

This item was submitted to Loughborough's Institutional Repository (<https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/>) by the author and is made available under the following Creative Commons Licence conditions.



For the full text of this licence, please go to:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>

Author-created final version for Institutional Repository:

Egan, Gabriel. 2011. "[Shakespeare, Idealism, and Universals: The Significance of Recent Work on the Mind](#)." *The Return of Theory in Early Modern English Studies: Tarrying with the Subjunctive*. Edited by Paul Cefalu and Bryan Reynolds. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 278-95

"Shakespeare, idealism, and universals: The significance of recent work on the mind" by Gabriel Egan

For most the twentieth century, the serious study of Shakespeare's works was founded on a general acceptance of the principles of Platonic idealism and essentialism, and a belief in the existence of universals. In textual criticism, the New Bibliography that emerged from the work of A. J. Pollard, W. W. Greg, and R. B. McKerrow in the first decades of the century assumed a relatively unproblematic application of Platonic idealism for the relationship between the play as conceived in the mind of the dramatist and the play as performed or written down. Since the 1980s idealism, essentialism, and universals have become dirty words as the New Historicism and Cultural Materialism popularized an unthinking association between these philosophical principles and political conservatism. In these new and related schools, the alleged antidote to all three evils was said to be materialism, which meant paying more attention to the physical (often the economic) realities of a system under consideration than to the ideas in it. In respect of the textual condition of Shakespeare's plays, this meant attending to the material particularities of the early quarto and Folio texts rather than seeking to extrapolate back from those to a lost authorial manuscript that preceded them or, worse still, to whatever it is Shakespeare had 'in mind' when he composed them.

Under this new intellectual dispensation, materialism was displayed as a badge of pride, a way of appearing to be tough and pragmatic by talking about the degree to which literature was (albeit covertly) really about money, matter, and production rather than love, ideas, and self-reflection. This was a curious development, since the particular kind of materialism the New Historicists and Cultural Materialists professed to practice was the nineteenth-century philosophical materialism best known through the works of Karl Marx. Ironically, far from rejecting ideas and valorizing harsh realities, Marx's materialism was an abiding concern for how ideas arise *from* material circumstances. To assert, as Marx did, that social being does not arise from consciousness but rather consciousness arises from social being is not to leave ideas out of the matter but to insist that they are the mysterious phenomena that are in need of an explanation rather than simply popping in existence to account for the way the world is. Finding a plausible account of the relationship between the hard facts of existence and the nebulous realm of ideas was a problem that dogged the twentieth-century refiners of Marxist determinism, notably Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Louis Althusser (whose approaches are admirably summarized by Eagleton 1991, 33-159), which tradition continues most exuberantly, although as yet without a solution, in the work of Slavoj Žižek (1989).

In analyzing cultures from the past (especially the early-modern period), New Historicism in particular drew upon a fresh approach from outside the Marxist tradition, articulated by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz who influentially characterized culture as essentially a literary phenomenon. According to Geertz, symbolic forms are the key to social behaviours--we must always ask 'what does this activity mean to these people?'--and the tools for reading culture are essentially literary-critical, not scientific. In an early and much anthologized essay, Geertz argued that Enlightenment science's approach to investigating the nature of humanity was to assume that like other phenomena (planetary motions, chemical reactions) this one would have universal principles underlying its apparent heterogeneity, and that finding these universals, this human nature, was the project for anthropology (Geertz 1965). Rejecting this, Geertz insisted that culture itself made people what they are, for it was "a set of control mechanisms--plans, recipes, rules, instructions . . . --for the governing of behavior", needed because humans are uniquely lost without such an "extragenetic, outside-the-skin control mechanism" (Geertz 1965, 107). In his most famous articulation of what follows from this, Geertz wrote that ". . . there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" (Geertz 1965, 112).

Geertz's primary evidence for this claim was that modern humans differ from their predecessor primates markedly in brain capacity and little else and that until a great deal of learning has been done a newborn human is not ready to survive unaided. Moreover, it was not that humans emerged and then became clever enough to have culture, but that culture (tool-making, collaborative hunting, and so on) slowly emerged among the primates and gradually turned *Australopithecus* into us. This account is itself not greatly controversial, but Geertz had a habit of drawing pithy conclusions that could be misread as overstatements of his case. A typical example is his claim that by "submitting" to culture "man determined, if unwittingly, the culminating stages of his own biological destiny. Quite literally, though quite inadvertently, he created himself" (Geertz 1965, 111). Clearly, Geertz had difficulty assigning agency here. Humankind is said to "submit" to culture as an outside force and yet to be made up by it. Geertz conceived culture and biology as mutually interactive and presumably mutually determining, since no amount of creative invention could produce tools that proto-human biology could not wield.

