

‘The single and peculiar life’: Hamlet’s Heart and the Early Modern Subject

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... you would pluck out the heart of my mystery.¹

Revisionist accounts of Early Modern subjectivity almost invariably begin with Hamlet’s accusation. Elizabeth Hanson’s fine book *Discovering the Subject* opens with the phrase as a paradigmatic statement, in which Hamlet assumes the position of the modern subject, endowed with an inner mystery, and resistant to its penetration and discovery.² In this model the subject *contains* something elusively called ‘mystery’; the space of mystery is the interior of the subject’s body, here symbolized by the heart; and other people are desperate to get access to that mystery, if necessary by tearing the heart out of the subject’s body. Since this was physically accomplished in contemporary rituals of execution for crimes involving treason, especially at this time religious treason, the phrase seems to gesture towards the torture chamber, the scaffold and the whole dangerous recusant world of Catholic England and ‘Secret Shakespeare’. Removing the heart from the chest was never a practical way of acquiring information, but here the torturer and the executioner merge into one, and the symbolic and literal are hard to prise apart: ‘To know our enemies’ minds, we rip their hearts’.³

Hamlet’s phrase has been extensively deployed in recent discussions of Renaissance subjectivity, but without reference to its immediate dramatic context. It appears almost accidentally in Hamlet’s speech to Guildenstern, after the play-within-the play, about the recorders. Hamlet is not, he protests, a musical instrument to be manipulated and played upon. But perversely he then proceeds to draw an elaborate parallel between man and recorder.

¹ Quoted from the 1604/5 Second Quarto, 3.2.357-358. *Hamlet, the Texts of 1603 and 1623*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London, 2006).

² Elizabeth Hanson, *Discovering the Subject in Renaissance England* (Cambridge, 1998) 1.

³ *King Lear*, 4.6.257-8.

... you would play upon me! You would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass.⁴

The king's spies would play upon Hamlet; seem to know his stops; pluck out the heart of his mystery; and sound him throughout his musical range. Logically the phrase would not belong there at all, if it is not part of the man/instrument parallel. So it must refer more directly to 'mystery' as 'mastery', profession, craft or skill, than to mystery as 'secret'. 'Mastery' however should belong to the man, not the instrument. 'Pluck' might belong with 'fret' as another rather discordant reference, in this disquisition on woodwind, to a stringed instrument. Textually then the phrase presents some difficulty, and editors have difficulty explaining it.

The Folio and Second Quarto texts are virtually the same for this passage (the Second Quarto has 'my compass' instead of 'the top of my compass'). Quite different however is the First Quarto:

You would seeme to know my stops, you would play upon mee,
You would search the very inward part of my hart,
And dive into the secreet of my soule.⁵

Here there is a logical transition from the instrument metaphor to the statement about the spies trying to gain access to the subject, a transition that precipitates the allegation: 'You would search the very inward part of my hart,/And dive into the secreet of my soule'. Though it is certainly less graphic and Tyburn-oriented than 'pluck out the heart', the physical nuance of 'search' could still echo the scaffold, perhaps the torture-chamber. Tortured Jesuit Thomas Cottam (younger brother of Stratford schoolmaster John Cottam) called his rack-masters 'searchers of secrets'.⁶ But the emphasis is less on the violent dragging out of truth from the body, and more on the successive layers of defence located within the body, and through

⁴ Quoted from the 1623 Folio, 3.2.354-357. *Hamlet, the Texts of 1603 and 1623*, eds. Thompson and Taylor.

⁵ *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke*, eds. Graham Holderness and Bryan Loughrey (Hemel Hempstead, 1992) 77.

⁶ William Allen, *A True, Sincere and modest defence of English Catholics* (Rheims, 1583), ed. Robert M. Kingdon (Ithaca, 1965) 72.

which the searcher has to penetrate to find what he's after. The very inward part of the heart is a depth within the heart itself, a more removed ground of mystery, an inner sanctum. To get to the soul and its secrets, the spy would have to dive right in, swimming very deep into an interior psychological and spiritual sea. By the same token the executioner might find himself holding his victim's heart in his hand, and yet, as far as secrets go, empty-handed.⁷ The heart of a traitor may look much like anyone else's heart, and may, as a sign, decline to declare the truth its excavation is designed to elicit.

