no reality of the sensible world, all is evaluation, even and above all the sensible and the real” (184). To live is to interpret, from one’s particular standpoint, and reality *is* as interpreted from that standpoint.

Insofar, then, as it aims to describe and analyze life, philosophy is fundamentally interpretive and willful, introducing meaning into human life in accord with its particular perspective. Thus Nietzsche’s philosophy itself offers only the truth as his unique will interprets it in accord with his own benefit.² Nietzsche thinks that to philosophize is not to discover or explain values, but to question values: “The issue for me was the *value* of morality... we need a *critique* of moral values, for *once the value of these values must itself be called into question*” (GM, Preface §§5-6). And Nietzsche answers this question, gives morality value, only from the standpoint of his personal desire, for “it has long since become sufficiently clear what I *want*, what I want precisely with that dangerous slogan that is so perfectly tailored to my last book:

‘*Beyond Good and Evil*’” (GM, I §17). Nietzsche’s philosophical evaluation of morality does not arise from the intrinsic value of morality, but is based upon Nietzsche’s particular *desire* for the operation of human society. Thus the philosopher’s claims about human life—whether political, ethical, epistemological, or ontological—are fundamentally the philosopher’s *personal* evaluations, “there is absolutely nothing impersonal about the philosopher; and in particular his morals bear decided and decisive witness to *who he is*” (BGE, §6).

Philosophy is not just the personal interpretations of the philosopher, then, but Nietzsche also thinks that the philosopher is actually constituted by his willful interpretation, that “*who he is*” is determined by his evaluation of phenomena. Perspectivism therefore not only posits reality as interpretation, but the philosophizing subject as the *act* of interpreting. Nietzsche writes that

Facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations... ‘Everything is subjective,’ you say; but even this is interpretation. The ‘subject’ is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is.— Finally, is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis. (WP, 481)

There is no philosopher before he philosophizes, because the concept of an interpreter preexisting and underlying the interpretation is a mere invention. Nietzsche elaborates,

Common people separate the lightning from its flash and take the latter as a *doing*, as an effect of a subject called lightning... as if there were behind [the lightning] an indifferent substratum... But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is simply fabricated into the doing—the doing is everything. (GM, I §13)

As things only exist for the evaluating subject through the act of interpreting them, the evaluating subject himself exists only in the act of interpreting, only in his willful effect on that which he interprets—“A ‘thing’ is the sum of its effects” (WP, §551). As Hamlet realizes that his interiority has no being in itself in the social world, but exists only in others’ figural interpretation of its self-expression, the philosopher for Nietzsche exists only in the expression of his evaluations, only in his “doing.” Hence Nietzsche’s claim to “*my* judgment” is personal not only in the sense of possession, of his patent upon his creation, but because his judgment brings Nietzsche himself uniquely into being qua judge: *as him*, his judgment is rightfully *his*.

Thus the interpreter and the interpretation, the philosopher and his philosophy, reciprocally bring one another into being. Philosophy only exists as the unique, individual positing of the philosopher, what Deleuze calls the artistic invention of “new possibilities of life,” while the philosopher himself only exists as the particular individual he is by actively

philosophizing, evaluating things from his unique perspective, with his unique will. The philosopher is therefore the literary product of his textual-philosophical self-expression: Nietzsche exists as a philosophizing subject by writing his philosophical texts. That is, to philosophize in and about an excessive world, philosophy must “transform itself into *art*,” and so the philosopher, too, as the interpreter constituted by his artistic interpretation, must become an artwork. As Hamlet must adopt a particular mode of subjectivity, becoming the “free artist” of himself in order to act within his excessive world, Nehamas argues that in order to philosophize in a perspectivist world Nietzsche must construct a particular philosophizing persona:

Having claimed that there is no objective truth about the world, and having argued that this world is the joint product of external causes and human interpretation, neither thing-in-itself nor invention, he devotes himself to fashioning a way of life that is part of such a world and acknowledges it for what it is. (232)

Like Hamlet’s self-creation in response to skepticism, Nietzsche constructs a mode of being for himself as a philosophizing subject which interlocks structurally with his excessive world—“part of” and “acknowledge[ing]” perspectivism.

Following the example of Hamlet, then, Nietzsche responds to excess by relating to himself as an artistic creation, a literary character—“*We*, however, want to be poets of our lives.” Nehamas writes that “Nietzsche wants to warn others against dogmatism without taking a dogmatic stand himself. His unparalleled solution to this problem is to try consciously to fashion a literary character out of himself and a literary work out of his life” (137). Nietzsche’s warlike writing style creates him as a literary character in his texts—portraying “*my* judgment,” “what I *want*”—allowing Nietzsche to perspectivally posit his philosophical theses as the particular propositions of the character who voices them. And reciprocally, the very act of proposing his interpretations as artistic inventions artistically creates Nietzsche as the interpretive force constituted by his interpretive effects, his philosophical texts. The subtitle of *Ecce Homo* is “How One Becomes What One Is,” and as Hamlet comes to be the self he is by writing himself in his play *The Mousetrap* and acting himself in his play with swords, Nietzsche comes to be who he is as a philosophizing subject by writing himself, creating himself in his philosophy.³

2. Shakespeare’s critique of Nietzsche, part one: Image

Nietzsche’s literary, textual self-creation as a philosopher derives, I will come to argue, from his understanding of Shakespearean drama, in particular of Hamlet’s artistically en-acted subjectivity. Propaedeutic to making this argument, however, we need to understand not only

what Nietzsche considers to be the meaning of *Hamlet*—the reading of *Hamlet* proposed in chapter one—but also what Nietzsche believes to be the philosophical ramifications of *Hamlet*'s meaning. What, that is, makes Shakespearean drama figure the “music-making Socrates”?

Like perspectivism, the concept of the music-making Socrates challenges traditional philosophical methodology. Descartes perhaps describes the traditional goal and method of philosophy most concisely: philosophy seeks to “establish” the “foundations” of knowledge by articulating knowledge “clearly and distinctly” (12 & 24). The music-making Socrates, however, as a modification of this traditional philosophical method—a modification/hyphenation of Socrates as the archetype of the philosopher—symbolizes for Nietzsche a new “cultural form,” a becoming-tragic by becoming-musical of the way in which human beings relate to one another and to their world. Nietzsche conceives of himself as “a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus,” and so to philosophize Dionysiacally, as a newly musical version of Socrates, requires of Nietzsche that he express in his philosophy the tragic, Dionysiac insight of music (EH, 217). Yet music's energy cannot be articulated “clearly and distinctly.” Nietzsche writes that

Whereas lyric poetry depends utterly on the spirit of music, music itself, in its absolute sovereignty, has no *need* at all of images and concepts but merely *tolerates* them as an accompaniment. Lyric poetry can say nothing that was not already contained, in a condition of the most enormous generality and universal validity, within the music which forced the lyric poet to speak in images. For this reason it is impossible for language to exhaust the meaning of music's world-symbolism, because music refers symbolically to the original contradiction and original pain... the deepest meaning of music, for all the eloquence of lyric poetry, can never be brought even one step closer to us. (BT, §6)

Synecdochically figuring all uses of language, lyric poetry fails to fully capture the meaning of music as music itself communicates the raw and meaningless, excessive pain and pleasure of living; language cannot communicate Dionysiac insight. Therefore the attempt to philosophize in language about the tragic insight of music—a basically non-representational, non-linguistic insight—constitutes a paradoxical problem as great as that posed by perspectivism: how can the Dionysiac, excessive of language, become Dionysiac philosophy, necessarily in language?

Thus elaborating precisely how Nietzsche thinks of Shakespeare as the music-making Socrates will illuminate how Nietzsche thinks this paradox can be overcome and the philosopher can philosophize about the insight of music. Consequently, articulating Shakespeare's uniqueness as the music-making Socrates will figure how Nietzsche thinks of the possibility of his own philosophical project in its attempt to be “a disciple of the philosopher Dionysus.”

Nietzsche thinks of Shakespeare, I will argue, as uniquely capable of absorbing the Dionysiac energy of music into theatrical, Apolline representations onstage, as Hamlet transforms his Dionysiac, tragic skepticism into the artistically created social figure of himself. And so, following Hamlet's fencing, Hamlet's self-creation, Nietzsche resolves the problem of Dionysiac philosophy in the same manner as he resolves the paradox of perspectivist philosophy—by creating himself as a literary character within his texts. Thus understanding Nietzsche's conception of Shakespeare's theatrical transmission of Dionysiac insight will elucidate the process by which Nietzsche's philosophy becomes both perspectivist and Dionysiac—will elucidate the process of artistic self-creation in which Nietzsche follows Hamlet.

