Making Mistakes:
Shakespeare, Metonymy, and *Hamlet*
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PERHAPS PARADOXICALLY, GIVEN THE TITLE OF THIS VOLUME, WE WOULD
like to address the question of boundaries that do exist within Shake-
speare's texts. This arises from a new project of ours, one that follows
on from our earlier collaboration, *Shakespeare, Meaning and Metaphor*.[1]
In that book, we applied recent studies of metaphor within the fields
of linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy to Shake-
speare. This time, we aim to do something similar with metonymy: to
expound recent thinking about this more difficult and less familiar
figure (or set of figures) and to develop an approach to literary texts
through it, focusing primarily on Shakespeare.

In recent times it was Roman Jakobson, working broadly within the
tradition of Saussurean linguistics, who labeled metonymy as one of
the two "axes of language."[2] Subsequently, scholars have developed
his approach, both within structuralism and within cognitive linguis-
tics in the productive tradition inaugurated by George Lakoff and
Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*.[3] David Lodge has applied this
mode of analysis to modern literature,[4] while scholars such as Jane
Hedley, Jutka Dévényi, and Judith Anderson have applied it to early
modern texts.[5]

Metonymy can be defined in a broad sense as the figure of conti-
guity or "next-to-ness," as opposed to metaphor as the figure of simi-
larity. The notion of an entity that is demarcated from its surroundings
is necessarily one of contiguity. It should be said that, puzzling though
metaphor as the figure of resemblance is, metonymy as the figure of
contiguity is a great deal more puzzling. It is not currently clear to us
that the excellent and thought-provoking work done in the past and
being undertaken in the present under the name of metonymy can in
fact be "unified." Certainly, to do so would be an ambitious aim. Here
we wish to be eclectic and exploratory, since metonymy is not our
topic, only a tool with which to address the matter of boundaries.

Boundaries exist to keep us from making mistakes about relation-ships and lines of demarcation. This chapter, when we move on to *Hamlet,* will explore a number of boundaries and a number of mis-takes, amongst other things the boundary between the living and the dead, the contiguity inherent in kinship ("next of kin," "a little more than kin and less than kind"), and some issues of recognition and mis-recognition. We will eventually focus on the metonymics of the dumb show, with reference of course to Dieter Mehl's important book on *The Elizabethan Dumb Show* (first published in German in 1964 and translated into English in 1965),[6] and we will show how his work has resonance for what we are trying to do with metonymy today. But we will begin with a more broad discussion of the significance of mis-takes, using metonymy as an exploratory concept, and, in a related way, the idea of boundaries.

Boundaries exist, inter alia, to save us from the bad consequences of mistakes, whether to help us to avoid them or to help us to rectify them. Metonymy, in its very broad definition going back to classical rhetoric, is the figure of boundaries. Its formulae—contiguity, part for whole and vice versa, container-contained and genus-species relationships—have in common a concern with boundaries and frames. We believe that Shakespeare was very interested in bound-aries, and that his "unboundedness," in the various senses our fellow contributors to this volume discuss, is in good part a function of how he exploits boundaries dramatically and poetically. The reason for Shakespeare's continuing strength across temporal, nation-state, and linguistic borders is that metonymy's boundary-related relationships, even more than metaphor's similarity relationships, are cognitively fundamental to human culture, hence remarkably stable cross-cultur-ally and hence transmissible across space, time, and language.

The mistake, or mistakenness, is a key powering force in narrative generally, well suited to provide material for the "middle" of the be-ginning-middle-end structure of stories. Something has to go wrong, either so that it can come right (comedy), or go decisively wrong (tragedy), or be there to be accounted for (history). Shakespeare was aware of this from the beginning of his career, when after all he pro-duced early on *The Comedy of Errors.*

Mistakes come in many varieties, of course, but boundary issues and their metonymic aspects provide a unifying framework for dis-cussing them, a framework of which, we suggest, Shakespeare had a startlingly intuitive grasp. This helps to explain the cross-narrative re-semblances that hold the canon together. Here is a preliminary (and selective) typology of mistakes found in plays regardless of genre (comedy, tragedy, history):

- mistakes of identity
- mistakes based on contiguity ("being in the wrong place at the wrong time," mistakes of misfortune)
- mistakes of miscategorization (genus-species)

We will discuss briefly some examples of each of these from across the canon before concentrating on how they come together in the fabric of *Hamlet*.