Even more striking a contrast is provided by the fact that Hamlet's speech on the 'sponge' appears, in the First Quarto, here next to the 'recorder' speech, whereas in the other two texts it is placed much later:

... a sponge, that sokes up the king's
Countenance, favours and rewardes, that makes
His liberalitie your store house ... (*Tragicall Historie*, p. 77)

The 'sponge' suggests the subject as open, porous, penetrable, fashioned and swayed by external influence. 'Men are sponges, which, to pour out, receive', said Donne.⁸ Its pliable absorbency contrasts sharply with the recorder (which Hamlet is still holding) as a metaphor for the subject: a closed, hard exterior, with an enclosed and hidden inner space that can produce 'eloquent music' when some of its holes are stopped. Somewhere inside the instrument, the metaphor of 'diving' declares, there is also a hidden underground pool, a well of souls, into which you may, at your peril, attempt to 'dive'. But that is a liquid contained, pent up, inaccessible, while the sponge liberally sucks up and regurgitates whatever moisture it can find in the circumambient air. Hamlet of course says he is neither a pipe, nor a sponge. He is not a Foucauldian subject fashioned by external influences, like an Aeolian harp; nor a porous pre-modern subject that is thought to soak up external pressure like some magic dishcloth. He neither receives nor pours out: his being is inscrutable, veiled, hidden. 'I have that within which passes show' (1.2.85); or in the First Quarto, no 'outward semblance' is

⁷ John Aubrey recorded such evidence from the execution of Sir Everard Digby. 'Twas his ill fate to suffer in the Powder-plott. When his heart was pluct out by the Executioner (who, *secundam formam*, cryed, Here is the heart of a Traytor!) it is credibly reported, he replied, Thou liest!'. John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (Ann Arbor, MI, 1962) 96.

⁸ 'To Sir Henry Wotton', *Poems of John Donne*, vol. II, ed. E.K. Chambers (London, 1896) 8.

‘equall to the sorrow of my heart’ (*Tragicall Historie*, p. 42) But he does, like the recorder, have an interior, albeit one that seems to be a hollow space, a thing of nothing: and from that interior emanates ‘discourse’, ‘most delicate’, ‘most excellent music’. If that music be not produced by external influence and manipulation, from the breath and fingering of others, then – where does it come from? What kind of recorder plays itself? What is the origin and nature of the subject?

The Q1 version of this classic observation (‘You would search the very inward part of my hart,/And dive into the secreet of my soule’) conveniently marks out the territory of the subjectivity debate as it has been woven around *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* was, as John Lee has shown, a test case for Cultural Materialism, and is a constant point of reference in histories of that movement.⁹ Francis Barker in *The Tremulous Private Body* used *Hamlet* to demonstrate his contention that modern subjectivity did not exist before the later 17th century:

At the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing.¹⁰

Hamlet’s sense of inwardness is ‘anachronistic’, wrote Barker, since ‘bourgeois subjectivity’ had not yet arrived, and in the play ‘interiority remains gestural’ (p. 163):

Pre-bourgeois subjection does not properly involve subjectivity at all, but a condition of dependent membership in which place and articulation are defined not by an interiorized self-recognition ... but by incorporation in the body politic. (Barker, p. 31)

Catherine Belsey followed this same line, quoting Barker on *Hamlet* with approval. The modern subject, ‘the free unconstrained author of meaning and action, the origin of history’¹¹ was a later invention. The search for Hamlet’s ‘mystery’, his ‘authentic inner reality’ (Belsey, p. 41), is therefore a wild goose-chase:

The quest is, of course, endless, because the object of it is not there. (Belsey, p. 41)

⁹ John Lee, *Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet’ and the Controversies of the Self* (Oxford, 2000).

¹⁰ Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body* (London, 1984) 163-4.

¹¹ Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (London, 1985) 8.

To ascribe subjectivity to Renaissance characters is to posit an ‘imaginary interiority’, imported into reading of the drama by modern ideological habits. Jean Howard further endorsed this view, and claimed that the ‘interiority and self-presence of the individual’ belong to a later historical period.¹²

Other critics such as Jonathan Goldberg and Patricia Fumerton took different but compatible views. They argued that there clearly was a *perception* of interiority, and a rhetoric of inwardness, in the Early Modern period; but this was externally generated, and externally-oriented. ‘The individual derived a sense of self’, wrote Jonathan Goldberg, ‘largely from external matrices’.¹³ ‘The private’, wrote Fumerton, ‘could be sensed only through the public’; ‘the “self” was void’.¹⁴

In this critical context, to imagine that Hamlet had an inner life, a sense of inwardness and interiority, that he could be the subject of his own sentence rather than ‘subjected’ to arrangements of knowledge and the ideological state apparatus, is to be helplessly under the sway of Barker’s ‘essential subjectivity’, or Belsey’s ‘liberal humanism’, to be taken in by ‘the idea of the autonomous, unified, self-generating subject’.¹⁵

The theoretical underpinning of these arguments derives of course from Althusser and Foucault, particularly Foucault (and possibly, it has been argued, an oversimplification of Foucault). For Foucault interiority is produced by power, as in his discussion of ‘confession’ in *The History of Sexuality*:

Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth ... One confesses - or is forced to confess. When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body. Since the Middle Ages, torture

¹² Jean Howard, ‘The New Historicism of Renaissance Studies’, *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986) 15.