When, at the birth of New Historicism, Stephen Greenblatt repeated Geertz's assertion that there is no human nature independent of culture (Greenblatt 1980, 3), academics whose subject was literary culture found themselves thrillingly located in a central position after years of marginality within social science. If human nature were not a given but a product of culture then existing critical methodologies concerned with how literature illuminates or reflects the human condition had missed the point. Might not literature itself be constructing our sense of what it is to be human while seeming only to represent it? If so, it was performing the work of ideology as theorized in Marxism. An enlarged role for literary studies as a branch of social science and politics coincided with an ascent to orthodoxy of cultural relativism that offered the possibility of partially undoing the harm of European ethnocentrism. The cost of these developments for the study of literature has been high. Literary students most commonly encounter linguistics via the outmoded structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, which gives priority to language itself as an outside-the-skin system of signification, and empirical developments in the second half of the century

(such as Noam Chomsky's widely-accepted view that humans have an innate skill for a universal grammar of which particular languages are only instances) are generally under-appreciated in English departments. The dogma of anti-essentialism has driven a wedge between English studies and most scientific approaches to the human condition and has blinded literary scholars to what is being discovered about the qualities that humans really do share simply by virtue of being human. Moreover, there are startling insights about just how much of what we call culture (including such things as ethics, politics, and play) is common also among the more intellectually advanced animals.

While Geertz may be sympathetically read as indicating that culture has embedded itself deeply in human existence, he is more commonly used to assert simply that human nature itself does not exist and that there are no universals. As Bertrand Russell pointed out, we all believe in universals of some sort else we could not accept the truth of a geometrical proof. The opening premiss "Let ABC be a rectilinear triangle" rests on our acceptance that although any triangle we might draw to illustrate the proof will necessarily be imperfect (we cannot draw absolutely straight and infinitely thin lines), the principles of how imaginarily perfect objects behave are easily understood and moreover are objectively true (Russell 1946, 146). We do not allow our experience of measuring a hand-drawn triangle's interior angles and summing them to 179.5 degrees to deflect us from the principle that with perfectly straight lines the angles would (indeed, must) sum to 180 degrees. Rather than being a common feature of a collection of disparate objects (as with the human universal of smiling to present a non-threatening demeanour), this kind of universal is more like the Ideal or Form described by Plato in *The Republic* and *The Timaeus* in having no material manifestation and yet embodying a truth. Despite this benign meaning, many materialists habitually reject Platonic thinking on principle.

Both kinds of universal are unfashionable in modern literary studies, being widely suspected as merely camouflages for conservative and illiberal values. To suggest that all human beings share discoverable common traits can seem reminiscent of the ethnocentrism of much nineteenth-century anthropology in which non-European cultures were chauvinistically measured by the degree to which had acquired European attributes that were deemed universal. To suggest that Platonic idealism might be a useful way to approach the relationship between a play and its physical embodiment as scripts and performances was for a long time usual in textual studies (it was the standard model in New Bibliography), but is now routinely dismissed as essentialism. Indeed, it is an essentialist model of textuality, but this only seems problematic when all forms of essentialism are rejected out of hand without reasonable cause. A strict anti-essentialist would have to argue that Shakespeare's plays (or indeed anybody else's) cannot be translated into another language, since translation is predicated on the assumption that there exists an essence of the play that stands apart not only from its manuscript and printed texts but also from the particular words written by the dramatist. This essay will argue that essentialism and Platonic idealism are reasonable ways to think about the various manifestations of a play, as performance, as written script, and as originating ideas in the mind of the dramatist. As any materialist must accept, ideas have a basis in the organization of matter in the human mind--ideas are to that extent physically real--and the new scientific studies of consciousness (especially memetics and various models of cognition) show that the Platonic analogy provides a good way to conceptualize the

distinction between the play as abstract (but nonetheless material and somewhat embodied) thought and its various further embodiments in manuscript and print textualisations and as performances.