My analysis of *Hamlet* began with Nietzsche's notebook description of Shakespeare as "the poet of tragic knowledge." Having articulated the content of this tragic knowledge, through Hamlet's skepticism, and in fact having moved beyond this knowledge to articulate Hamlet's theatrical response to his tragic insight, I want to posit a reading of Nietzsche's other three notebook entries on Shakespeare's unique blend of music and philosophy. Nietzsche writes:

Shakespeare, the poet of fulfillment, he brings Sophocles to perfection, he is the *Socrates who makes music*. (7[131])

Shakespeare: the fulfillment of Sophocles. The Dionysian has been completely absorbed into images. The omission of the chorus was completely justified, but at the same time the Dionysian element was allowed to fade away. It breaks forth in Christianity and gives birth to a new music.

The task of our time: to find the culture for our music. (7[134])

Euripides and Socrates signify a new beginning in the development of art: *out of tragic knowledge*. This is the task of the future, which so far only Shakespeare and our music have completely appropriated. In this sense Greek tragedy is only a preparation: a yearning serenity. (7[166])

In these notes Nietzsche depicts Shakespeare's status as the music-making Socrates to be a result of Shakespeare's simultaneous similarity to but difference from both musical Greek tragedy and Socratic science. On the one hand, Greek tragedy "is only a preparation," and Shakespeare was required to bring "Sophocles to perfection," to "fulfillment." Largely similar to its Greek predecessor, Shakespearean tragedy adds something essential to Greek tragedy in order to complete it, to fulfill it as a mode of drama and knowledge. Conversely and complementarily, Shakespearean drama appropriates the Socratic philosophical project, making philosophy into tragic art even as it perfects tragic art. Socrates took art "*out of tragic knowledge*," a philosophical task Shakespeare appropriates which, together with his fulfillment of Sophocles,

makes Shakespeare figure and embody “*the culture for our music.*” Shakespearean tragedy, that is, exemplifies a mode of culture, a mode of art, a mode of living, and most importantly a mode of philosophizing which accords with and can communicate music’s Dionysiac insight.

Analyzing Shakespeare’s unique philosophical role as the music-making Socrates thus depends upon grasping how the non-representational, musical, Dionysiac insight of tragedy operates within Shakespearean drama as distinct from and in alteration of both Greek tragedy and Socratic philosophy. How does the Dionysiac life-force—the “*excess of pleasure and suffering and knowledge in nature,*” expressed in the pathetic energy of music—come to be communicated in Shakespeare in contrast to philosophy or ancient tragedy? The fulfillment of Sophocles and appropriation of Socrates by which Shakespeare differentiates himself from Greek tragedy and philosophy consists, I believe, in the complete absorption of the Dionysiac into images described in 7[134]. This absorption both brings tragic insight fully into the discursive Apolline realm in which philosophical writing occurs, thereby rendering music Socratic, philosophical, and makes philosophical discourse Dionysiac, always presenting Dionysiac insight, and thereby rendering Socrates musical.

Greek tragedy, Nietzsche thinks, consists of the manifestation of Dionysiac energy and insight in the Apolline image of action and dialogue on the stage. Tragedy is “a Dionysian chorus which discharges itself over and over again in an Apolline world of images” (BT, §8). Tragic insight into the nature of reality as meaningless, amoral, and suffering (or joyful) is therefore nonrepresentational, unable to be formulated but only to be felt in listening to music, feeling its energy. But this insight comes to be recognized by the viewer of tragedy only insofar as it manifests itself in imagistic representation on the stage, because the full force of Dionysiac energy would overwhelm the audience; tragedy’s Apolline appearance serves as “radiant patches, as it were, to heal a gaze seared by a gruesome night” (BT, §9). Sophocles, that is, can present Oedipus’ excessively intense Dionysiac suffering only in the *image* of Oedipus gouging out his eyes. And so tragic drama constitutes “the Apolline appearance in which Dionysus objectifies himself,” in which “the clarity and firmness of the epic shaping now speak to [the viewer] from the stage, now Dionysus no longer speaks in the form of energies but rather as an epic hero... simple, transparent, beautiful” (BT, §§8-9). Grasping the Dionysiac truth that existence exceeds our comprehension and lacks (moral) order requires one to be an “*aesthetic listener*” attuned to the musical, energetic pathos on the stage. But this music can only express

itself as it occurs within a representational drama, within the Apolline realm of dialogue out of which Dionysus speaks. While language cannot “exhaust the meaning” of music, the Dionysiac energy of music, in its tragic insight into our excessive world, must discharge itself through healing images, must objectify itself by forming itself to language.

Given this relationship of the Dionysiac to the Apolline in Nietzsche’s aesthetic theory, I posit that Socrates’ attempt to take art “*out of tragic knowledge*” and into philosophical theory constitutes a refocusing of art from manifesting the Dionysiac to representing reality through images. Socrates’ image-allegory of the cave, for instance, deploys artistic representation— simile, metaphor, figure, sensuously artistic image—for the philosophical purpose of accurately portraying the world. The image-allegory of the cave makes use of the artistic image of the cave in order that the reader of philosophy might come to know the reality of the world by understanding it through an accurately metaphorical image, a re-presentation of reality within scientific philosophy. Thus an artistic mode of Apolline discourse—figured by Plato’s mastery of rhetoric and figure—comes to constitute the means by which philosophy expresses itself. Philosophy “clearly” articulates its understanding of reality and thereby portrays a reality which it assumes to be objectively true. Shakespeare’s appropriation of the movement “*out of tragic knowledge*”—the Socratic movement of art toward philosophy and away from tragedy—even as he is “the poet of tragic knowledge,” may therefore be interpreted as Shakespeare’s embrace of the philosophical deployment of Apolline art even as he remains true to the Dionysiac energy which discharges itself in tragedy. Shakespearean drama becomes a fully philosophical, Apolline discourse which yet manifests Dionysiac insight into the excess of pleasure and suffering in nature. That is, Hamlet’s deep philosophical musings constitute a discursive attempt to know the world, but in their artistically realized skepticism they reject science and exalt excess.

Conversely, then, Shakespeare’s appropriation of Socrates’ use of images to convey philosophical truth constitutes the completion Shakespeare brings to Greek tragedy. As post-Greek drama “completely absorbed [the Dionysiac] into images,” the Dionysiac and its chorus was “allowed to fade away.” With Shakespeare the nonrepresentational energy of the Dionysiac “breaks forth” to create a new form of tragedy. Yet this does not entail the reemergence of the Dionysiac from image, for Nietzsche does not indicate that the fading of the Dionysiac was necessarily consequent upon its absorption into images. Dionysiac insight returns in Shakespeare, but unlike Wagnerian opera, Shakespearean drama does not return to music—

precluding Nietzsche's incorporation of Shakespeare into *The Birth of Tragedy*—but rather presents the Dionysiac in dialogue and action, in Hamlet's philosophical, discursive, but skeptical and excessive musings and playing onstage.

Thus to complete Greek tragedy as a mode of drama and knowledge, Nietzsche, I think, believed that the Dionysiac *had* to be completely absorbed into images. In order to philosophize Dionysiacally, the Dionysiac had to be rendered fully into the Apolline realm of discourse in which it could be excessively formulated as a discursive theorization of Dionysiac excess. Socrates' task of presenting truth imagistically was therefore a necessary step in creating Dionysiac philosophy; in contrast to Greek tragedy, in which Apolline image serves to heal the pain of the Dionysiac, Socratic philosophy makes the image itself philosophically meaningful. Thus, augmenting Sophocles by appropriating Socrates, Shakespeare expresses the Dionysiac philosophically, even as he makes philosophical discourse into a tragic, Dionysiac knowledge.