¹³ Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Stanford, 1983) 86.

¹⁴ Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago, 1991) 109 and 130.

¹⁵ Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Brighton, 1984) 155.

has accompanied it like a shadow, and supported it when it could go no further: the dark twins.¹⁶

The impulse to confession now seems natural, as if ‘truth, lodged in our most secret nature, “demands” only to surface’ (p. 60) In fact such truth is ‘the effect of a power that constrains us’. (p. 60)

Foucault explicitly does not say, as Barker and Belsey did appear to say, that there is ‘nothing’ inside Hamlet, or inside anyone else:

It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality ...¹⁷

But this is manifestly not the ‘Christian essentialism’ diagnosed by Jonathan Dollimore, the person given unity and essence by the imputation of a ‘metaphysically derived’ soul. (Dollimore, p. 155) The soul is, like all seemingly ‘inner’ truth, ‘produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power’. (Foucault, p. 29) In later work, published posthumously, Foucault began to show more interest in the ‘technologies of the self’, ‘how an individual acts upon himself’.¹⁸ But in the 1980s it was his major published works with their anti-essentialist conception of subjectivity as the effect of power that underpinned Cultural Materialist thinking on the Early Modern subject.

A number of recent studies have reverted to these controversies and shown convincingly that the Foucauldian approach used by Barker and Belsey failed to account for the manifest superabundance of interiority in *Hamlet* and in Early Modern culture in general. Katharine Eisaman Maus in *Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance* shows that Hamlet’s perception of an inner self, ‘that within which passes show’ ‘would have been commonplace for his original audience’.¹⁹ Everywhere in Renaissance writing and culture we find the fundamental difference named by St Augustine as the distinction between *homo interior* and

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. I, *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London, 1998) 58-9.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977) 29.

¹⁸ See Lee, *Controversies of the Self*, pp. 82-4.

¹⁹ Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago, 1995) 3.

homo exterior (a distinction actually used in *Hamlet*, by Claudius, between ‘th’ exterior’ and the ‘inward man’).²⁰ In philosophy, ethics, politics, history, medicine, religion, writers continually allude to the split between ‘that within’ and ‘actions that a man might play’. People in the Renaissance knew, amazingly enough, that ‘a person’s thoughts and passions, imagined as properties of the hidden interior, are not immediately accessible to other people’. (Maus, p. 5) Jesuit Thomas Wright complained, perhaps regretfully, that ‘we cannot enter into a man’s heart’ and see his passions and inclinations: rather these are, as William Vaughan put it in 1600, ‘concealed in a man’s heart’.²¹ When Campion, on the scaffold, continued to protest his innocence of treason, many wept: but that, says Anthony Munday, was because they were ‘not entering into conceit of his inward hypocrisy’, and therefore could not see into ‘the very inward part’ of his heart.²² Maus argues that ideas of interiority derive simply from ‘the irreducible mysteriousness of human beings to one another’. (Maus, p. 12) The gap between self-consciousness and objective knowledge of others ‘may seem so fundamental to social life that it cannot be the property of a particular historical moment’, but must be part of the ‘inescapable conditions of any human intercourse’. (Maus, p. 12) The retort from Cultural Materialism would of course be that this appeal to universal human experience is nothing more than a capitulation to essentialist humanism.

By contrast Elizabeth Hanson in *Discovering the Subject* continues to operate within a broadly Foucauldian approach. Hanson differentiates her work from that of Maus:

I share with Maus the sense that inwardness was in fact a cultural obsession ... I would stress, however, that the very ubiquitousness of the anxiety about inwardness which Maus so compellingly reveals actually supports the cultural materialist narrative of emergence. (Hanson, p. 51)

Hanson thus admits that the Renaissance had an ‘obsession with the discovery of the heart’s secrets’ but sees this as ‘symptom of an epistemic change, of a redrafting of the terms on which the subject relates to the world’. (Hanson, p. 2) Throughout her analysis we see subjectivity produced by external agency. ‘As one man examined another, he confronted as in

²⁰ Quoted from the 1623 Folio, 2.2.6. *Hamlet, the Texts of 1603 and 1623*, eds. Thompson and Taylor.

²¹ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in generall*, ed. Thomas O. Sloan (Urbana, 1971) 105; William Vaughan, *The golden-grove, moralized in three books* (London, 1600) 14r.