MISTAKES OF IDENTITY

The boundary between an individual and all other individuals is humanly crucial, and its loss is one of the great potential fears. *The Comedy of Errors* is a tour de force in its setting up space-time noncontiguity relationships that, with some help from strong resemblance relationships (the double twins), allow the errors to occur. At the same time, the contiguity of succession of scenes and of shared stage-space gives the audience its privileged and pleasurable grasp of who exactly is who. (A production of the play in which the audience got lost as to character identities would be judged to be a failure.)

No one in *The Comedy of Errors* is actually in disguise (one might say that from the point of view of the plot it is sheer good luck that the two pairs of identical twins happen to be wearing identical clothes), but of course a common cause of mistaken identity in Shakespeare is when female characters dress "up" as men, crossing gender boundaries (Rosalind becoming Ganymede in *As You Like It,* Viola becoming Cesario in *Twelfth Night*), or when male characters dress "down," crossing class boundaries (the King becoming Harry le Roy in *Henry V,* Kent becoming Caius and Edgar becoming Poor Tom in *King Lear*); occasionally, male characters dress "up" in class terms, as when in *1 Henry IV* Sir Walter Blunt and other men fight on the battlefield at Shrewsbury "[s]emblably furnish'd like the King himself" (5.3.21). "The King hath many marching in his coats," as Hotspur puts it (5.3.25).[7] Imogen in *Cymbeline* does both: she dresses "up" across the gender boundary to be a man but "down" across the class boundary to be a commoner, Fidele. *Cymbeline* also contains the extraordinary scene of the mistaken corpse, mistaken partly because of its stolen or usurped clothing and partly because it lacks the important part-for-whole piece that would confirm its identity, the face. The face for the person is one of the "metonymies we live by," as Lakoff and Johnson put it. Digressing from their discussion of everyday, inescapable metaphoricity, whereby one kind of thing gets regularly, even auto-

matically, understood in terms of another ("time is money," "argu-
ment is war," etc.), they note that metonymy can serve some of the
same purposes that metaphor does and specifically that "the face for
the person" is not just a poetic or rhetorical device but part of the way
we think and act as well as the way we talk and write: "If you ask me
to show you a picture of my son and I show you a picture of his face,
you will be satisfied. You will consider yourself to have seen a picture
of him. But if I show you a picture of his body without his face, you
will consider it strange and will not be satisfied. You might even ask,
'But what does he look like?' "[8] *Cymbeline* pushes this everyday
metonymy to the limit by suggesting that even a wife might not rec-
ognize her husband when presented with not just "a picture of his
body" but an actual corpse without a face.

Other cases of mistaken identity occur without the need for either
identical twins or disguise: "I am not what I am," says Iago in *Othello*
(1.1.64), meaning that he is not the blunt honest captain that he pre-
tends to be (a stereotype that Kent employs for a more admirable pur-
pose in *King Lear*). Iago's whole strategy is to lead Othello toward his
terrible mistake by manipulating stereotypical identities: Desdemona
is set up as the typical Venetian woman who would deceive her hus-
band, Cassio as the typical seducer "framed to make women false"
(1.3.396), and Othello himself as the typical passionate black man
who will act violently on a jealous impulse. In a completely different
kind of plot, one reading of *The Taming of the Shrew* is that Petruchio's
strategy is to persuade the characters surrounding Kate that her clas-
sification or identity as a shrew has been a mistake; arguably he per-
suades Kate herself of this in the scene on the road back to Padua in
which she joins in his game of mistaking the sun for the moon and
an old man for a young woman.