Dualism and the Intentional Stance

In his *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* (Meditations on First Philosophy), Rene Descartes responded to the radical scepticism of those such as Michel de Montaigne by asserting that while one could doubt the accuracy of one's sensory experiences, and hence doubt the existence of the world (including one's body) known from those experiences, one could not doubt the existence of the thinking mind that was, in that moment, doing the doubting (Descartes 1641). The thinking mind, at least, had to exist, and for Descartes this special status set the mind off from the rest of the body and the wider universe, all of which was made from matter; the mind, for Descartes, had to be immortal and (in his terminology) unextended and impossible to fragment. This is the essence of Cartesian dualism, dividing the material body from the immaterial (and unified) mind. Most people report that their mind does indeed feel unitary and immaterial (quite distinct from the body it inhabits), and when asked to consider its physical location in the brain many of us respond that it seems as though the sensory perceptions of the body were being delivered to a single, central location--a command centre--where the visual images are played on a screen and the sounds delivered through loudspeakers for the benefit of the real self operating the controls. The Cartesian model suffers the distinct problem of infinite regression: how does the inner self watching the screen and listening to the speakers gain its consciousness, unless we posit yet another smaller homuncule inside the first, and so on? The dualism of the Cartesian mind/body distinction seems to exert a powerful grasp on the way we think about ourselves, even though most people when pushed will accede that it cannot actually be true. It is certainly difficult to see how there could be an interface between the body and an immaterial spirit such that the latter could control the former. On reflection, materialists tend to agree with Gilbert Ryle that there can be no 'ghost in the machine' and that the mind is the name we give for the collection of activities that the brain, and the body of which it is a part, collectively perform (Ryle 1949).

It may be that the dualist habit is hard to discard because it has served an evolutionary purpose, for it allows us to treat the environment around us as full of intentions. An efficient way to make sense of how other creatures behave and to predict their future actions is to treat them as having purposes: a predator exist 'for' chasing oneself, prey exists 'for' chasing, caves exist 'for' sleeping in, and so on (Dennett 1987). Children are highly prone to impute purposes to objects, but adults do it too. In a famous experiment, Fritz Heider and Mary-Ann Simmel showed a simple animated film of a pair of triangles and a circle moving around and inside a box and asked viewers to report what they saw (Heider & Simmel 1944). Overwhelmingly, viewers constructed from the movements of these images a narrative of rivalry, pursuit and flight. It is as though the rational mind's acceptance that these are only shapes, not creatures with purposes, is overwhelmed by an innate predisposition to interpret certain movements as purposeful and thus to endow each shape with its own internal spirit. This kind of (possibly innate) benign dualism suits the dramatic arts. In an after-show discussion of a work-in-progress airing of his puppet-masque adaptation of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*,

Gregory Doran discussed the ease with which the mind treats a wooden puppet as though it were a living being. So convincing was the puppet Venus, Doran reported, that during rehearsals he found himself giving instructions directly to 'her' rather than the puppeteers (Shakespeare 2004). Theatre with human performers also promotes the habit of dualism as a mind inferred from a character's word is temporarily put in command of the actor's body.

In this we might see an inherent contradiction between emerging knowledge about the mind and the habits of thought that enable dramatic impersonation. We know that the mind is not a distinct entity apart from the body and also that it is not unitary. Sigmund Freud's division of the mind into conscious and unconscious parts remains popular in literary studies although recent research into the operations of the brain posits further empirically verifiable divisions, such as that between left and right hemispheres and between smaller specialized units. In Daniel C. Dennett's recent description of the mind, distinct modules in the human brain have worked more or less independently and unconsciously for millenia doing the important work of keeping us out of danger, while the illusion of a singular, conscious self arose only quite recently after the invention of language (Dennett 1993). Dennett's account is controversial among philosophers, and it puts language at the centre of its explanation of consciousness. Just what language itself is for remains a tricky anthropological question. The obvious answer might seem to be that it aids social cooperation, and so arose as an evolutionary innovation that enabled our ancestors to out-compete rival animals for the control of resources. However, our oversized brains (presumably needed for big thinking) are a physical disadvantage, consuming considerable energy even when apparently doing nothing useful for us and making childbirth considerably more dangerous than it would otherwise be. One of the best reasons for taking seriously Richard Dawkins's only half-intended invention of the meme, the cultural equivalent of the gene (Dawkins 1976, 189-201), is that it gives an explanation for this peculiar fact about our bodies.

As Susan Blackmore argued, a memetic pressure to increase brain size could have overwhelmed the genetic pressure to keep the brain small (Blackmore 1999, 67-81). Once imitation became useful to *Homo habilis*, about 2.5 million years ago, good imitators (that is, those whose brains happened to be good at copying others' behaviour) benefitted from a genetic-selection pressure in reproduction. The memes that were imitated might be genuinely useful (the making of sharp tools or the fashioning of clothes) but since, once culture took off, it made good sense from a survival point of view to mate with good imitators in preference to poor imitators, non-useful memes (say, for singing or decorating caves) could flourish too. At this point, according to Blackmore, the memes took over and were able to drive up brain size as if for their own ends. In fact, this view of human development had been somewhat anticipated by Geertz:

The slow, steady, almost glacial growth of culture through the Ice Age altered the balance of selection pressures for the evolving *Homo* in such a way as to play a major directive role in his evolution. . . . [The effects of culture] all created for man a new environment to which he was then obliged to adapt. As culture, step by infinitesimal step, accumulated and developed, a selective advantage was given to those individuals in the population most able to take advantage of it--the effective hunter, the persistent gatherer, the adept toolmaker, the resourceful leader--until

what had been a small-brained, protohuman *Homo australopithecus* became the large-brained fully human *Homo sapiens*. (Geertz 1965, 110-11)

Geertz's account lacks only Blackmore's insight that once being a good copyist conferred a genetic advantage, the things copied need not be exclusively practical, since unproductive memes too could flourish in this new intellectual substrate. That Geertz dates this process to about 3.5 million years ago and Blackmore to about 2.5 million years ago is irrelevant to the larger point about culture.

The claims that memetics makes about the origin of human physiology and culture have gained support from neurological science with the discovery of the mirror neurons, first in monkeys (Gallese et al. 1996) and then in humans (Arbib 2005). These neurons fire not only when we perform an activity but also when we watch someone else performing that same activity. They appear to be the reason that it is difficult to watch someone yawning or laughing without joining in, and equally why it is difficult to watch Lear's agony at the death of his daughter without sharing in the emotion. Our mirror neurons make us feel his pain even though we know we are watching only an imitation, and the principle seems anticipated in Hamlet's conviction that watching a representation of a crime is all the more acutely painful for those who have committed the like action. The memeticists' claim that we are merely the conduits for self-replicating practices and ideas may seem difficult to accept, but analogues of it have been common in the humanities and social sciences for some time. A correlative of the structuralist view of language and literature was that these extra-personal corpora of meaning-bearing distinctions speak, as it were, through us in our utterances and texts. The structuralist anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss identified his aim as not "to show how men think in myths but how myths think in men, unbeknownst to them" (Lévi-Strauss 1970, 20). Where Lévi-Strauss took up the process from the perspective of the myth instead of the teller, W. D. Hamilton and his followers such as Dawkins took up the perspective of the gene instead of the organism, and showed that the replicator fashions the organism to get itself copied. Equally, one might take up the view of the object you are holding and say that from the book's point of view the scholar (who researches in a library) is just a library's way of getting more books made.

Recent work on the mind and on language should be of special interest to those who engage with drama, since theatre is to a large extent concerned with the artificial construction of what seem like human minds in dialogue. We do not know just how realistic the theatre of Shakespeare's time aimed to be, and must not make the mistake of anachronistically applying twenty-first century assumptions about psychological plausibility to early-modern drama. Psychological approaches to acting such as those taught by Constantin Stanislavsky, Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg might well seem suitable for the portrayal of a character like Hamlet, whose unseen inner mental life is explicitly a part of the role. But they are scarcely useful for a brainless role like Rumour in *2 Henry 4* or a minimally motivated one such as the easily overlooked Adrian in *The Tempest*. But for characters that seem intended to be realistically human, certain insights about how the mind works throw light on theatrical impersonation and the construction of characters. According to F. Elizabeth Hart, we can see this at work when the characters themselves are constructing fictional realities for one another (Hart 2005). In *Othello*, Iago has a 'theory of mind', a term coined by David Premack and Guy Woodruff and meaning

the ability to impute mental states to oneself and others (Premack & Woodruff 1978). Children over the age of about four years are generally able to comprehend that they might know things that another does not and that another might hold beliefs that are actually false, say because that person is being tricked into believing falsehoods. With this 'theory of mind', a child is able accurately to predict others' behaviour even when deceptions are being practised. Children under the age of about four, or with conditions such as Downs syndrome and autism, are generally unable to make this distinction between the way things really are and the way that another might think they are (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith 1985).

Iago not only assumes that Othello has a mind and predicts how it will react, he also assumes that Othello himself has a 'theory of mind' and is trying to make sense of Iago's reactions. As Hart pointed out, humans are "compulsive mind-readers" and can be made to misread a mind by someone like Iago who is able to simulate the self-editing of a mind trying not to reveal itself. Othello constructs, from scraps of evidence, a version of Iago's mind that is self-editing to avoid being read:

OTHELLO

'Think, my lord?' By heaven, thou echo'st me
As if there were some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shown! . . .

. . .

[Thou] weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath,
Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more;
(*Othello* 3.3.110-25¹)

Iago only rarely lies, since he seldom needs to. Iago knows that habitually we read others' minds and he lets Othello misread his by dropping scraps of evidence from which Othello can construct the central falsehoods of the play for himself.