²² Anthony Munday, *A discoverie of Edmund Campion and his confederates*, etc. (London, 1582) G1v.

a mirror the idea of the subject, not merely as authority's subordinate but as the origin of discourse and action'. (Hanson, pp. 2-3) The idea of the subject as 'a cache of truth' emerges 'not at first as an oppositional strategy but as a disciplinary effect'. (Hanson, p. 4)

Hanson's argument, which focuses on subjectivity as constructed in the course of the Elizabethan state's efforts to understand and control religious dissent, is persuasive partly because the circumstances of the period (between the bull *Regnans in Excelsis* and the Gunpowder Plot) were so unusual, extraordinary and distinctive that they can reasonably be imagined as triggering a seismic shift in subjectivity. 'What is new and catastrophic' she says 'in the Renaissance is not, as Barker and Belsey assert, a sense of interiority, but the usually fearful, even paranoid recognition that interiority can give the subject leverage against his world'. (Hanson, p. 16) Interiority deepened and withdrew, in other words, as the state sought to discover and manipulate religious and political convictions. Equivocation, predicated on a gap between interior and external utterance, was a distinctive feature of Catholic resistance in this period. Interrogatory torture was used extensively and unusually between 1570 and 1605, although it was never formally a part of English common law. Torture aimed at 'discovery of the truth' or 'the boulding forth of the truth' from its concealment in the subject's body.²³ 'The structure of interrogatory torture' says Hanson, 'posits a victim in possession of hidden information that the torturer must struggle to uncover, and therefore produces a narrative of discovery'. (Hanson, p. 25) This is not then about what is really in there, or even about what the interrogator wants to find (like most interrogators, he thinks he knows it already): it is much more about the process of torture as means of demonstrating and enforcing, by eliciting, truth. The language of torture supposes that truth is an object that could literally be found in the body of the victim: 'wrested' from him, 'wrung' out of him, 'withdrawn' from his body. (see Hanson, p. 40). Catholics complained that torturers exceeded their legitimate brief by 'attempting to discover matters that had to do, not with the alleged treasonable activities of the victims, but with their spiritual experience'. (Hanson, p. 27) Campion said that his tormentors were not gathering evidence of treason, but trying to probe his conscience.²⁴ Thomas Cottam complained that the torturers tried to make him confess his

²³ Phrases from warrants reproduced by James Heath, *Torture and English Law* (Westport, Conn., 1983) 201-229.

²⁴ *Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials*, ed. T.B. Howell (London, 1811) vol. 1, pp. 1060-1.

sins.²⁵ 'The inviolable truth of conscience' concludes Hanson, 'is a product of discovery'. (Hanson, p. 51)

Hanson, Maus, Lee and others have demonstrated convincingly what Hanson calls 'the absurdity of any account of the mental world of pre-Renaissance Europe that denies it the experience of interiority'. (Hanson, p. 16) There is on the other hand less consensus and less clarity on the sources of interiority. Was it, is it, an 'inescapable condition' (Maus's phrase) of human experience - something immanent, unchanging, a human essence? Or is it simply one of the effects produced by the operation of power on the human body and mind? Is 'truth' 'that which is susceptible to discovery', asks Hanson, or 'that which is felt in resisting discovery'? (Hanson, p. 27) 'It is difficult to know at this historical remove' admits Maus, 'whether the aggressions of the state produced furtiveness in its enemies or supposed enemies as a defensive reflex, or whether the secretiveness of the heterodox necessitated the regime's attempt at surveillance'. (Maus, p. 23) 'Direct evidence of Prince Hamlet's interiority ... proves hard to find' (Lee, p. 90), perhaps because, as a reviewer of Lee's book argues, 'interiority as such is precisely what can never be exhibited on stage'.²⁶ We may grant the existence of inwardness, but still maintain that it is socially and ideologically produced.

I wish to argue that the single biggest difficulty afflicting the study of subjectivity in the 1980s was a systematic blindness to the stubborn fact of religious faith. It is my view that state interrogators and torturers discovered interiority in their victims because it was already there; and that it was there in such abundance because their victims believed what they professed. Katherine Maus suggests that Cultural Materialists denied the interiority of the subject because they themselves did not believe in it the religious implications of interiority:

... as the idea of 'inward truth' in Early Modern England is intimately linked to transcendental religious claims, antagonism to those claims perhaps contributes to the recent tendency to underestimate the conceptual importance of personal inwardness in this period. (Maus, p. 27)

²⁵ Allen, *A true defence*, p. 72.

²⁶ Roger Starling, 'Review of John Lee, *Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and the Controversies of the Self*', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 7.2 (September, 2001) 5.