MISTAKES OF CONTIGUITY

Being in the wrong place at the wrong time is a fatal mistake in a num-
ber of plays. The "Clown" who carries a letter from Titus Andronicus
to Saturninus expects to be rewarded, not hanged; Polonius, eaves-
dropping in the Queen's closet in *Hamlet,* expects to learn Hamlet's
secrets, not to be killed. In this context, *Romeo and Juliet* might be reti-
tled *The Tragedy of Errors:* Romeo is very much in the wrong place (or
the wrong company) when he encounters Tybalt immediately after
his secret wedding and gets drawn into a fight. "O, I am fortune's
fool," he cries (3.1.137), but it is Mercutio who has paid for this mis-

take with his life. Further mistakes—the failure of Friar Lawrence's letter to reach Romeo and the mistiming of Juliet's return to consciousness—climax in Romeo mistaking Juliet's live body for a corpse and thereupon killing himself.

Similarly fatal mistakes occur in the English and classical historical plays: Cassius in *Julius Caesar* kills himself thinking that Octavius's army has defeated Brutus's army whereas in fact it is the other way around. Messala comments:

> Mistrust of good success hath done this deed.
> O hateful Error, Melancholy's child,
> Why dost thou show to the apt thoughts of men
> The things that are not? O Error, soon conceived,
> Thou never com'st unto a happy birth
> But kill'st the mother that engendered thee.
>
> (*Julius Caesar*, 5.3.64–69)

These are difficult lines, and they are powerful in a way that we had not noticed before reading them in this context. We take it that error is seen as melancholy's child because nonexistent evils (in this case the perception of defeat rather than victory) are the product or offspring of depressed or suicidal minds. Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra,* like Romeo, kills himself thinking his lover is already dead—in this case a piece of deliberate manipulation on her part that causes his fatal mistake.

Deliberate manipulation of place and time is used to bring about happier conclusions in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* when the so-called bed-trick is used to avoid two women (Diana and Isabella) being in the wrong place at the wrong time (the bed of the would-be rapist) from their point of view, and to substitute two other women (Helena and Mariana) for whom this is the right place (the bed of the husband or the betrothed). Helena reflects uncomfortably on the consequences of this supposedly happy mistake:

> But, O strange men!
> That can such sweet use make of what they hate,
> When saucy trusting of the cozen'd thoughts
> Defiles the pitchy night; so lust doth play
> With what it loathes for that which is away.
>
> (*All's Well That Ends Well*, 4.4.21–25)

and later remarks to Bertram, "when I was like this maid / I found you wondrous kind" (5.3.308–9).

MISTAKES OF MISCATEGORIZATION

One could say that this type of mistake occurs when one species of object or person is mistaken for another of the same genus. The most obvious—indeed, obsessive—example in Shakespeare is where a member of the genus "woman" is mistaken for a member of the species "unfaithful woman." This could be seen to overlap with, but is distinct from, mistaken identity: there is no doubt about the identity of Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing,* Desdemona in *Othello,* Imogen in *Cymbeline,* or Hermione in *The Winter's Tale,* but each is mistaken by her husband (or in Hero's case her fiancé) for a different kind of woman. For Desdemona and Imogen there is an additional contiguity mistake whereby a significant object (the handkerchief, the bracelet) is seen as part of the woman in such a way that it can be taken to stand in for her and represent her, with disastrous (or nearly disastrous) consequences.

This kind of mistake does not seem to occur in the same way with male characters (Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors* thinks her husband has been unfaithful to her, but she happens not to be mistaken), but a comparable set of errors flow from the perception of a member of the genus "man" as a member of the species "brave man." As Hero, Desdemona, Imogen, and Hermione appear to their husbands to be what they are not (unchaste or unfaithful), so characters like Parolles in *All's Well That Ends Well* and Pistol (and even Falstaff) in the *Henry IV* plays appear to some of those around them to be more heroic and less cowardly than the audience knows they really are.