Early Modern Cognition and Textual Transmission

The art of creating plausible impersonations of fictional humans includes, of course, the creation of dialogue from which the audience may infer the existence of a mind thinking up the lines being spoken. Indeed, the entire process of early-modern theatre (as opposed to merely the problem of how to act) is illuminated by recent work on the mind, for certain of its practices required feats of mental activity that seem to us prodigious. It is clear from the diary of theatre impresario Philip Henslowe, which lists dates and titles of performances at his playhouses, that early-modern actors performed as many as six different plays in a week, with a new play entering the repertory about every two weeks. We might suppose, as Tiffany Stern did, that they managed this by sticking to formulas and having each man play the same kind of character in each play (Stern 2000). But Evelyn Tribble has suggested that in fact the physical and documentary mechanisms of early theatre took some of the burden from the individual acting mind (Tribble 2005). According to Tribble, the 'parts', the 'plot', the conventions of movement, the company structures, and the theatre building itself together comprised a cognitive system that enabled a playing company to maintain its seemingly miraculous high-turnover repertory. In a cognitive approach the tools we use are not strictly distinct from the minds that use them, but rather the tools are part of what we think with: they are "cognitive prostheses"

(Tribble 2005, 140). Actors did not receive the whole script of a play, only the 'part' containing each of one character's speeches, topped by a 'cue', the last two or three words of the previous speaker's speech. Thus the 'plot', a single folio sheet listing the scenes and who is in them, was an actor's only chance to see the whole play represented all-at-once, like a map, and so to see what parts he was doubling and how the scenes related one to another. Another prosthetic was verse speaking itself, since it not only helps remembering but it also conceals forgetting: a good actor can stay in verse even if he uses the wrong words (Tribble 2005, 150). Simple rules about stage movement, such as Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa's refinement of Bernard Beckerman's 'restaurant kitchen' rule (one door for getting 'on' and one for getting 'off'), make the least cognitive demands on the performer and hence are the most plausible of the various theories regarding staging conventions (Tribble 2005, 143; Gurr & Ichikawa 2000).

A convention not discussed by Tribble but probably pertinent is the one governing asides and soliloquies. Humphrey Gyde showed that it is possible to construct a single simple rule-based convention for both forms of address, only the former of which (asides) were so named in early-modern theatre scripts (Gyde 1990). Gyde argued that the implied injunction to a character who steps onto the Renaissance stage is 'tell us how you feel' and in responding to this call--especially in soliloquy where deception is not possible--dramatic personality is created. Gyde produced an elegantly simple model of the audibility of asides and soliloquies that he called 'represented awareness', and I have found no violations of it in the extant early-modern drama. Gyde claimed that a character speaking an aside or soliloquy can, as it were, deafen those characters whom she knows are on the stage at the time, invoking the convention of deafening by taking a step towards one of the edges of the stage ('aside') to confide in the audience. However, a character cannot deafen those of whose presence she is unaware, and hence the fear of being crept upon shown by soliloquizers, and their explicit silencing of themselves lest the speech that was privileged address to the audience be overheard in the world of the play:

[RICHARD GLOUCESTER]

Enter George Duke of Clarence, guarded, and Sir Robert Brackenbury

Dive, thoughts, down to my soul: here Clarence comes

(*Richard 3* 1.1.41)

[HAMLET]

. . . Soft you, now,

The fair Ophelia!

(*Hamlet* 3.1.90-1)

BANQUO

Thou hast it now: King, Cawdor, Glamis, all . . .

. . . But hush, no more.

Sennet sounded. Enter Macbeth as King, Lady Macbeth as Queen, Lennox, Ross, lords, and attendants

(*Macbeth* 3.1.1-10).

In response to these cues, and others that answer the 'tell us how you feel' injunction, the audience or reader infers a relatively unified and stable (albeit changeable) dramatic self, and as Bruce Smith showed--and Gyde independently

confirmed--this process is most obviously logocentric (in Jacques Derrida's sense) in the soliloquies, and more acoustically social in the ensemble scenes (Smith 2001). Smith, however, was concerned with the disorder--what he called 'green' sound--that encroaches upon the edges of logocentric order, and did not address the more philosophically fundamental problem of what we are doing when we infer a character from its utterances.