I propose to argue that it is only by giving due regard to religious belief that we would be able to locate an authentic and integral early modern subject at all. This is not to pretend that we can avoid the difficulty that any attempt to describe the interior world of faith could also be taken for a description of the social and ideological world in which that faith happens to find itself. It follows hard upon: however fully described, the inner space of faith could still be, as Maus describes it, simply the ‘inevitable result of religious oppression’. (Maus, p. 16) But I want to suggest that it is rather more than that.

When veteran Cultural Materialist Alan Sinfield reviewed Ewan Fernie’s *Spiritual Shakespeare in Textual Practice*, he attacked not only the book itself but any approach to cultural analysis that shares the religious faith of the culture under investigation.²⁷ Sinfield went into the business of criticism, he recalls, in order to ‘undermine the hegemonic Anglicanism of mid-twentieth century literary criticism’. (p. 161) Critics then were interested in Early Modern religion, but never taken in by it: ‘many scholars proceeded to explore aspects of religion in the early modern period, and rarely in a way that presented it as transcending the conditions of its social and historical construction’. (p. 163) ‘On this topic, everyone was a materialist’. (p. 163) Now that consensus appears to have broken, with influential voices such as those of Derrida and Greenblatt setting the door to the spiritual even ever so slightly ajar. Sinfield dislikes Fernie’s book because its spirituality seems syncretic, individualistic and quietist: it represents ‘spirituality explicitly disconnected from institutional religion’ (p. 167), divorced from ‘allegiance to anything like a congregation’ (p. 168) and with no ‘project for furthering change in the world’. (p. 168) Above all he rejects what he takes to be the premise of this book and any form of religious thought: that ‘the spiritual may be accepted as an irreducible first principle’.²⁸ I would argue that for Christians the spiritual and the material are inextricably intertwined, from the creation of the world to the Incarnation, from the primacy of the Word to the Resurrection of the body. What is incontrovertible however is that for Cultural Materialists, then and now, matter is certainly the ‘irreducible first principle’ of the universe and of human existence. The Cultural Materialist is as much a scientific ‘naturalist’ as the evolutionary biologist.²⁹

²⁷ Alan Sinfield, ‘Turning on the Spiritual’, *Textual Practice*, 20:1 (2006) 161-170.

²⁸ Towards the end of the review Sinfield identifies any form of religious faith with belligerent fundamentalism: there is little difference between a few Shakespearians with spiritual leanings, and the warmongering zealotry of George Bush. (p. 169)

²⁹ ‘There is nothing beyond the natural, physical world, no supernatural creative intelligence lurking behind the observable universe, no soul that outlasts the body and no miracles – except in the sense of

It is often explicitly or tacitly assumed, as Foucault himself later acknowledged, that modern interiority can be said to begin with St Augustine, whose *Confessions* invented autobiography and perhaps the very notion of the subject. No-one before Augustine, says Karl Weintraub, had ‘opened up their souls in the inwardness of genuine autobiography’.³⁰ In *De Fide Rerum Quæ Non Videntur* Augustine points to the obvious fact that many things on which human beings depend are invisible: the minds of others, thoughts, intentions and so on. Nonetheless all these have to be inferred, and they are predicated on the ground of belief. ‘Lo, out of your own heart, you believe an heart not your own’.³¹ The subjectivity of another is grasped via the subject’s own interior awareness of subjectivity. Human beings know that others have private spaces within, because we all have them. Hence Augustine’s model of subjectivity is immediately different from the ‘bourgeois subject’, the ‘liberal-humanist subject’, the ‘essential subject’ of Cultural Materialism. It is not autonomous, or independent, or divorced from the human community. Augustine’s interiority is a space in which human beings meet one another in reciprocal understanding and mutual love. Inwardness is the space of community.

Augustine’s *Confessions* demonstrate that what you find at the centre of the human being is not nothing, or a void, or just the reflection of external things. What you find is God. ‘I could not be then, O my God, could not be at all, wert thou not in me’³² God is both inside and outside, both the subject of the sentence that is the believer, and the external power to which he is subject. Augustine knows that God is inside him, but still asks God to enter or re-enter him: ‘Behold, Lord, my heart is before thee ... say unto my soul, I am thy salvation’. (p. 4) God is both self and other, both subject and object, both the agent and the object of the agent’s desire. The form of *Confessions* is of course by self-definition a confessional autobiography, and the reader is placed in the ambivalent position of hearing and overhearing both Augustine’s confession and the open secret of his life. We are listening to a man talking to God; but he is also addressing the reader, with a confessional invitation to share in an inner

natural phenomena that we don’t yet understand’. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London, 2006) 14.

³⁰ Karl Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: self and circumstance in autobiography* (Chicago, 1978) 45.

³¹ Augustine, *On Faith in Things Unseen*, trans. C. L. Cornish, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 3 (Buffalo, NY, 1887).

³² Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. E.B. Pusey (London, 1907) 2.

space into which God can also be invited. In this way the text generates a subjectivity-effect in the reader, but it is a subjectivity shared with the writer and with his audience.

The Confessions is, again by definition, all about opening the person to admit the divine: ‘To thee therefore, O Lord, I am open, whatever I am’. (p. 4) This is figured in intensely physical terms via the use of an anatomical vocabulary of inwardness, featuring the internal organs, the heart, the liver, the entrails. Augustine clearly had no sense of any qualitative distinction between the bodily organs and the thoughts and passions they supposedly housed. ‘*Venter interioris hominis conscientia cordis est*’,³³ he assumed: ‘the interior belly of man is the conscience of the heart’. The inward knowledge of a person possessed by God alone was a knowledge of the physical interior of the body, which contained the conscience and the moral being. God is, according to the *Book of Revelation*, ‘*scrutans corda et renes*’: ‘he which searcheth the reins and hearts’.³⁴

In *Shakespeare’s Entrails* David Hillman demonstrates convincingly that in the early modern period the Cartesian separation of material body and immaterial mind had not yet supervened on human consciousness.³⁵ On the contrary, human beings thought of themselves primarily in ‘resolutely materialist’ (p. 2) physical terms. What we now think of as a metaphorical language of internal organs and processes – as in Hamlet’s speeches to Guildenstern – was in practice perceived much more literally, with a ‘fully embodied intensity’. (p. 1) ‘What we now call inwardness or interiority was inseparable from the interior of the body’. (p. 2) The usefulness of this insight is that Early Modern notions of self, the subject, inwardness, were not necessarily incompatible with a view of the person as fully engaged in the body with somatic others and with a carnally affiliated environment. What Yves Bonnefoy called the ‘excarnation’ of the world into body and spirit had yet to take place.³⁶

For the pre-modern religious sensibility such as that found in St Augustine, the subject consisted of a solid, irrefutably material body which was sufficiently self-contained to house mind and spirit, but which was also physically and spiritually open to the divine. Hence the

³³ Augustine, quoted Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York, 1953) 137.

³⁴ Revelation 2.23. *Geneva Bible*, 1560.

³⁵ David Hillman, *Shakespeare’s Entrails: Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body* (London, 2007).

³⁶ Bonnefoy quoted in Hillman, *Entrails*, p. 4.

assumption that the subject is inscrutable, invisible, inaccessible to immediate interpretation, is not in any sense incompatible with the apparently contrary assumption that the subject exists only in its openness to external influence. When the Jesuit Father Wright declared that ‘hearts... be inscrutable’, his qualification was that they are ‘only open unto God’.³⁷ On the other side of the religious divide John Foxe said exactly the same thing: no-one can ‘pronounce assuredly upon the secret cogitation and intent’³⁸ of another: God only is ‘*scrutans corda*’. ‘Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart’ (Psalm 44:21); ‘for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts’ (1 Chronicles, 28.9). And this language of the body as impervious to human vision, but opening to God, either by providing the divine with direct access into the interior, or by imagining the body as literally turned inside-out to disclose its interiority, became absolutely characteristic of Renaissance religious sensibilities. Here it is in the general confession of *The Book of Common Prayer*:

ALMIGHTY God, unto whom al hartes be open, al desires knowe, and from whom no secretes are hyd ...³⁹

Hence it is inevitable that there will be a doubleness or plurality about any description of Christian inwardness: and it is obviously tempting to read this as self-division, internal conflict, the effect of contested power relations such as those between the Elizabethan state and the Roman Catholic Church. But the point is that the interior of the Christian subject is a very crowded place. ‘Narrow is the mansion of my soul’, complained St Augustine (*Confessions*, p. 4), and that sense of spatial restriction is understandable given what he had to pack into it, including not only himself, but God, the world and humanity. ‘What room is there within me, wherein my God may come?’ (p. 5) The Christian subject typically feels internally divided from God who is both here and there, both ‘within me and without’. (p. 5) Augustine begs God to come to him, although God is already the ground of his being, because by his sin he has separated himself from God, and hence from himself. The territory

³⁷ Wright, *The Passions*, p. 27.

³⁸ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of these latter and perilous days, etc.*, vol. 8 (New York, 1965) 238.

³⁹ ‘The Order for the Administration of the Lords Supper, or holy Communion’, *The Booke of common praier and administration of the sacramentes and other rites and ceremonies in the Church of Englande* (London, 1559).

of Christian interiority is a place of voices, the scene of dialogue and conversation, argument and debate.