ELSINORE MISTAKENNESS

From this point on, we will concentrate on *Hamlet.* The play is a veritable treasury of mistakes, of accusations or fears of mistakenness, of boundaries not observed or wrongly crossed. Just before "The Murder of Gonzago" is interrupted, the Player Queen piously wishes "never come mischance between us twain" (3.2.222), but by the end Horatio is ready to speak of

> . . . accidental judgements, casual slaughters
> . . . purposes mistook
> Fallen on th'inventors' heads.
>   (5.2.366–69)

and Horatio is anxious to get the situation under control "lest more mischance / On plots and errors happen" (5.2.378–79). We can explore only a few of the numerous examples.

What Kind of a Mistake Might the Ghost Be?

Obviously the Ghost is not, literally, Hamlet's father, because Hamlet's father is dead, though the modern colloquial phrase "a ghost of his former self" makes sense in terms of a process of negative change over time: Ophelia's response to Hamlet's transformation from his former self ("O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown," etc.) is relevant here, as indeed is the King's comment on his stepson that "nor th'exterior nor the inward man / Resembles that it was" (2.2.6–7). To be a ghost must be to have, or represent, some part of an actually vanished whole, and, alarmingly, to have crossed the boundary (or "bourn" as Hamlet calls it at 3.1.78) between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Horatio accuses the Ghost of "usurping"

> . . . that fair and warlike form
> In which the majesty of buried Denmark
> Did sometimes march.
>
> (1.1.45–48)

The Ghost is wearing Hamlet's father's clothes—"Such was the very armour he had on" (1.1.59) and "My father in his habit as he lived" (3.4.133) and could easily be mistaken for him, as Sir Walter Blunt is for Henry IV. The physical resemblance is stressed: "Is it not like the King?" asks Marcellus, to which Horatio replies "As thou art to thyself" (1.1.57–58), later assuring Hamlet "[t]hese hands are not more like" (1.2.211). But Hamlet is still cautious: this may be a case of disguise where the Ghost has put on not only the clothes but the very body (or bodily appearance) of his father: "If it assume my noble father's person" (1.2.242).

A categorization of such a being is called for, given the seriousness of what the Ghost is calling upon Hamlet to do—namely, to revenge him. The Ghost may be a "true ghost," or it may be a deceptive ghost, a fiend. The "look" of the Ghost is one sign of its truth. But the appearance of devils may be dissembling. So a part, the appearance, does not necessarily stand for a whole. ("[S]mile and smile and be a villain" [1.5.108] is only one of many remarks in the play to this effect.) Independent corroboration of the Ghost's legitimacy as the true ghost of his father is felt by Hamlet to be required. Hence the performance of "The Murder of Gonzago" (or, as Hamlet calls it, "The Mousetrap"), of which we will have more to say below. A fiction is set up to "stand in for" the reality of the fratricide. This is a matter of resemblance ("something like the murder of my father" [2.2.530]): the dumb show and the spoken lines (a problematic part inserted into what the Play-

ers would have known as a whole play) resemble what actually happened sufficiently for the King to call "Give me some light, away" (3.2.261). But resemblance consists, precisely, in the likenesses of the contiguity of the means of murder, the poison applied to the ear.

The Ghost's likeness to the dead King is one question; the dead King's unlikeness to the usurping, fratricidal king is equally dwelt upon. And the focus here, from Hamlet's point of view, is on the accusation of incest—a crossing of one of the boundaries set out in the *Book of Common Prayer* "Table of Kindred and Affinity" whereby a man may not marry his (dead) brother's wife. The play is notoriously unclear on this issue: the King himself draws attention to it by describing Gertrude as "our sometime sister, now our Queen" (1.2.8), but he does not list incest among his sins in his attempt to pray in act 3, scene 3; the Queen sees her remarriage as merely "hasty" (2.2.57), and the councillors have apparently gone along with it (1.2.15–16). It is only Hamlet and the Ghost who use words like "incest" and "incestuous" (1.2.157; 1.5.42 and 83). Early audiences would have been aware that Henry VIII had gained papal permission to marry Katherine of Aragon, widow of his dead brother Arthur, though he subsequently claimed this was a sin when he wanted to marry Anne Boleyn, thereby precipitating the English Reformation.[9] Interestingly, the Queen in *Der bestrafte Brudermord* or *Fratricide Punished,* an eighteenth- or possibly seventeenth-century German play derived from *Hamlet,* mentions having had a papal dispensation for her second marriage in the equivalent of the closet scene.