Even the most postmodern of us does not feel entitled to treat what a character says as genuinely self-contradictory; we habitually infer coherence of mind and seek alternative explanations for contradiction. Take the simple problem of how many men Miranda thinks she has encountered before meeting Ferdinand in *The Tempest*. In an aside Miranda implicitly counts Caliban among humankind: "This [Ferdinand] | Is the third man that e'er I saw" (1.2.447-8). Obviously, Prospero and Caliban were the first and second. However, speaking to Ferdinand she excludes Caliban from the count: "nor have I seen | More that I may call men than you, good friend, | And my dear father" (3.1.50-2). Rather than treat this as a fundamental rupture in the coherence or consistency of the dramatic world, we quite naturally treat such discrepancies as examples of a singular, unified character being in possession of imperfect knowledge of herself, of her selfhood perhaps changing over time, and, whether consciously or not, of a self shaping its account of reality to suit the hearer. Thus, we might say that in her own mind--and presumably her near-rape is significant in this regard--Miranda considers Caliban a potential, albeit revolting, sexual partner, but she would not want Ferdinand to think so.

We treat ourselves as likewise partially self-divided when we say "I forced myself to do it", or "I did not mean it". Such moments of self-division are among the markers of realistic dramatic character, and this fact itself corroborates the claim that consciousness--in dramatic characters as much as in real people--is an overarching phenomenological illusion of mental continuity that sutures the differences in our behaviours across time and space. Thus, although I do not feel that I am wholly the same person I was 20 years ago, I can hardly claim to be someone else entirely; at the very least the law may hold me to account for what I did back then. And yet there is a distinct fear of such continuities in much modern criticism and theorizing about Shakespeare. Foucauldians such as Margreta de Grazia would have us believe that before the Enlightenment people were simply more comfortable than we are with the discontinuous, the contradictory, and hence that (to take her example) when in Shakespeare the same letter is read aloud twice to produce seemingly different words, a problem emerges for us (with our unity-loving post-Enlightenment minds) that simply did not exist for them (De Grazia 1991, 222-26). As I argue elsewhere, De Grazia misread the historical evidence and an enabling fiction of characterological and textual unity was as important for them as for us, and this should inform our textual theory (Egan 2008). At the very least, both the singularity of the performance script (normally only one text was licensed by the Master of the Revels) and, press correction notwithstanding, the singularity of the printed text, belie the textual multiplicities favoured by postmodernism.

In our current dramatic practices, we grant coherent singularity to dramatic characters within a single text or performance, but withhold it when there exist multiple, seemingly distinct, early printings. We no longer feel entitled to consider the Hamlet found in Q1 to be the same as the Hamlet found in Q2 or in F, and hence the

new Arden³ edition of the play contains edited texts of all three versions (Shakespeare 2006a; Shakespeare 2006b). And yet we treat the Hamlet at the end of the play (in each version) as effectively the same as the Hamlet at the beginning, despite him having quite a different outlook and, as Roger Lewis pointed out, having answered his own question "To be or not to be" (3.1.58) with a definitive and conclusive "Let be" (Lewis 1978; Shakespeare 1604-5, N3v). This might well be considered something of a contradiction, and perhaps we should draw an analogy with our habitual refusal to construct a different person to account for how the character has altered over the course of the play (and we do not, as Dennett showed, do that with real people either) in order to say that we will not construct a different play each time we come across a variant version. The difficulty lies in overdetermination. There are two ways that a singular text may become a pair of variant texts, by revision or by corruption, and although either is sufficient to explain variation both may be operating as the cause of difference between two versions of a play. The problem was neatly stated by John Jowett, who observed that we used to think that Q1 and Folio *King Lear* were imperfect witnesses to a singular antecedent authorial version, and now we are in danger of deluding ourselves that they are perfect witnesses to two equally viable authorial versions, but in fact the truth lies between these positions: authorial revision and corruption separate these printings (Jowett 2007, 3).

Assuming that corruption will always be present in the printing of early-modern plays, how high should we set the threshold for variation before we say that revision must also be brought in as an explanation? In a preface to Blackmore's book on memes, Dawkins gave a cogent reason for distinguishing between variations that matter and those that do not, using Blackmore's distinction of reproductions that copy-the-product and those (much more important, and mostly human) imitations that copy-the-instructions. Imagine a Japanese master carpenter teaching an English apprentice:

The apprentice would not copy obvious mistakes. If the master hit his thumb with a hammer, the apprentice would correctly guess, even without understanding the Japanese expletive '** **** **!', that he meant to hit the nail. He would not make a Lamarckian copy of the precise details of every hammer blow, but copy instead the inferred Weismannian instruction: drive the nail in with as many blows of your hammer as it takes your arm to achieve the same idealized end result as the master achieved with his--a nail head flush with the wood. (Blackmore 1999, 12)

This is pure Platonism, even down to the use of an analogy from woodwork, allied with a view of genetics that rightly dispenses with Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck's notion of inheritance--that each generation's particularities (the ironsmith's large biceps, the bicycle-courier's powerful calves) are passed on to descendants--in favour of August Weismann's assertion of the continuity of the germ line: your genes are not, in fact, altered by your behaviour. Just as the apprentice copies not the master's actual practice but what is inferred to be the ideal behind it, so in genetic reproduction the 'recipe' for an organism, not a particular reading of that 'recipe' (the phenotype or bodily particularities) is what is passed on.