There is a voice in writing as well as in speaking, according to *Aristotle* himselfe, so there is an internall voice, as well as an externall, and an internall speach as well as an externall, which speaketh, affirmeth, or denieth to the inwarde eares as well or better then the voice, or letter to the outward.⁴⁰

This is Robert Persons defending the practice of Equivocation, so it is a statement that seems very much of its time and place. But the fact that the Christian conscience or soul is interpellated, speaking to and from different subject positions, accounting for itself before different tribunals, is neither unusual nor localised, but endemic to the experience of Christian faith, of Christian subjectivity.

Not every Christian hears that interior conversation in the same way. Augustine heard God speaking to him indirectly, through the child's song and the text of scripture. Joan of Arc heard St Michael and St Katherine speaking directly to her, and acted upon what they told her to do. This manifestation of 'aberrant agency' makes her for Donald E. Hall an early example of 'proto-subjectivity'.⁴¹ Joan's heart, we recall, according to legend, survived the consuming fire of her martyrdom.

Nowadays we are rightly suspicious of people who hear voices. But the inside of everyone's head is a buzz of conversation, and for the Christian, part of that is noise is the conversation of prayer. Few Christians (apart from Paris Hilton) think that God talks directly to them. But all Christians try to talk to God, to explain themselves, to get things straight, to apologise, to atone. God knows. Puritans John Dod and Robert Cleaver said 'God ... doth as well discern the most secret things of the soul'.⁴² Maus suggests that this 'presence of an omniscient spectator',

⁴⁰ Robert Persons, *A Treatise Tending to Mitigation Towards Catholick Subjects* (St. Omer, 1607) 329.

⁴¹ Donald E. Hall, *Subjectivity* (London, 2004) 14.

⁴² John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A plaine and familiar exposition of the Ten commandments* (London, 1604) 29-30.

... seems so fundamental to the structure of human subjectivity that the fact of that subjectivity becomes part of the proof of God's existence. (Maus, p. 10)

William Perkins said no man or angel could ever really know 'what is in the heart of man'.

But

There is a substance, most wise, most powerful, most holy, that sees and bears record, and that is God himself.⁴³

Maus proposes that for someone like Perkins the individual exists as

The object of a double scrutiny: of a human vision that is fallible, partial, and superficial, and of a divine vision that is infallible, complete and penetrating. (Maus, p. 11)

'Human inwardness' is created in the tension between these two perspectives:

The inwardness of persons is constituted by the disparity between what a limited, fallible human observer can see and what is available to the hypostasized divine observer. (Maus, p. 11)

This remains the case for a Christian (or indeed any religious) subjectivity irrespective of whether there is external pressure on that subject to confess, conform, or discover truth.

Hillman makes a distinction between belief and scepticism based on differing conceptions of the body.

Scepticism ... can be described as an attempt to deny the susceptibility of one's interior to external influence; faith as an attempt to deny one's exteriority or separateness. (Hillman, pp. 28-9)

⁴³ William Perkins *The whole treatise of the cases of conscience* (Cambridge, 1606) 211.

In belief there is an inside, but it is 'accessible or corresponds to the outside'. Faith is based on a willingness to accept the other into one's interior, and a conviction that 'the other is open to inhabitation by oneself'.

Belief seems to be inseparable from an acceptance of the interpenetrability of self and other, self and world, or self and God, an acknowledgement of the outer world or of the other akin to its incorporation or introjection into one's own bodily interior. (p. 28)

The sceptic by contrast 'experiences the world as if it were made up of insides and outsides radically opaque to one another'. Scepticism denies the inherence of inner in outer, and assumes a gap between inner truth and outer display. The sceptic assumes that outer display in others is probably misleading (actions that a man might play):

The sceptic's own interior matches this closure, refusing entry to the other and simultaneously refusing egress to his own deepest self. He will not take the other in, nor will he allow himself to be taken in ... In this way, the sceptic in effect renders 'the inner' unknowable. (p. 28)

That within which passes show. What ties all this together in Christian belief is of course, uniquely, the Incarnation.

But Thomas one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And eight days after, again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. *Then* came Jesus, when the doors were shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you.

After said he to Thomas, Put thy finger here, and see my hands, and put forth thy hand, and put it into my side, and be not faithless, but faithful.

Then Thomas answered and said unto him, *Thou art* my Lord, and my God.

Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou believest; blessed *are* they that have not seen, and have believed.⁴⁴

The sceptic Thomas needs to pluck out the heart of Jesus' mystery before he will believe. Jesus offers his interior for penetration, and in the offering breaks down the barrier between himself and his doubting disciple. 'The stigmata and wound in his side', says Hillman, 'literally puncture the boundary, the integument, separating him from the world'. (Hillman, p. 31) As Hillman points out here, the scripture doesn't actually say, notwithstanding the conventional representations of this scene, that Thomas does stick his fingers in. The offering is enough. 'It is rather the offer of access or the sense of being granted access, to the interior (to the divine object or to the human subject of faith) that constitutes faith'. (Hillman, p. 32) Later in the 17th century the cult of the Sacred Heart founded by Sister Margaret Marie Alacoque gave the most graphic expression to this idea of corporeal openness and infinite generosity of grace. Devotion to the Sacred Heart did not appear, as Michael Neill says, 'first in baroque art': it was already well known to 13th century monastics.⁴⁵ But it clearly came into its own with the Counter-Reformation.

The Protestant Reformation reconstituted the subject of faith as a disembodied spiritual subject in innumerable ways. Reinterpretation of the Eucharist diminished the literal incorporation of Christ into the body of the believer. Relics were suppressed; possession and exorcism treated with scepticism; stigmata denied; even the sacramental efficacy of unction rejected. All these reforms were disputes about the place of the body in worship, and particularly about whether the body was open or closed to the external world and to the divine. After the Reformation, the body was relatively closed.

In the poetic language of *Hamlet* we can see multiple possibilities of somatic subjectivity. Man can be a pipe or a sponge. 'The single and peculiar life' can be thought of as 'bound/With all the strength and armour of the mind' (3.3.11-12), and as we have seen, Hamlet furiously repudiates penetration. On the other hand he invites Gertrude to see into the 'inmost part' of herself, and invites Horatio to dwell in his 'heart's core – ay in my heart of heart' (3.2.69) (where 'core' is both 'heart', *cor*, and the heart's 'inward part'). The body, it seems, and the self from which it is indistinguishable, ought ideally to be open to affection,

⁴⁴ John 20. 24-9. *Geneva Bible*, 1560.

⁴⁵ Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: mortality and identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford, 1997) 158.

friendship, love; but the corrupt toxicity of the time forces it to close in upon itself, ‘as if this flesh which walls about our life/Were brass impregnable’ (*Richard II*, 3.2.167-8). If the body is open to penetration by malice, as in Old Hamlet’s murder where poison flows in through the ‘natural gates and alleys of the body’, then like any biological organism it will close defensively against manifest danger. Norbert Elias labelled this newly ‘bounded’ individual ‘*homo clausus*’, a being ‘severed from all other people and things “outside” by the “wall” of the body’. Poisoned by the world, but still open to the divine; closed to other people, but never to God. Hamlet’s description of ‘how ill all’s here about my heart’ lies close to his intuition that ‘There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow’. Presentiment and prophecy converge.⁴⁶

We are no longer surprised to find that early modern people had interiors. Nor should we be surprised to find those interiors complex, self-divided, cacophonous spaces of internal debate and dissension. We could assume, as the Cultural Materialists did, from that evidence that those interior spaces are produced by external cultural and ideological contradictions. But if we attend fully to the religious dimension, that conclusion does not necessarily follow.

Further, although those interior spaces display a dialectical interconnectivity with externality, this is not proof that externality is the primary driver of subjectivity. This seems to me particularly the case in Christianity (I cannot speak for other faiths), where the doctrine of the Incarnation establishes a synergy between the divine and the human that can never be disentangled. Christianity does not teach that the spiritual is an ‘irreducible first principle’. It teaches the inextricable intertwining of spiritual and material, self and other, soul and world.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and that Word was God.
This same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by it, and without it was made nothing that was made.
In it was life, and the life was the light of men.
And that light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1.1-5)

⁴⁶ 5.2.190-1 and 197-8. 2nd Quarto text. *Hamlet, the Texts of 1603 and 1623*, eds. Thompson and Taylor. See my discussion of the fall of the sparrow in ‘Vanishing Point: Looking for *Hamlet*’, *Shakespeare* 1.2 (2005) 167-8.

Subjectivity is constituted by, but not limited to, the spiritual. It was experienced in a common way by people throughout the Christian era because their life was very largely constituted by faith. It seems not to be there, or to be inexplicable, or to be merely an image in a mirror, to those who read with the eyes and ears of scepticism. It is accessible to the modern reader who reads with the eyes and ears of faith.

Religion, after all, was what the common life of those times was about; and it is curious that radicals, who are supposed to take popular consciousness seriously, should so often be found skipping embarrassedly over the religious rituals and beliefs which bulked so large in it. No ideology in human history has been more persuasive and persistent than religion, a symbolic form which links the minutiae of everyday conduct to the most ultimate of spiritual realities, and it is hard to see that any ideology ever will be. The radical's nervousness of religion is parochial as well as patronising; religion may not be the driving force in Middlesbrough, but it is in Dacca.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Terry Eagleton, 'Foreword' to Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3rd edition (London, 2003) xii.