In the very scene in which he is shortly to be informed about the "figure like your father" (1.2.198), Hamlet has already remarked on "My father's brother (but no more like my father / Than I to Hercules)" (1.2.152–53), and his insistence upon the unlikeness culminates in the contiguous presentation of the "counterfeit presentment[s]" of the two brothers in the closet scene (3.4.51–86), where he dwells at length on the physical and moral differences between the two men—a discourse that becomes even more striking if, as in Kenneth Branagh's film, the actor playing Hamlet's uncle is, at least to some members of the audience, more attractive than the actor playing his father, or if, as has happened frequently onstage since John Gielgud's production in 1939, the same actor plays both parts.

Do You Know Me, My Lord?

Hamlet's pretended misrecognition of Polonius ("Excellent well, you are a fishmonger," [2.2.171]) is a deliberate and comic mistake, crossing a class boundary and signaling to the audience that he is feigning

madness at this point. Earlier in the scene, it has become conventional to make a comic moment of the first appearance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: when the King dismisses them with "Thanks, Rosencrantz, and gentle Guildenstern," the Queen follows him with "Thanks, Guildenstern, and gentle Rosencrantz" (2.2.33–34)—perhaps just a piece of courtesy, giving the two courtiers equal priority, but more often interpreted as a correction of the King who does not know which is which. In Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967), it is Rosencrantz himself who first confuses the names, and the confusion continues throughout the play, raising the specter of losing one's own identity, as in *The Comedy of Errors.*[10] Without ever having recourse to literal disguise (apart from Hamlet's own plot to "put an antic disposition on," a plot that is usually underplayed on the modern stage), the play keeps raising issues of uncertain or mistaken identity. From Hamlet's banal castigation of women to Ophelia in which he resorts to a conventional criticism of makeup ("God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another" [3.1.142–43]) to his response to discovering that he has murdered her father ("Is it the King? / . . . / I took thee for thy better" [3.4.24–30]), the question of what it is to know someone or be known oneself reverberates.

Hamlet himself refuses to be known ("Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?" [3.2.361–62]) and asks, more than once, "What / . . . is a man?" (2.2.269, 4.4.32). Despite his contempt for the conventional trappings of mourning ("I know not 'seems'. / . . . These / . . . are actions that a man might play" [1.2.76, 83–84]) he encourages his mother to practice hypocrisy ("Assume a virtue if you have it not" [3.4.158]) and has no hesitation about substituting his own message to the king of England and using the royal seal to cover the deception. Insisting on the differences between his father and his stepfather, he nevertheless plays on the idea of his "uncle-father" (2.2.313) and even addresses his stepfather as "mother" (4.3.48–49). The comedy of the conversation with the Gravedigger in act 5, scene 1 depends on Hamlet himself not being recognized, although the Gravedigger claims to recognize Yorick's skull. Horatio either does not know or does not recognize Laertes in this scene (Hamlet has to tell him who he is), but in the next scene, in one of the play's most extravagant comic exchanges, Hamlet and Osric enumerate Laertes' "parts" or qualities with a rhetoric from mathematics:

> *Hamlet.* Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you, though I know to divide him inventorially would dazzle th'arithmetic of memory. . . . [T]o make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror, and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more.
>
> (5.2.98–105)

This gets us back to expressions like "as thou art to thyself" and "these hands are not more like": the only person "like" Laertes is his mirror image or his shadow.