Hamlet's theatrical mode of self-conscious subjectivity supports and elaborates this conclusion about the status of the Dionysiac and the Apolline in Shakespeare.⁴ Hamlet's unique understanding of the tragic nature of reality, and his unique response to his understanding, figures the complete absorption of the Dionysiac into images, in contradistinction to Greek tragedy, and thereby elevates Shakespeare to the status of music-making Socrates. Oedipus responds to the terrible truth of existence by gouging out his eyes and wandering Greece, while Prometheus' defiance of the gods lacks effectiveness because he remains enchained. Hamlet's ability to enact his revenge, by becoming the morally autonomous law-giving agent of his revenge, therefore stands in stark contrast to Greek tragedy in its conception of the agent's potency in response to reality's tragic nature. Even Antigone, who acts in the face of the tragic opposition of family and state, falls far short of Hamlet or Brutus in her 'autonomy.' While Antigone's self-law-giving consists of a choice between preexistent ethical frameworks in a value-over-saturated world, Hamlet and Brutus must create their own ethics, their own values, by choosing to act in a valueless world. Consequently Hamlet's difference from Oedipus rests in Hamlet's relationship to images, for Hamlet's ability to act stems from his artistic self-creation and self-valuation, the "veil of illusion" he creates for himself. Blondel writes that "if Oedipus gouges out his eyes so that he can no longer see the terrible truth to which his drives have destined him, then Hamlet plays with appearances, he reproduces them on stage; he avoids the truth that would make him completely mad by theatrically feigning insanity itself" (163).

Thus while Dionysiac insight in Greek tragedy and the first four acts of *Hamlet* paralyzes the agent, forces Oedipus simply to put out the light of the world, Hamlet's final play with images, with the image of himself as a character he en-acts in the world, allows him to respond to, to live with, even to revel in his excessive, tragic reality. Acting, Hamlet artistically absorbs Dionysiac insight into Apolline image, into the social appearance of self and self-created appearance of value which let him kill Claudius. Hamlet's theatrical relationship to himself as an Apolline image therefore sublimates his Dionysiac insight into an Apolline subjectivity—a feigned subjectivity as Blondel puts it—that is “part of” and “acknowledges for what it is” the Dionysiac world in which Hamlet moves. In Hamlet's fencing, then, Shakespearean drama refigures Dionysiac insight by absorbing that insight fully into the image of action and dialogue onstage, the discourse of Hamlet's speech and the representation of his activity. And insofar as Hamlet's theatrical subjectivity constitutes the proper response to an excessive world, the absorption of Dionysiac insight into the artistic image of the self figures the way in which a Dionysiac subjectivity like Hamlet's would move even in the real world. In Shakespeare, music is thereby replaced with image as the means of conveying Dionysiac energy and of properly responding to Dionysiac insight. The pathos of feeling suffering through music is transfigured into a theatrical relationship to the self whereby the subject, like Hamlet, realizes the tragic truth of existence through a theatrical process—like *The Mousetrap*—and responds to this truth by projecting itself as an acted image rather than a pathetic listener. While in Greek tragedy Apolline image served to heal Dionysiac suffering—as a “veil of illusion,” a “saving sorceress,” “radiant patches”—in Shakespeare image actively capacitates action as the subject brings its Dionysiac insight fully into the Apolline realm.⁵ Hamlet's plays, whether *The Mousetrap* or his fencing, constitute the artistic, theatrical images by which he knows and acts in his world. And they are therefore more than healing veils, they are the expression of his Dionysiac subjectivity in his world, the musical-fencing-playwriting-Apolline way he exists—“come, some music!”

I assert, therefore, that Nietzsche's attempt to philosophize in accord with “the philosopher Dionysus,” despite the necessarily Apolline discursive medium in which he writes, operates through the same ‘complete’ absorption of music into image by which Shakespeare becomes the music-making Socrates and Hamlet comes to take revenge. Sloterdijk asserts that Nietzsche's philosophy functions by the same mechanism as does Greek tragedy:

Nietzsche's book on tragedy is almost always fixed to the apparent dimension of

its contents and read as a Dionysian manifesto. However, a dramaturgical reading leads with the greatest possible certainty to the opposite conclusion. What Nietzsche brings forth upon the stage is not so much the triumph of the Dionysian as its compulsion toward an Apollonian compromise. (24)

As an *essay* on tragedy, *The Birth of Tragedy* is a necessarily Apolline manifestation of Dionysiac truth. Therefore Nietzsche's writing attempts to discursively communicate Dionysiac truth through the same process by which tragedy dramaturgically discharges the Dionysiac through Apolline image. As we saw with regard to perspectivism, then, Nietzsche achieves this dramaturgical style of philosophy by creating himself as a literary character in his philosophy, making himself as the Apolline image of himself through which his Dionysiac insight discharges itself. Referring to "my judgment," Nietzsche becomes the unique Apolline voice which speaks his philosophical theses: "Whatever might say 'I' upon the stage will be a symbolically represented 'I,' an Apollonian artistic creation" (Sloterdijk, 32).

Nietzsche's Apolline image of himself, though, cannot simply imitate the representations by which Greek tragedy discharges its Dionysiac energy. While Greek tragedy seeks simply to heal Dionysiac pain through Apolline image, Nietzsche seeks to *philosophize* his Dionysiac energy, to articulate it in the language of his philosophy. Nietzsche's philosophical method of creating himself in his texts therefore must operate in line with Shakespearean tragedy as it figures the music-making Socrates: Nietzsche's philosophy must fully absorb the Dionysiac into Nietzsche's discourse and his literary character, as Hamlet refigures his musical impulse into his two plays. The Apolline "I" which speaks Nietzsche's Dionysiac truth—excessively theorizing his Dionysiac insight, rather than nihilistically gouging out his eyes—will be an artist-actor like Hamlet's theatrical instantiation of himself. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche depicts acting and artistry analogously to the above analysis of Hamlet, thereby modeling his philosophical method:

The need to make a living still forces nearly all European men to adopt a particular role... [and they] confuse themselves with their role... their 'good performance'... Upon deeper consideration, the role has actually *become* character; and artifice, nature... But there are contrary ages, the truly democratic ones, in which people unlearn this faith and a certain audacious faith and opposite viewpoint moves steadily into the foreground... the individual is convinced that he can do just about anything *and is up to playing any role*; and everyone experiments with himself, improvises, experiments again, enjoys experimenting, where all nature ends and becomes art... When the Greeks had fully accepted this *faith in roles*—the faith of artistes, if you will—they underwent, as is well known, step by step an odd metamorphosis that is not in every respect worthy of imitation: *they really became actors*... But what I fear is that... every time man

starts to discover the extent to which he is playing a role and the extent to which he *can* be an actor, he *becomes* an actor... because of this, another human type becomes ever more disadvantaged and is finally made impossible; above all, the great 'architects': the strength to build is now paralyzed. (§356)

Nietzsche here analyzes three types: the mere actor, the artist-actor, and finally the architect. The mere actor accepts his role as authentically himself, merely playing his role and thereby becoming only his role. The role "has actually *become* character; and artifice, nature." In contrast, the artist possesses a "*faith in roles*," the ability to change roles because he recognizes their contingency. Perspectivist, the artist actively "experiments" in creating his roles and creating himself by choosing which roles to play—as Hamlet chooses to play the revenger.

Nietzsche fears, however, that in modern Europe the artist's role-faith will solidify into being merely actors, unable to artistically *create*. Paul Patton writes that "what was initially a metarole, a mode of relating to the variety of roles one might have adopted, becomes a role like any other. The artist-self collapses into a single role, and the individual becomes just an actor" (178). Proper artist-actors, the artistes whose "*faith in roles*" allows them to "experiment with [themselves]" and thereby to become true individuals, must retain the "strength to build." Humanity can act only under a "veil of illusion," and the creation of that illusion rests with the "architects" who create values, the "mighty architectural genius who succeeds in erecting the infinitely complicated cathedral of concepts on moving foundations." In order to be proper actors, artist-subjects must retain the ability to create values, to will new values: "Always do what you will—but first be such as *can will*" (Z, "On the virtues that make small).

Thus as a willful artist-actor-architect, Hamlet creates himself by experimenting with himself, inventing "new possibilities of life" by actively interpreting himself and the value of his actions. Moreover, Hamlet's self-creation through self-interpretation allows him to be a subject consistent with and able to act in an excessive world—a subject which authentically deals with his Dionysiac insight. Hamlet becomes an architect with the strength to will by relating to himself as the theatrical image of himself, relating to himself as an actor of the roles he creates, and thus his Dionysiac skepticism, his tragic knowledge, is absorbed into the Apolline image of himself with which he experiments and thereby lives. Nietzsche's ability to philosophize perspectivally and Dionysiacally therefore finds a role-model in Hamlet. Nietzsche can perspectivally posit his philosophical theses by voicing them through the literary character of himself, the "I" which is already "an Apollonian artistic creation" which speaks in his texts.