A version of this distinction was clearly in Philip Sidney's mind when he responded to Plato's famous attack on visual and poetic art, which attack claimed that because

any real-world object, say a bed, is only an imitation of a perfect Idea or Form of 'bed-ness', a painting of, or a poem about, a bed necessarily is only an imitation of an imitation (Plato 1941, 10:595a-608b, pp. 314-32). According to Sidney, ". . . the skill of each Artificer standeth in that *Idea*, or fore conceit of the worke, and not in the worke itself". Through imitating the idea, not the actual behaviour, the prentice may surpass the master and the poet can make "things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite a new, formes such as neuer were in nature" (Sidney 1595, C1r). Using Blackmore's example, we may notice that a person's recipe for a new soup could be disseminated by repeated imitation of the soup by those who tasted it (Lamarckian, copy-the-product dissemination), in which case slight alterations might accumulate quite quickly as each chef chooses to add more salt (Blackmore 1999, 60-61). But if the recipe circled the world as a text on the Internet, such local variations would not accumulate because the text (like the germ line, DNA) is not altered by the variations (thus Weismannian, copy-the-instructions dissemination). The analogy works well for Shakespeare: most of the early textual reproduction was monogenetic (Q1 was copy for Q2, which was copy for Q3 and so on) and, now that the memorial reconstruction theory is largely discredited (in which theory actors created a complete script by recalling their individual lines), we can say that there was relatively little copy-the-product dissemination.

If we think the Dawkins/Blackmore/Dennett line on Platonism and the dissemination of cultural knowledge is reasonable in its distinction between variations that matter and those that do not, and if we think that human character is an example of where we should permit considerable latitude (such as variations of behaviour and beliefs) before we conclude that we are dealing with more than one person, there seems little reason to accept the current textual theorizing that finds in each textual variant (apart from those that are egregious errors) the branching off of a new version of the play. Recast in terms of human labour, playwrighting tends towards the singular not the plural and to accord a distinct line to each textualization that happens to survive is as mistaken as asserting that there is no singularity called Coca-Cola because (contrary to the corporation's official line) we know that its sweetness is varied when it is sold in different markets across the world. It is true that we do not possess a manuscript recipe for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, only three copies of it that differ markedly. But we are entitled to treat these as three approximations of one thing, the Platonic ideal of *Hamlet* as it existed (in material form, as configurations of neurons) in the mind of Shakespeare. If, over time, Shakespeare changed his mind about *Hamlet*, it is still conceptually *Hamlet* even if a text closely representing the conceptual state at time T_1 is quite different from a text closely representing the conceptual state at time T_2 .

It is not that there was actually a pure and unembodied form of the play in the mind of Shakespeare and that all textualizations are fallings-off from this perfected state. Ideas are not quite like that. According to Dennett, even in our minds experiences and intentions exist in multiple and inchoate forms, never coming together at one place (the now-dismissed Cartesian Theatre):

We don't directly experience what happens on our retinas, in our ears, on the surface of our skin. What we actually experience is a product of many processes of interpretation--editorial processes, in effect. They take in relatively raw and one-sided representations, and yield collated, revised, enhanced representations, and

they take place in the streams of activity occurring in various parts of the brain.
(Dennett 1993, 112)

The written state of the plays existing in multiple textualizations has an analogy in the neurological state inside our heads, the 'multiple-drafts' model of consciousness. The feeling that the experiences and intentions adhere together, are coherent and persistent over time, comes from the combination of memes that we call consciousness: the simplified version of oneself that the various modules of the brain collectively generate for the purpose of managing the whole. (A useful analogy would be the 'My Computer' icon that the Microsoft Windows operating system presents to its user: like the Cartesian homuncule this exists within the hardware that it purports to represent, and it hides from the user the messy detail of the modules that make the real system.) The editorial work performed by the mind to generate and perpetuate the useful fiction of me (to me) or you (to you) is precisely like the editorial work formerly undertaken by editors to generate and perpetuate the useful fiction of a singular, coherent Shakespeare play for his readership and theatre practitioners. As that singularity and coherence breaks down in modern editorial practice, the plays become at worst impossible to speak of at all, or at best they become identified with, and constrained by, their extant early textualizations. This is not how Shakespeare would have thought of them, nor how the early actors would have thought of them, because it is not really how the human mind works. Conflating multiple drafts to create usable fictions of self, of textuality, of existence, are what our minds have evolved to do.