AND IN PART HIM

Polonius carefully instructs Reynaldo to say to the Danes he seeks out in Paris that he knows Laertes' "father and his friends / And in part him" (2.1.14–15), concealing his own knowledge in order to draw information out of his interlocutors. Persons and their bodies seem to fragment in this play, taking on iconic significance at times—the dead King's ear, Yorick's skull, the "drop of blood that's calm [that] proclaims [Laertes] bastard" (4.5.117). One of the most difficult passages in the play—indeed, in the entire canon—concerns a part-for-whole issue. This is Hamlet's speech at 1.4.17–38 (found only in the 1604/5 Second Quarto text) on how Danish drunkenness destroys the nation's reputation; it is often referred to as the "dram of eale" crux ("eale" being an otherwise unknown word, much emended by editors, usually to "evil"). The gist of the speech is obvious, even proverbial: "One ill condition mars all the good,"[11] but Hamlet's elaboration on the idea that a single flaw ("some vicious mole of nature" [1.4.24], "the stamp of one defect" [1.4.31], "that particular fault" [1.4.36], or finally "the dram of eale" [1.4.36]) can damage a good person or nation by bringing him or them into disrepute is convoluted and syntactically obscure.

A puzzling part-for-whole moment occurs very early on, only eighteen lines into the first scene. "Say, what, is Horatio there?" asks Barnardo and gets the reply "A piece of him" (1.1.18). The "piece" of Horatio may be only his hand, offered in greeting, or "a shrunken fragment of his real self," on account of the cold. "Peace, break thee off" (1.1.39), Marcellus says once the Ghost appears: speech is thought of as an extended body that in being broken off, curtailed, brings about peace (quiet)—unlike, one might say, "The Murder of Gonzago" which, in being broken off, brings us closer to the violent climax of the play. Already, "Stand and unfold yourself," Francisco has said to Barnardo (1.1.2): in the darkness there is a folding up of identity. In the actual full light of a Globe Theatre performance by daylight, worries about who is who and what can be seen of each are being created purely in language. The Ghost is a "dreaded sight" (1.1.24), in which Horatio does not initially believe. It has a "figure," which is to say that what it looks like, its figure, stands for itself as a putative identity: "the same figure like the King that's dead" (1.1.40).

This is a form, "fair and warlike" (1.1.46); a form of Denmark (the dead king being a metonymy for his kingdom), now buried; a form that once marched. Any identity is a relationship between a visible or more broadly "sensible" part—calling upon the apparition to speak is all-important—and the whole it "expresses."

It is clear that part-for-whole issues pervade the play at various levels of importance and poetic heightening. For example, Horatio's reference to "[a] piece of him" may pass by scarcely noticed, while the line "If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away" (5.2.212) is more of a key moment in the drama. The boundaries crossed in Shakespearean tragedies—that is to say, the mistakes and the crimes—tend to have stage embodiments: Desdemona's handkerchief is succeeded by Othello's pillow. Swords do their worst and neither ears (*Hamlet*) nor eyes (*King Lear*) are spared. If "next-to-ness" ought to be the most tender of experiences, the point of tragedy is to show its terrible potential for violence. It is still the case that, in real life, most murderers are known (and often intimately known) to their victims.

DUMB-SHOW METONYMICS

In conclusion, we would like to return to "The Murder of Gonzago" or, more specifically, to the dumb show that precedes it, and to explore the ways in which the dumb show stands in for the play-within-the-play, which in turn stands in for the murder of Hamlet's father. In dumb shows, where the early modern theater invents the silent cinema before its time, sheer "next-to-ness" (a part or summarized version standing in for a larger whole) bears the weight of expressing the matter of the drama, wordlessly.[12] And in this context it is worth returning to the fact that Hamlet's father died through a poison administered, unusually enough, to the ear. Modern medicine tells us that such a method of poisoning would not actually be effective, but editors of *Hamlet* follow Geoffrey Bullough in suggesting that Shakespeare took the idea from accounts of the murder of the Duke of Urbino in 1538, allegedly done in this way.[13] Another possible source might be Marlowe's villain Lightborn in *Edward II* (1592) who describes a method of killing he claims to have learnt in Naples: "whilst one is asleep, to take a quill / And blow a little powder in his ears" (5.4.34–35).[14] A point that has been made about the ears' difference from the eyes is that eyes may be closed but ears cannot be in the same way. To close an ear is, in Hamlet, murderous. In enacting that, in silence, the Players replicate the very nature of the crime Hamlet is having them enact.