Experimenting with different kinds of truths, Nietzsche both wills his interpretations into being and creates roles that he can play as the interpreter constituted by those various interpretations. Nietzsche experiments with his interpretations, and thereby experiments with the concomitant constitutions of himself as their willing interpreter.

Moreover, this perspectivist method allows Nietzsche, by creating himself as does Hamlet, to bring his Dionysiac insight into his necessarily Apolline philosophical discourse. On the most basic level, following the example of Oedipus or any Greek tragic character, Nietzsche's creation of himself as a literary character allows him to discharge his Dionysiac energy through the pathos of his character-self on the stage/page of his philosophy. That is, by placing his own desires—"what I *want*"—on center stage in his philosophy, the desiring character Nietzsche presents his Dionysiac insight to his readers in the same manner as the image of Oedipus gouging out his eyes transmits his suffering. On a higher level, though, approximating the blend of music and philosophy figured by Shakespeare as the music-making Socrates, Nietzsche absorbs his Dionysiac insight fully into the Apolline image of himself as the character who voices his Dionysiac philosophy. By willing the various interpretations voiced by his character-self, as Hamlet wills the justice of his revenge, Nietzsche not only discharges his Dionysiac pathos through the Apolline image of himself, but also refigures his Dionysiac insight by acting on that insight, responding to skepticism by valuing things for himself. Nietzsche's ability to speak, to artistically create the Apolline image of himself as a way to know and act in a Dionysiac world, derives not from the paralyzing Dionysiac suffering experienced by Oedipus, but from the playful, creative power by which Hamlet acts—Nietzsche's writing is not Oedipus' wandering, but rather Hamlet's fencing.⁶ That is, Nietzsche's perspectivist experimentation with truth, accomplished through the literary creation of himself in the mode of Hamlet's self-creation and Shakespeare's general absorption of the Dionysiac into the Apolline, allows him to philosophize Dionysiacally, rendering the Dionysiac into philosophical language by constructing his philosophizing subjectivity as a Dionysiac one which is "part of such a world and acknowledges it for what it is." As Hamlet artistically creates and acts out the role of himself in order to recognize and respond to the excess of reality, Nietzsche creates himself as a literary character in his philosophical texts in order to philosophize perspectively and Dionysiacally.⁷

3. Shakespeare's critique of Nietzsche, part two: Theater

Thus Nietzsche's philosophy, I argue, exists in an essential relationship to Shakespeare.

Nietzsche's philosophical methodology resonates profoundly with the Nietzschean reading of Shakespeare proposed in chapter one, and so Nietzsche, I believe, consciously mimics the imagistic-artistic-acted mechanism of Shakespearean tragedy in order to philosophize at all. Nietzsche consciously conceives of his writing as the play of Hamlet's fencing, the willful interpretation and self-creation by which Hamlet acts, and so Nietzsche's ability to philosophize in accord with Dionysus and perspectivism results from his conscious playing of the role of Hamlet. Hamlet's role is to role-play the self, and insofar as Nietzsche plays the role of himself by en-acting himself in his writing, Nietzsche plays Hamlet's role of role-playing. That is, in his self-creation and discursive presentation of his philosophy, Nietzsche plays the role of Hamlet, and thereby even plays Shakespeare himself insofar as he methodologically imitates the Bard.⁸

Nietzsche conceives of himself as a Dionysiac philosopher, as a music-making Socrates insofar as he philosophizes in accord with the tragic energy of music. And in *The Birth of Tragedy* Dionysiac man finds its ultimate archetype not in Oedipus or Prometheus but in Hamlet, while Shakespeare, Nietzsche seems to think—even if he could not write it in *The Birth of Tragedy*—models the music-making Socrates Nietzsche himself seeks to be. As argued above, then, Nietzsche achieves his perspectivist Dionysiac philosophy through his own Hamlet-ian absorption into the theatrical image of himself as the literary character Nietzsche created in his philosophical texts. His writing is “certainly warlike” and proves “that I was no Jack the Dreamer, that I take pleasure in fencing”; his writing is the theatrical self-interpretation and self-creation by which Hamlet acts. Nietzsche writes perspectivally, avoiding dogmatism, and Dionysiacally, presenting the life energy of the Dionysiac through its discharge in himself as a character, by artistically fashioning himself in his texts precisely as Hamlet fashions himself in his actions—“We, however, want to be poets of our lives.” By becoming the poet of his (textual) life, Nietzsche poetically *makes* his interpretations, his Dionysiac energy, and the literary image through which that energy is discharged. That is, he makes his interpretation of the phenomenon of human life about which he philosophizes, thereby making the phenomenon—imposing his will upon it, “writ[ing] upon” human life “as upon metal”—in order to philosophize about it. Thus it is the Apolline, theatrical acting of himself on the stage of his philosophy which capacitates Nietzsche's philosophizing. He en-acts himself as a philosopher, taking the stage of theory wearing the mask of himself, in order to write.

This absorption of himself—of his energy, will, and interpretation—into the image of

himself in his writing derives not only from Nietzsche's reading of Hamlet's subjectivity—the theatrical subjectivity which figures Nietzsche's "warlike" writing—but is for Nietzsche a basically Shakespearean process. Following the complete absorption of the Dionysiac into the Apolline which defines Shakespearean drama, Nietzsche writes that "if one is Shakespeare one is satisfied only with being dissolved into images of the most passionate life" (D, §549). Shakespeare lives most fully when he writes the characters of his plays, discharges his Dionysiac insight into the passionate representational action and dialogue on the stage. Likewise Hamlet lives most fully when he artistically writes himself as a character he plays, when he interpretively evaluates his own actions in order thereby to bring them into being. And Nietzsche lives and philosophizes most fully when he dissolves himself into the pathetic image of himself in his texts. Nietzsche the character—"an image of the most passionate life" whose judgment and desire we feel in reading Nietzsche's texts—can present his views as uniquely his, the result of his passion; and he can, like Oedipus, transmit his Dionysiac insight as it wells up in the passion of his character; and finally he can redirect his Dionysiac insight into the artistic image of himself whereby he creates himself as a willing subject. Thus not only does Hamlet's theatrical subjectivity provide a model by which Nietzsche can conceive of his own writing, but the literal process of writing by which Shakespeare brings Hamlet into being models for Nietzsche the way in which Nietzsche can bring himself into being as a literary character.

In his dissolution of himself into his image, then, Nietzsche wills his interpretations, and reciprocally poetically creates himself, by wearing the theatrical mask of himself as a passionate character. Sloterdijk writes that Nietzsche puts "on the double mask of Apollo and Dionysus" in order to philosophize, and through this mask-wearing, I posit, Nietzsche becomes "simultaneously poet, actor, and spectator" of his own philosophy (Sloterdijk, 26). Hamlet's ability to relate to himself artistically depends upon his theatrically realized recognition of himself as merely figural: like the Greeks who "fully accepted this *faith in roles*" in order to become artist-experimenters with the roles they played, Hamlet can only become the artist of his own self-role-playing by recognizing that he plays a role. And like Hamlet, Nietzsche must recognize that he plays the role of himself in his philosophy before he can artistically create and experiment with his roles.⁹ Nietzsche achieves this self-consciousness, the perspectivism of being "simultaneously poet, actor, and spectator," through the recognition that he takes on masks, through his recognition that he takes on the mask of Hamlet by writing by analogy to

Hamlet's fencing. Consequently the wearing of masks, the dissolution of the philosophizing subject into an image of himself, figures philosophy in general. "Theory is no longer a discursive mechanism that is served and reconstructed by the functionaries of thought," Sloterdijk writes, "but instead represents a stage upon which life is transformed into an 'experiment on the part of the perceiver'" (17). Socratic science conceives of theory as the rational pursuit of truth by the thinking subject, "the functionaries of thought"; scientifically, "reason is an attempt to turn myself into a local representative of the truth." But, like the self-experimentation of the artist-actor-architect, the Dionysiac philosopher of the future philosophizes by offering his theory as a staged, acted, artistic experiment, a wearing of masks each of which posits its perspectival truths and thereby brings into being its interpretation and its philosopher qua interpreter: "in every philosophy there is a point where the philosopher's 'conviction' steps onto the stage" (BGE, §8).