Notes

¹ All quotations of plays are from Shakespeare 1989 unless otherwise stated.

Works Cited

Arbib, Michael A. 2005. "From Monkey-like Action Recognition to Human Language: An Evolutionary Framework for Neurolinguistics." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 28. 105-67.

Baron-Cohen, Simon, Alan M. Leslie and Uta Frith. 1985. "Does the Autistic Child Have a 'Theory of Mind'?" *Cognition* 21. 37-46.

Blackmore, Susan. 1999. *The Meme Machine*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Dawkins, Richard. 1976. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

De Grazia, Margreta. 1991. *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus*. Oxford. Clarendon.

Dennett, Daniel C. 1987. *The Intentional Stance*. Cambridge MA. MIT Press.

Dennett, Daniel C. 1993. *Consciousness Explained*. Illustrated by Paul Weiner. London. Penguin.

Descartes, Rene. 1641. *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*. Paris. Michael Soly.

Eagleton, Terry. 1991. *Ideology: An Introduction*. London. Verso.

Egan, Gabriel. 2008. "Foucault's Epistemic Shift and Verbatim Repetition in Shakespeare." *Shakespeare's Book*. Edited by Richard Meek, Jane Rickard and Richard Wilson. Manchester. Manchester University Press. 123-39.

Gallese, Vittorio, Luciano Fadiga, Leonardo Fogassi and Giacomo Rizzolatti. 1996. "Action Recognition in the Premotor Cortex." *Brain* 119. 593-609.

Geertz, Clifford. 1965. "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man." *New Views of the Nature of Man*. Edited by John R. Platt. Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 93-118.

Greenblatt, Stephen. 1980. *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press.

Gurr, Andrew and Mariko Ichikawa. 2000. *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres*. Oxford Shakespeare Topics. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Gyde, Robert Humphrey. 1990. *Speaking Apart: The Formation and Exploration of Character Through the Aside and Soliloquy in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Stanford CA. Stanford University.

Hart, F. Elizabeth. 2005. 'The Renaissance Theory of 'Things' and 'Words', or What Iago Knows That Othello Doesn't': A Paper for the Seminar 'Theorizing the Mind in English Renaissance Literature' at the National Convention of the Modern Language Association of America Held in Washington DC, 27-30 December.

Heider, Fritz and Mary-Ann Simmel. 1944. "An Experimental Study of Apparent Behaviour." *American Journal of Psychology* 57. 243-49.

Jowett, John. 2007. *Shakespeare and Text*. Oxford Shakespeare Topics. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1970. *The Raw and the Cooked*. Trans. John and Doreen Weightman. Mythologiques: Introduction to the Science of Mythology. 1. London. Cape.

Lewis, Roger. 1978. "The Hortatory Hamlet." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 72. 59-60.

Plato. 1941. *The Republic*. Trans. and ed. Francis Macdonald Cornford. Oxford. Clarendon Press.

Premack, David and Guy Woodruff. 1978. "Does the Chimpanzee Have a 'Theory of Mind'?" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 4. 515-26.

Russell, Bertrand. 1946. *History of Western Philosophy and its Connections with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. London. George Allen and Unwin.

Ryle, Gilbert. 1949. *The Concept of Mind*. London. Hutchinson's University Library.

Shakespeare, William. 1604-5. *[Hamlet] The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*. STC 22276 BEPD 197b (Q2). London. J[ames] R[oberts] for N[icholas] L[ing].

Shakespeare, William. 1989. *The Complete Works*. Ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery. Electronic edition prepared by William Montgomery and Lou Burnard. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

Shakespeare, William. 2004. *Venus and Adonis: A Masque for Puppets (Work in Progress)*. Directed by Gregory Doran at Royal Shakespeare Theatre Stratford-upon-Avon on 10 October as part of the New Work Festival 29 September to 17 October.

Shakespeare, William. 2006a. *Hamlet*. Ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. The Arden Shakespeare. London. Thomson Learning.

Shakespeare, William. 2006b. *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*. Ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. The Arden Shakespeare. London. Thomson Learning.

Sidney, Philip. 1595. *The Defence of Poesie*. STC 22535. London. [Thomas Creede] for William Ponsonby.

Smith, Bruce R. 2001. "Hearing Green: Logomarginality in *Hamlet*." 1.1-2. Online (<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/07-1/logomarg/intro.htm>). Internet 9 August 2001. *Early Modern Literary Studies* 7.1. n. pag.

Stern, Tiffany. 2000. *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*. Oxford. Clarendon Press.

Tribble, Evelyn. 2005. "Distributing Cognition in the Globe." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56. 135-55.

Žižek, Slavoj. 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London. Verso.