By the time Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet,* Dieter Mehl tells us, dumb shows had "almost completely disappeared from more refined plays and were mainly to be found in the type of popular drama that is ridiculed by Hamlet" in his famous "advice to the Players" speeches, especially when he expresses contempt for the groundlings "who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise" (3.2.11–12).[15] But *Hamlet* seems to have given them a new lease on life, and they subsequently appear in plays by Marston, Webster, and Middleton. A crucial feature of the dumb show in *Hamlet* is the immediate contiguity of the Players and the Danish court: "The play scene derives its particular effect and tension from the fact that here the moral purpose of drama is deliberately exploited and that actors and spectators are on the stage simultaneously."[16] Unlike our experience of the Ghost's oral/aural account of the crime in act 1, scene 5, the audience now can see it enacted in front of them.

Who is next to whom during this enactment? This scene, the one in all three early texts of *Hamlet* that requires the largest number of speaking parts, is notoriously difficult to stage. As Mehl says, "The audience in the theatre alone can recognize the true meaning of the dumb show and therefore keeps an eye not only on the play, but also on the King and Hamlet."[17] But how can this be organized? For directors, it is an important decision whether to have the onstage audience "downstage" (i.e., between the offstage audience and the Players) or "upstage" (behind the Players). Sightlines are complicated either way. Moreover, Hamlet's own location is doubtful: the Queen invites him to "sit by me," but he refuses on the grounds that in Ophelia he sees "metal more attractive" (3.2.105–6). Given that he wishes to watch the King's reactions to the dumb show and the play, it is arguable that he does not want to sit too close to him; since Edmund Kean's performance in 1814 to at least Asta Nielsen's screen performance in 1920,[18] actors of Hamlet began watching the show stretched out at Ophelia's feet but then crawled menacingly toward the King during the performance. Proximity is crucial here, not just the proximity of the Players to their audience, but indeed that of the Players to their text, the wordless "embodiment" of the crime that they unknowingly perform.

The dumbness of the show fools the King into complacency, Mehl argues, and this is not surprising: "Ophelia's puzzled reaction to the pantomime indicates that its significance was not immediately obvious to an Elizabethan audience."[19] Seeing a show of the actual murder is not enough on its own to alert the King. But a boundary, for the offstage audience, is crossed: this is our first sight of the murder: "It is therefore important that what at first was only reported by the

ghost should now be visibly presented in some detail in the pantomime."[20] The dumb show works, for the offstage audience, as a kind of flashback to the murder of Hamlet's father, even though it is ostensibly a kind of prologue to a different murder, that of Gonzago. It is followed by another prologue, or "posy of a ring" as Hamlet calls it (3.2.145), which as Mehl points out is not only "meaningless" but "almost more unusual and astonishing than the actual pantomime and is undoubtedly intended to provide an even better reason for the bewilderment of the spectators."[21] The dumb show stands in for ("figures") the crime, by resemblance, but enacts it by contiguity, in its performance within the diegesis, but also in the shape of the urcrime itself. A "striving for powerful effects . . . [and] the visualization and intensification of moral ideas and concepts" operates metonymically as well as metaphorically.[22] And moral ideas are matters of boundaries.