Thus, as "everything profound loves masks," Nietzsche's philosophy as an artistic experiment with himself operates through the taking on of many masks. Regarding his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche writes that "in the *third* and *fourth* Untimely Ones, two images of the hardest self-love, self-discipline are put up... as pointers to a higher concept of culture, to restore the concept of culture... Schopenhauer and Wagner *or*, in one word, Nietzsche" (EH, 277). Interpreting Schopenhauer and Wagner, imposing his will upon them in order to make them as indicators of a new Dionysiac culture, Nietzsche hammers them into one figure, one persona, taking them both on as masks of himself whereby he philosophizes. Nietzsche's role-playing of himself, therefore, is not only guided by his relationship to a previous writer—Shakespeare—but consists partly of his appropriation and role-playing of his literary and philosophical predecessors.¹⁰ Nietzsche wears the philosophical canon as a mask—a mask he creates in his interpretation of it—in order to bring himself onstage as a passionate life. Even Shakespeare, then, is a role that Nietzsche plays in order to create himself as a Dionysiac philosopher:

Ultimately it is because Bacon-Shakespeare is revealed as a lover of masks that Nietzsche, the lover of masks, can use Bacon-Shakespeare himself as...a mask, another 'metaphor' for 'Nietzsche.' The mask finally drops off, though, along with all Nietzsche's others, on 3 January 1889, the date on which we find his last, poignant reference to Shakespeare in the letter to Cosima Wagner, where his identification with his typological forbear is now absolute: 'It is a prejudice that I am a man. But I have often lived among men already and I know everything they can experience, from the lowest to the highest. Among Indians I was Buddha, in Greece I was Dionysus,—Alexander and Caesar are my incarnations, as is the Shakespeare poet, Lord Bacon' (KGB III / 5:573). (Large, 59)

Shakespeare, now a mask for Bacon, becomes a mask for Nietzsche, an image of a passionate life through which Nietzsche can project his Dionysiac insight. The Dionysiac energy of life, “everything that [men] can experience,” manifests itself in endless Apolline masks, and the philosophy of Nietzsche, disciple of Dionysus, likewise presents itself in myriad masks.¹¹

Nietzsche’s philosophical methodology, the theatrical instantiation of his philosophy, therefore follows Nietzsche’s conception of the overman. For Nietzsche “the highest man would have the greatest multiplicity of drives, in the relatively greatest strength that can be endured” (WP, 966). The overman acts as a poet of his life by artistically melding his many conflicting drives into a coherent self, an artistic image of himself—though this self is provisional, only an experiment like that of the artist-actors in *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche’s assumption of philosophical masks therefore constitutes an overman-like mastery of many different selves, many drives, many perspectives, into the coherent image of the literary character Nietzsche. By interpreting them as Dionysiac forbears, Nietzsche artistically melds Schopenhauer and Wagner into the “one word, Nietzsche,” as Nietzsche’s assumption of Buddha and Caesar blends contemplator and conqueror into Dionysiac philosophical voice.

And Nietzsche conceives of the act of self-overcoming, of becoming an overman, as yet another Shakespearean process. The mastery of conflicting drives is best figured by Shakespeare, who dissolves himself into the myriad and conflicting characters of his plays, yet remains in his artistic mastery a coherent subject: “where the plant ‘man’ shows himself the strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully (e.g., in Shakespeare), but are controlled” (WP, 966). Nietzsche conceives of the self-mastery of wearing many masks, including wearing the mask of Shakespeare, to be Shakespearean, the act of the “Shakespeare poet.” Thus Nietzsche’s assumption of the “incarnation” of “the Shakespeare poet, Lord Bacon” is itself already facilitated by a playing at the role of Shakespeare, a playing at Shakespeare’s role of self-dissolution and self-mastery, or at Hamlet’s role of fencing. Nietzsche, that is, dissolves himself into images—a role figured by Shakespeare—or artistically evaluates and experiments with himself—a role figured by Hamlet—in order to dissolve himself into the image of Shakespeare in his letter to Cosima Wagner or to interpret himself as Hamlet in *Ecce Homo*.¹² Nietzsche philosophizes by taking on masks—taking on the mask of himself, but also creating himself by interpreting, blending, and assuming the masks of Wagner, Schopenhauer, Buddha, Alexander, Caesar, Dionysus, and Hamlet, Shakespeare, and Bacon—and this very assumption of masks is

already and paradoxically facilitated by Nietzsche's wearing of the masks of Shakespeare and Hamlet. That is, Nietzsche philosophizes by creating himself as a literary character within his writing. He does this both by playing Hamlet's role of self-creation, creating himself in his texts, and by wearing the masks of, identifying himself in his texts as, Shakespeare and Hamlet. And to play Shakespeare or Hamlet is already to play at the role of playing, which is the role of Shakespeare and of Hamlet. To create himself, to play at being Nietzsche in order to philosophize perspectivally and Dionysiacally, Nietzsche paradoxically plays Shakespeare in order to play Shakespeare, plays Hamlet in order to play Hamlet.

This paradoxical circularity becomes acceptable—Nietzsche's ability to philosophize Dionysiacally and perspectivally via the already-Shakespearean process of playing Shakespeare is made comprehensible—if we recall two pieces of wisdom from Cavell and Nehamas that have arisen over the course of this essay. Cavell assigns to philosophy the “first virtue” of “responsiveness,” such that philosophy forbears to speak first but always exists in relation to something other, some other thought, which preexists it. Yet philosophy, we know from Nietzsche, brings this preexistent thought itself into existence by interpreting it. Thus philosophy is both responsive and creative. The millennia, the wax partly determine how the hand can shape them, as one's condition determines how one can shape oneself, and as Nehamas writes that “this world is the joint product of external cause and human interpretation, neither thing-in-itself nor invention.” Philosophy only exists as the interpretation of other phenomena, other literature, other thought; but those phenomena, texts, and philosophies reciprocally exist only in being interpreted, in being thought.¹³ Nietzsche remakes our conception of Shakespeare by playing Shakespeare in order to play himself as Nietzsche; he remakes Shakespeare as a role he can and wants to play to create himself. But to do this he must already be responding to Shakespeare, must in some sense understand the meaning of and be playing at the roles of Hamlet and Shakespeare before he creates those roles. Nietzsche plays at being Shakespeare in order to present Shakespeare as a player whose role-playing provides Nietzsche the means of role-playing, the means of philosophizing, at all. Thus Shakespeare's art is the condition of the possibility of Nietzsche's artistic philosophy, while Nietzsche's artistic interpretation of Shakespeare is the condition of the possibility of the foregoing insights into Shakespeare, into what Large calls “Nietzsche's Shakespeare.” Nietzsche makes Shakespeare, and Shakespeare makes Nietzsche—*ad infinitum*...

Coda

At its outset, this essay promised, via its critique of Nietzsche's philosophical deployment of Shakespeare, to comment upon the entire contemporary philosophical and critical landscape. The groundwork for this has been established, I think, in my demonstration of Shakespeare's essential role within Nietzsche's philosophy. Contemporary criticism, at least that with a continental spice to it, derives primarily from Nietzsche, with a smattering of Marx and Freud. What is Derridean deconstruction if not an elaboration of Nietzschean destruction; or Foucauldian archaeology if not an expansion and retooling of Nietzschean genealogy; or Lyotard's postmodernist plurality if not the implication of Nietzsche's perspectivism? Heideggerian phenomenology owes much to its Nietzschean heritage, and the linguistic turn in continental thought likewise relies on Nietzsche's view of language. The existentialists are mere latter-day Nietzscheans. What critical framework as employed in literary and cultural critique, and what continental brand of philosophy, does not exist as it does primarily because of Nietzsche, if my reductionism is granted? Lacanian criticism, perhaps, and not much more.

And so if Nietzsche's philosophy largely responds to and unfolds the insights of Shakespearean drama, voicing itself through its interpretation of Hamlet and the Bard himself, why should we be surprised when the critical practices which have evolved from Nietzsche appear particularly apt for reading Shakespeare? Aha! says the critic when deconstruction proffers precisely the tools for conceptualizing Hamlet's corrosive wit. But this is to say that the grandparent resembles the grandchild, and to think that this point gives novel insight into the grandparent.¹⁴ Of course contemporary criticism is particularly apt for Shakespeare!—for contemporary theory derives, through Goethe and the Romantics, and then Nietzsche, *from* Shakespeare. Bloom writes that

this complex truth renders vain all our attempts to *contain* Shakespeare within concepts provided by anthropology, philosophy, religion, politics, psychoanalysis, or 'Parisian' theory of any sort. Rather, Shakespeare contains us; he always gets there before us, and always waits for us, somewhere up ahead. (734)

The critical and philosophical conceptions of the phenomena of human life, by which we attempt to analyze Shakespeare, are already Shakespearean, the evolution of Shakespeare through and following his modern interpretation and creation by Nietzsche. And if the meanings circulating in our literature and philosophy give us the concepts by which we cognize and navigate our world, postmodern society and life, with a detour through Nietzsche, is a Shakespearean one.¹⁵

Endnotes

Ch. I, Excess

¹ That is, Nietzsche takes up the position of Kant's third Kritik in order to remake the pure and practical reason of the first two Kritiks. Kant's third Kritik renders the question of aesthetics philosophically important, critical to understanding human nature, but it presents an aesthetics of the spectator, of the *viewer* of art (GM, III §6). Nietzsche inhabits this Kritik, in its focus on aesthetics, but remakes the third Kritik into an aesthetics of the *creator*, an aesthetics of the poet and his dreams. From this poetic perspective, Nietzsche then reinterprets the ontology and ethics of the first two Kritiks, rewriting Kant's philosophical conception of the world and human action to accord with a tragic, artistic understanding of reality.

² It must be noted that, just as the problem of science is to be understood from the grounds of art, Nietzsche's portrayal of the death of tragic art asserts that science provided the grounds for critiquing tragedy. It was Socrates' and Euripides' drive to the clarity of scientific theory within art, "*aesthetic Socratism*," which killed tragedy (BoT, §12). The necessity of questioning science from the position of art therefore parallels and inverts the questioning of art from the position of science, so that the two critical positions are locked agonistically into one another. The functional division of reason and art consequently appears to be a fantasy, and Nietzsche's "music-making Socrates" stands as the synthetic alternative to "aesthetic Socratism." It seems to be a question of science fulfilling the role of art, or art fulfilling the role of science, though in either case even the dominated pole affects the dominant one.

³ Nietzsche of course turns away from the idea of the rebirth, of the resurrection and instauration, of tragedy in his later work, simultaneous with his turn away from Wagner and, to a lesser extent, Goethe. But the idea of resurrection itself remains a powerful tool to conceptualize Nietzsche's philosophical project. Heidegger, for example, argues that Nietzsche represents the culmination and overcoming of Western philosophy, and therefore Nietzsche takes his place more amongst the pre-Socratics than within the canon of Western thought. Characterizing his own philosophy as a combat against Socratism—as Marx inverted Hegel—Nietzsche himself might be open to this particular resurrection of thought from before the age of theory. See Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. 1* p. 7, and Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* p. 16.

⁴ The deep godlessness of Shakespearean tragedy—understood not as atheism but rather as the profoundest of agnosticisms—perhaps glosses Nietzsche's notebook claim that tragedy "breaks forth in Christianity and gives birth to a new music." Greek tragedy is always theistic—dedicated as it is to a god—and so Oedipus' suffering is always framed by the power of the gods, *moira* as a divine force; in *Oedipus at Colonus* Sophocles still renders Oedipus a divine, sanctified figure, as Nietzsche says that Oedipus is the first of the "saintly" type of man (BT, §9). In contrast, when Hamlet suffers and becomes skeptical about his world, there is no divine framework into which to insert his worldview—as Nietzsche puts it in *The Gay Science*, once God is dead then the "earth [is unchained] from its sun" (§126). The meaninglessness of human suffering becomes most acute only once humanity has become monotheistic—and then killed that god.

⁵ The loss of the transcendental signified, that is, severs the world from its sun—see Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play"—while if the world is basically excessive then it cannot be fully known by empirical means either.

⁶ The inability of either the discursive or the empirical epistemological model to understand the essence of the Ghost is played out not only in characters' epistemological relationships to it, but in the very stagecraft of Shakespearean tragedy. Belsey argues that the discursive worldview was accompanied by an "emblematic staging" which "displays the signified, makes meaning visible" (25). In Medieval morality plays, emblematic, allegorical figures were discursive signifiers of transcendental knowledge, the morality of God; if 'read' properly, morality plays offered pure truth. In contrast, Belsey describes the staging of the empirical worldview as "illusionism" or "scenic staging," which "reproduces the referent, replicates what is already visible, already known" (25). Restoration era plays, in the mid-17th century, assume that accurate representation of characters and actions allows the audience to simply know the thing portrayed for what it is—in contrast to the hermeneutical process of morality plays.

Shakespearean drama, as we know though, refuses to settle in either epistemological paradigm, and so its staging blurs emblematic and scenic stagecraft:

In the period between the precarious unity offered by the moralities and the stable, transcendent unity of the Restoration stage, from 1576 when Burbage built the Theatre to 1642 when the playhouses were closed, the stage brought into conjunction and indeed into collision the emblematic mode and an emergent illusionism. The effect was a form of drama capable at any moment of disrupting the unity of the spectator... a form of staging that can be read as withholding the certainty which offers to unify in different ways both the medieval and the Restoration spectator. (Belsey, 25-26)

While scenic and allegorical staging offer stable (if different) truths to the viewers, who are coherent knowers, the viewer of Shakespearean drama is torn between contrary understandings of the characters and actions onstage, and his unity as a knowing subject is destroyed. The Ghost, then, by figuring both a transcendent and an empirical entity, partakes of both emblematic and illusionistic staging, and this staging presents itself to both Horatio and the audience; Horatio views the Ghost like the audience views Shakespearean drama, neither discursive nor empirical, and therefore as unknowable.

⁷ Othello is of course Shakespeare's *tour de force* on the question of skepticism of knowing other minds, as Othello cannot know either Iago or Desdemona, and kills Desdemona as the only way to be sure of her. Thus the potential villainy of acting—in Othello, Claudius, or Richard III—is an ongoing concern of Shakespeare's; the agent can never be fully known to intend or merely play-act his action. Thus even eyewitnesses cannot, for Shakespeare, achieve sufficient knowledge to determine guilt or innocence, as Othello (wrongly) believes that he has overheard Cassio confess to bedding Desdemona. Himself a master of acting and stage management, Shakespeare recognizes the always-present possibility that appearances may deceive.

⁸ Of course one may be skeptical of the possibility of knowing other minds even without being confronted with a Ghost. I do not mean to suggest, therefore, that we need to see a Ghost onstage to realize our merely figural relationship to other people—though I do argue that observing drama is particularly helpful in recognizing the possibility that we cannot know other minds. Yet Hamlet does, in some sense, require a Ghost to realize his skepticism. From his first appearance onstage, we know that Hamlet conceives of himself as fundamentally different from his appearance to others, because that within him "which passes show" can only express itself inauthentically in conventional symbols, mere "forms." Hamlet's skepticism of the possibility of

knowing other minds therefore simply brings his self-understanding into the larger realm of social relations. Hamlet's disgust for society, though, and self-absorption into his own interiority, requires something powerful to jar him into a focus on others, a realization that his self-understanding applies to others; this jarring force is the Ghost, the moral claim of murder. The call to revenge forces Hamlet into a stronger engagement with his social interlocutors, and consequently with the question of morality itself.

⁹ Utter ethical paralysis may be a bit of a reach as far as philosophical conclusions based on a character's interaction with a ghost go. But I find Hamlet's paralysis profoundly suggestive from an historical standpoint. With God removed as the foundation for knowledge, Shakespearean man is set adrift—as Nietzsche puts it in *The Gay Science's* description of the death of God—and knowledge becomes always suspect, always at best belief. Modern science best demonstrates this point, as it operates through constant experimentation, in contrast to the firm understanding that a Ten Commandments of Physics might bring. And with knowledge become belief, morality seems to be something other than what has been traditionally meant by that word. Hamlet at best *believes* that he would know how to act if he were to know the content of Claudius' mind, and so even if most social interactions admit of more certainty regarding others' intentions than does Hamlet's situation, morality in a godless world admits of doubt at two points—both the moral maxim, and its applicability—and therefore falls far short of any objective criterion for morality.

¹⁰ Hamlet's inability to trust the play comes out differently, perhaps more strongly, in his instructions to Horatio before *The Mousetrap* begins:

There is a play tonight before the king.
One scene of it comes near the circumstance
Which I have told thee, of my father's death.
I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe my uncle. If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan's stithy. (H, III.2.74-83)

The play comes only “near the circumstance” of the murder, can only ever figure the murder and thereby fails to confirm Claudius's guilt. And Claudius is to react to “one speech,” yet this speech is the one in which Hamlet describes the murderer as “nephew to the king.” That which Horatio can “observe” is no stable basis for knowledge.