Unlike many dumb shows in Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, "The Murder of Gonzago" does not lead immediately into the violent catastrophe of *Hamlet* itself. Hamlet's description of the murderer as "nephew to the king" (3.2.237) may, however, give the King some anxiety. Neither of the murderers is a nephew in the source given by Bullough, but the poisoner in *Fratricide Punished* is identified as "the King's brother": brother-as-poisoner would of course reinforce the flashback to the original crime, while nephew-as-murderer would seem to look forward to Hamlet's own intended revenge. This may be one reason why the play is broken off at this point. The dumb show is of course needed to show both the murder and its consequences and, even if the King and Queen do not seem to react to it immediately, it is felt, at least by the offstage audience, as an important factor in the dramatic changes they both undergo in the next two scenes: the King, in soliloquy, expresses his guilt and his failure to repent at some length for the first time in act 3, scene 3 (he has prefaced this with a brief aside in act 3, scene 1), and the Queen acknowledges her fault and asks for Hamlet's advice in act 3, scene 4.

What boundary does the Queen imagine herself to have crossed, or is made by Hamlet to realize she has wrongly crossed? The question of murder in *Hamlet* is rather straightforward, the question of incest more puzzling (for the characters as much as for ourselves). Then there is the boundary between sanity and madness, and that other boundary between truth and deceit, and the ultimate boundary, that between life and death. We hesitate to raise, on the basis of the scant evidence available, the question of the life/death boundary involved in the death of Shakespeare's son Hamnet/Hamlet as a background to his revision of the Ur-*Hamlet*. The earlier play (whose own very existence is certainly ghostly) would have preceded Ham-

net's death, while the *Hamlet*s we know succeed it. Yet, in conclusion, working with the *Hamlet* texts themselves, their thoughts about boundaries are themselves boundless. And we have found that this approach has enabled us to have thoughts about *Hamlet* that we might not otherwise have had. It has been a privilege to be part of a community with Dieter Mehl and so many others—scholars, writers, "players"—the vast community of the living and the dead within which these thoughts have been experienced.

Notes

1. Ann Thompson and John O. Thompson, *Shakespeare, Meaning and Metaphor* (Brighton, England: Harvester, 1987).

2. Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in *Fundamentals of Language*, by Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, Janua Linguarum 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), 53–82.

3. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Lakoff has more to say on metonymy in his subsequent *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Useful introductions to the burgeoning cognitive linguistics tradition include Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002) and Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Recently more attention is being paid to metonymy within this tradition, e.g., in Antonio Barcelona, ed., *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads: A Cognitive Perspective* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000).

4. David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).

5. Jane Hedley, *Power in Verse: Metaphor and Metonymy in the Renaissance Lyric* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988); Jutka Dévényi, *Metonymy and Drama: Essays on Language and Dramatic Strategy* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1996); Judith H. Anderson, *Translating Investments: Metaphor and the Dynamic of Cultural Change in Tudor-Stewart England* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

6. Dieter Mehl, *Die Pantomime im Drama der Shakespearezeit: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der "Dumb Show"* (Heidelberg: Quelle and Meyer, 1964); and Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention* (London: Methuen, 1965).

7. All Shakespeare references and quotations, apart from those from *Hamlet*, are from *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan, rev. ed. (London: Thomson Learning, 2001). All *Hamlet* references and quotations are from the more recent Arden *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Thomson Learning, 2006).

8. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 37.

9. See Bruce Thomas Boehrer, *Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England: Literature, Culture, Kinship, and Kingship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Richard A. McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law: 1550–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Jason P. Rosenblatt, "Aspects of the Incest Problem in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29 (1978): 349–64.

10. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).

11. R. W. Dent, *Shakespeare's Proverbial Language: An Index* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), C585.

12. See, however, the essay by Bruce R. Smith in this volume, in which he argues that dumb shows were not always, strictly speaking, silent.

13. Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare,* vol. 7: *Major Tragedies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 29–33.

14. Quoted from Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays,* ed. J. B. Steane (London: Penguin, 1986).

15. Mehl, *Elizabethan Dumb Show,* 114.

16. Ibid., 114–15.

17. Ibid., 118.

18. *Hamlet,* directed by Sven Gade and Heinz Schell, Germany, 1920.

19. Mehl, *Elizabethan Dumb Show,* 117.

20. Ibid., 115.

21. Ibid., 118.

22. Ibid., 171.