Cavell picks up on Hamlet's moralizing of his own “imagination” as potentially “foul” in order to argue that the entire suspicion of Claudius is colored by Hamlet's Oedipal arousal regarding Gertrude. Hamlet fears that he questions her incestuous relationship to Claudius not because of its morality, but because of his own foul imaginings, and so the Ghost is simply wrong about Claudius' guilt, is simply imagined (Cavell, 183). This is the strongest doubt of the Ghost in the critical literature, and while I do not fully accept it, it does seem that Hamlet himself has something of the same doubt in the back of his mind when he plans *The Mousetrap*.

¹¹ In *Why We Read Fiction*, Lisa Zunshine argues that we read novels in order to practice ‘mind-reading.’ That is, as we interpret other people's motives in daily life in order to function socially,

we practice reading characters' motives through their pithy actions in fiction. Arguing from psychological studies, Zunshine claims that "it is possible, then, that certain cultural artifacts, such as novels, test the functioning of our cognitive adaptations for mind-reading while keeping us pleasantly aware that the 'test' is proceeding quite smoothly" (18). *Hamlet* models the act of 'reading' others in this fashion, but it demonstrates a fundamental mis-reading, as characters constantly fail to accurately interpret others' intentions. Hence our own interpretive act of mind-reading the actions of the characters onstage also becomes tenuous, subject to possible catastrophic failure. Thus one might say that the mis-reading of *Hamlet* to which we are open because of characters' mis-readings of one another within the play opens us to mis-reading in our own lives, to the same kind of quotidian but catastrophic misinterpretations of others and reality to which the characters of *Hamlet* are subject. The inability to 'know' precisely what occurs onstage, and what characters' intentions are, becomes paradigmatic for the tenuousness of our real interpretations of one another in our social lives.

¹² As the mix of emblematic and scenic staging techniques in Shakespeare encodes and deepens the conflict between discursive and empirical outlooks, the very stagecraft of Shakespearean drama encodes and deepens Hamlet's capacity for self-revision/self-creation. The soliloquy is Hamlet's primary mechanism for self-revision, as it allows him to discuss himself—viewing himself objectively, as Hegel puts it—and thereby to revise himself. Bloom writes that "for Hamlet, revisioning the self replaces the project of revenge" (400). Bloom's use of "revisioning" rather than "revising" is critical: in his soliloquies Hamlet envisions himself, and then, by changing himself, re-visions himself. Hamlet thus absorbs his moral conflict into himself, rather than appealing to external sources, and resolves his conflict through self-revision and self-creation:

As the literal drama discards allegory, and morality personifications give way to social types, concrete individuals, the moral conflicts externalized in the moralities are internalized in the soliloquy and thus understood to be confined *within* the *mind* of the protagonist. The struggle between good and evil shifts its center from the macrocosm to the microcosm. (Belsey, 43)

¹³ To continue to frame Hamlet's action through Nietzsche's conception of the will, Hamlet's relative peace—and his (and the audience's) precedent belief that he ought to act despite his skepticism—may be interpreted through the contrast between active and reactive lifestyles. For Nietzsche the active life possesses vastly more value in the actualization of human potential than does the reactive life, "*Ressentiment*... its action is, from the ground up, reaction. The reverse is the case with the noble manner of valuation: it acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks out its opposite only in order to say 'yes' to itself still more gratefully and more jubilantly" (GM, I §10). Hamlet comes to be a person, a willing subject, through his active self-affirmation, rather than the self-nullifying desistance from action which leaves him with no being, no activity by which to define himself.

¹⁴ Brutus, that is, is presented with a classic existential choice situation, but one which is compounded by the evidentiary skepticism which prevents Hamlet's action. Like Antigone's choice between family and state, with no grounds for preferring one to the other, Brutus is presented with an irresolvable conflict between friendship and republicanism. But while Antigone knows that to act for the family or the state *is* moral within that framework, Brutus cannot even know, should he choose friendship or republicanism, whether his action for

friendship or republicanism will fulfill the moral framework he has chosen. That is, Brutus' choice of republicanism, with no reason to prefer it over friendship, also lacks any grounds for believing that killing Caesar actually accords with republicanism, fulfills the republican moral mandate. Brutus is left without any grounds for making any moral valuation at all.

Ch. II, Poiesis

¹ Parallel to, and catalytic of, my coming argument that Nietzsche conceives of himself as a literary character, I argue here that he conceives of the world as a literary text, “the world as a work of art that gives birth to itself” (WP, §796). Nehamas writes that “Nietzsche’s model for the world, for objects, and for people turns out to be the literary text and its components; his model for our relation to the world turns out to be interpretation” (91).

² This constitutes a reading of the Will to Power as an interpretive force, a mode of valuation—“the will to power *interprets*” (WP, §643). Insofar, then, as interpretation also constitutes the subject’s relation to himself—his objective analysis of himself, *pace* Hegel, and his self-creation by reinterpreting himself—the Will to Power constitutes the means by which the subject relates to and brings himself into being. It is a power over the self and what the self perceives and believes—it is a self-overcoming by which the self interpretively, artistically controls how it exists. The Will to Power is therefore also a Will to Interpret, in the context of writing, of the philosopher’s writing, a Will to Philosophize.

³ Sloterdijk asserts that Nietzsche’s recognition of perspectivism leads to an ironic relationship to his philosophical theses, but an irony that does not distance Nietzsche from his propositions. For Nietzsche, Sloterdijk argues, the philosopher occupies

ontologically an ironic site, one from which the pretending animal is condemned to see through his own fictions. His awakening to this irony is at the same time an awakening to philosophy—it is not an irony that could lead to detachment nor an understanding that would provide distance. At this site, the mechanism for maintaining distance from life through knowledge breaks down. But one must play with that from which one is unable to distance oneself. (80)

Nietzsche realizes that his views are mere perspectives, artificial. Yet he must still post things, must still will his interpretations of things—“man would much rather will *nothingness* than *not will*” (GM, III §28). In his very willing, then, Nietzsche overcomes dogmatism, embracing the illusory nature of his truths by playing with them, as Hamlet plays with his fencing foil.

⁴ From here on, Hamlet and Shakespeare will begin to blur. While in the first chapter I was able to maintain their separation by arguing that Shakespeare posits an understanding of reality through the portrayal of the character Hamlet, now Hamlet’s theatrical relationship to himself as the author of himself begins to look very like Shakespeare’s theatrical relationship to Hamlet as the author of Hamlet. And Nietzsche will argue, shortly, that Shakespeare writes himself by discharging his pathos in characters like Hamlet, so that Shakespeare’s self-relation is a self-creation like unto Hamlet’s. I have not discovered a clear way to distinguish the two, and Nietzsche seems to blend them together, even as Nietzsche will begin to blend Shakespeare and Hamlet with himself. Regarding this muddiness of interpretation, for now I pray you let it be. Or, if that is unsatisfying, Bloom’s take on Shakespeare’s merging with Hamlet:

Hamlet consciously takes on the burden of the theater's mystery augmented by Shakespeare's strength. Hamlet, too, ceases to represent himself and becomes something other than a single self—a something that is a universal figure and not a picnic of selves. Shakespeare became unique by representing other humans; Hamlet is the difference that Shakespeare achieved... Hamlet's final stance personifies Shakespeare's Negative Capability... (12)

Hamlet was the only Shakespearean character who could have written the play in which he appears. Again, I would add that Hamlet was capable of composing *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. There is pragmatically something very close to a fusion of Hamlet and Shakespeare the tragedian... Hamlet, in taking on Shakespeare's function as playwright-actor, assumes also the power of making Shakespeare his mouthpiece, his Player King who takes instruction. This is very different from Hamlet's serving as Shakespeare's mouthpiece. Rather, the creature usurps the creator... Hamlet "lets be" Shakespeare's empirical self, while taking over the dramatist's ontological self. (739).

⁵ For Nietzsche the process of critiquing other philosophers and thereby building one's own interpretations is an artistic and artisanal project symbolized by the Hammer—"part tuning fork to sound out hollow idols, part instrument of their destruction, and part sculptor's mallet to fashion new statues out of the forms as well as the materials of the old" (Nehamas, 97). Here this means that the Hammer is Hamlet's Dionysiac insight into the world—which destroys moral frameworks and scientific theories through its artistic realization in Hamlet's relationship to *The Mousetrap*—and Hamlet's self-creation which lets him rebuild his world through personal valuation. Interpretation, then "is the most powerful theoretical and practical instrument. It is the literal analogue of 'the hammer' with which [Nietzsche] proposes to do philosophy in the Preface to *The Twilight of the Idols*" (Nehamas, 97). But I want to argue that the tuning-fork aspect of the Hammer not only sounds out false idols—as Hamlet's playwriting lets him realize the vacuity of morality—but also allows for the musical tuning of the new edifice of illusion which capacitates action. The "veil of illusion" by which Hamlet acts, which he builds with his "sculptor's mallet" (or perhaps his fencing foil), must be tuned, brought into accord with the musical energy of the Dionysiac, absorbing Dionysiac energy. Shakespeare writes with a Hammer by using art, the theater, as a mechanism of both destruction and rebuilding.

⁶ In its most nihilistic presentation, the lack of truth makes philosophy a wandering; but in response Nietzsche figures philosophy as willing, and therefore fencing. The "wanderer upon the face of the earth" of *Human all too Human* becomes the warlike fencing Hamlet who models *Zarathustra* and *The Gay Science*.

⁷ Nietzsche's literary self-creation offers him a means of playing in accord with the perspectivist irony identified by Sloterdijk in note 2. Nietzsche thinks that art operates as a "saving sorceress" because it lets man stomach the fact that all truth is merely a metaphor. Therefore art provides a second degree of metaphor, a way of metaphorizing metaphor to artistically claim that the metaphor is authentic. Nietzsche's Apolline, artistic creation of himself lets him posit his truths as the artful creations of his character-self, and therefore as the authentic interpretations of that self, rather than merely contingent beliefs. Apollo serves to heal the searing darkness of Dionysiac night, and Apollo thereby also permits Dionysiac philosophizing. Blondel writes that

if man were aware of living in an originally and fundamentally metaphorical world, he would succumb to Dionysian madness. Thus, Apollo—god of the veil—hyperbolically obscures the metaphorical element in art... By metaphor and its excess, man forgets that he is originally a metaphoric being—and the height of metaphor is to forget that it is such. (Blondel, 172-73)

⁸ In addition to the following argument for this conclusion, predicated upon an interpretation of Nietzsche's writing, the assertion that Shakespeare critically influenced Nietzsche simply makes historical sense. In their translation by Schlegel, Shakespeare's plays had a central position in the literary education of young Germans, and Nietzsche wrote school essays on Shakespeare in the early 1860s as well as receiving a copy of the Complete Works for Christmas in 1861 (see Large, "Nietzsche's Shakespearean Figures"). Moreover, Nietzsche's early infatuation with the Romantics, especially Goethe, ensured that Nietzsche would consider Shakespeare deeply important for Western thought. In addition to Schlegel's role as translator of Shakespeare, Goethe wrote numerous essays on the Bard, and in *Conversations with Goethe*, which Nietzsche called "the best German book there is," Goethe waxes eloquent about Shakespeare's naturalism and artistry (HH, II §109). Finally, I offer Nietzsche's own participation in Shakespearean drama as an indication that Nietzsche understood what it means to embody the passionate characters written by the Bard: for Shakespeare's 300th birthday, Nietzsche played Hotspur in a class rendition of *Henry IV, Part I*—"not without false pathos," according to a classmate (Large, 47)!

⁹ That is, Nietzsche's refiguration of Kantian aesthetics to be an aesthetics of the creator requires that the creator recognize the created-ness, the poeticity, of his creations; the creator creates most authentically when he recognizes the utter contingency of his willing, when as an artist he creates the art-ificial.

¹⁰ Regarding Nietzsche's relationship to the philosophical canon, Deleuze writes that Nietzsche "compares the thinker to an arrow shot by Nature that another thinker picks up where it has fallen so that he can shoot it somewhere else" (ix). Consequently, Deleuze claims,

The succession of philosophers is not an eternal succession of sages, still less a historical sequence, but a broken succession, a succession of comets. Their discontinuity and repetition do not amount to the eternity of the sky which they cross, nor the historicity of the earth which they fly over. There is not eternal or historical philosophy. Eternity, like the historicity of philosophy, amounts to this: philosophy always untimely, untimely at every epoch. (107)

As Nietzsche blends Wagner and Schopenhauer within the *Untimely Meditations*, the philosophical assumption of one's philosophical predecessors as masks is an untimely process, a-historical because it is not the continuation of another's project but rather of another's persona. Nietzsche reinterprets, and thereby remakes, Schopenhauer and Wagner, Hamlet and Shakespeare, in order to wear them, and so he picks each up as an arrow in order to fire them as he sees fit. Nietzsche does not continue their work, but discontinuously appropriates their views.

¹¹ "The Dionysian man enters into every skin, into every emotion; he is continually transforming himself" (TI, §10). Shakespeare's absorption of himself into his characters therefore epitomizes the way in which the Dionysiac discharges itself through myriad masks, and moreover the way in which Nietzsche qua Dionysiac man/philosopher can enter into skins, masks, emotions. Nietzsche presents his emotions, his will, his interpretation, by responding to and portraying that

emotion in its Apolline, mask-like representation, and Nietzsche thereby philosophizes—qua Shakespeare.

¹² Nietzsche's assumption of masks, particularly of those of Hamlet and Shakespeare, may be conceived in a kind of Lacanian process of mirroring. Nietzsche interprets Hamlet, making Hamlet come to be as the image by which Nietzsche can understand himself—Nietzsche projects himself onto Hamlet. And then Nietzsche introjects this understanding of himself as Hamlet in order to philosophize like Hamlet's fencing. Hamlet is a mirror in which Nietzsche sees himself:

There is no mystery in a looking glass until someone looks into it. Then, though it remains the same glass, it presents a different face to each man who holds it in front of him. The same is true of a work of art. It has no proper existence as art until someone is reflected in it—and no two will ever be reflected in the same way. However much we all see in common in such a work, at the center we behold a fragment of our own soul, and the greater the art the greater the fragment. *Hamlet* is possibly the most convincing example in existence of this truth... It is quite as if *Hamlet* were itself a play within a play. *The Murder of Gonzago* was one thing to the Prince, another to the King, and others still to the Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, and the rest. So *Hamlet* is to us. The heart of it's hero's mystery will never be plucked out... But that does not mean that a deep man will not come closer to that mystery than a shallow man... No one but a dead man can escape projecting himself on the Prince of Denmark. But some will project themselves on many, others on only a few, of the innumerable facts of his personality. (Godard, 331-332)

¹³ Analyzing the portrayal of ghostliness in *Hamlet*, apropos of the Ghost, Derrida writes that

A genius *operates*, it always resists and defies after the fashion of a spectral thing. The animated work becomes that thing, the Thing that, like an elusive specter, *engineers* a habitation without proper inhabiting, call it a *haunting*, of both memory and translation. A masterpiece always moves, by definition, in the manner of a ghost. (168)

Culture, philosophy, literature, the canon become, then, hauntological entities which create the possibilities by which we live by creating the meanings by which we can think. As people, like the figure of the Ghost, haunt the social world, haunt each other's social worlds by appearing merely as figures, Shakespearean drama haunts Nietzsche insofar as it sets the stage for, but does not thereby become fully present in, Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche's philosophy responds to Shakespeare, but because it creates Shakespearean drama by interpreting it, that to which Nietzsche responds is never present—it is a Ghost, a hauntic being which is the hauntological condition of the possibility of thought.

¹⁴ Of course one can learn things about the grandparent that become apparent only by observation of the grandchild. But the direction of priority becomes obscure, the predecessor grounding the successor, and thereby offering insight into the successor—and the successor evolving from, and thereby offering insight into, the predecessor. Dealing with this infinite loop, the reciprocal, intertextual paradox of influence, Cavell writes that

If you are struck by the fit, by the way Shakespeare can interpret Freud... as well as Freud can interpret Shakespeare... then from whom shall we say we learn these things primarily?... To recognize that there is no answer to the question of priority between this art and this science would seem to me the sign of philosophical progress. (189)

¹⁵ Belsey: “philosophical texts do not exist in isolation from the meanings concurrently in circulation” (82); Barthes: “intertextuality... the impossibility of living outside the infinite text” (36).

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