University of Richmond
UR Scholarship Repository

Jepson School of Leadership Studies articles, book chapters and other publications

Jepson School of Leadership Studies

1999

The "Confessing Animal" on Stage: Authenticity, Asceticism, and the Constant "Inconstancie" of Elizabethan Character

Peter Iver Kaufman
University of Richmond, pkaufman@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/jepson-faculty-publications

Part of the Dramatic Literature, Criticism and Theory Commons, Performance Studies Commons, and the Philosophy of Language Commons

Recommended Citation

Kaufman, Peter Iver. "The "Confessing Animal" on Stage: Authenticity, Asceticism, and the Constant "Inconstancie" of Elizabethan Character." In *Performance and Authenticity in the Arts*, by Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, 49-65. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jepson School of Leadership Studies articles, book chapters and other publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

3

The "confessing animal" on stage

authenticity, asceticism, and the constant "inconstancie" of Elizabethan character

---

PETER IVER KAUFMAN

I

For persons persuaded by the rhetoric of sixteenth-century religious reformers, authenticity was a complex matter of access to the reality of divinity. George Levin's paper on empiricist "habits of mind" seems a strange place to start elaborating on that observation, for such "habits" look to be worlds apart from what I study, the sixteenth-century Calvinist adaptations of patristic and medieval ascetic spirituality. Yet Levin maintains that he has identified empiricism's near-ascetic techniques. "To know nature," he claims, "one must make it alien ... and deny one's own desire." If he is correct about "the programmatically self-alienating" character of "the positivist model of knowledge" and about the empiricist assumptions it extends and refines, then perhaps asceticism, Calvinism, empiricism, and positivism someday will file companionably through sweeping histories of the human imagination. If he is correct, that is, and if the historians of that someday are still reupholstering old ideas and long-standing "habits of mind." I cannot pronounce authoritatively on the first condition and am only slightly tempted to guess about the second. Not so George Levin, who crosses cavalierly from self-alienation to self-annihilation, sure that "the religious/moral implications of that tradition of self-annihilation continue to thrive in the practice of science and the language of the social sciences."[1]

"That tradition" interests me as it does a small army of others who are fascinated by the alienation and alleged self-annihilation on the Elizabethan stage. Obituaries in scholarly journals announce the death by disintegration of "Renaissance man." Possibly the same passion for denial and deconstruction that prompted them also influenced Levin. To be sure, it has generated a number of intriguing studies of late Renaissance, specifically Elizabethan, culture. They are undeniably and wondrously provocative, but are they sound?[2]

Hamlet is a favorite hangout. Annihilators lingering there say that scripted hyper-reflexivity left (and leaves) performers no choice but to dramatize disintegration, to document the loss or absence of the protagonist's unified sense of self. In what follows, I hope to restore choice and to suggest a contextually sensible alternative to soliloquacious self-cancellation. True, Hamlet casts off Elsinore's "inauthentic exterior"; true, he seems to want to cast off from the roles assigned him: dutiful son, lover, avenger. Also true, his efforts to probe conscience, intention, and character were ultimately unsuccessful efforts to constitute them. But must we therefore agree with Francis Barker that "at the center of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing," that sincerity and authenticity were simply what idealist critics projected on the characterless character set before them?[3]

Bert States recently scolded the scholars who dwell on dissolution, who sense that a character's pelting self-criticism leaves nothing at the center. States suggests that colleagues of that stripe misunderstand "the art of dramatic characterization."

> In my experience, most "modern" protagonists from Hamlet through Camus's Caligula spend much of their time wondering who they are while undergoing the agony of disillusion and loss of self... lead often to madness or suicide. But to assume the character-entity that does all this wondering and agonizing doesn't project a more or less continuous and reliable personality, in most cases, at least, seems a remarkable confusion of the qualitative persistence of behavior, on the one hand, and identity as an immutable essence (whatever that may be) on the other. The consequence of throwing personality out with the bath water of identity is that we are left with nothing human to talk about and criticism becomes an excursion into pure textuality and the perils of signification.

The point is well taken, but if only because nimble annihilators could conceivably celebrate as an interpretive advance precisely what States sees as "a remarkable confusion" and that "excursion into pure textuality," a *con*textual perspective seems advisable. We will listen to the devotional performances of the late Tudor Calvinists to learn how their "soliloquies" deploy disintegration in the regeneration of character.[4]

II

Faith, grace, justification, salvation: all were given by God to the undeserving rather than earned and accepted as the rewards for virtue. Any synopsis of Calvinist – for that matter, of Protestant – doctrine would have to make that point clear. For Calvin and for reformed orthodoxy, human righteousness was a fiction. It was widely assumed, to be sure, and the assumption that righteous men and women needed only occasional instruction to climb to heaven underwrote much of Roman Catholic polity and practice, according to Rome's reformed critics. John Calvin countered, as had Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, and Huldrych Zwingli, that only through the faith that Jesus atoned for their sins – a faith given them and not achieved by them – could sinners cling to an imputed or "alien" righteousness. The Calvinists had learned from the apostle Paul (Romans 11:32) that they and all others were irrepressibly wicked. They had nothing to show for themselves or to offer God, save their insolvency and insolence. Better by far, then, to contrive no excuses, to confess personal and pervasive depravity, to accentuate the negative, and to turn inward, becoming intimately acquainted with the sordid and sorry self that God sees and pardons. Better by far, that is, to play their bad hands than to bluff, because absolute disgrace, Calvin confirmed, led to religious knowledge. Without a profound sense of their dreadfully depraved characters, the faithful would not be able to comprehend the immense mercy of God.

Calvin commended self-examination and self-criticism. Reformed Christians must confront their utter insolvency and ardently regret their "emptiness," he counselled. They should be "consumed," "swallowed up" by disgrace and despair. Seventeenth-century spiritual autobiographies of several prolific English Calvinists seem to have plumbed the shallows and raked the muck, probably more than Calvin would have wanted. They are well known, often studied. But recently Tom Webster re-catalogued that "ego-literature" and discovered that the ordeals of self-criticism, variously described by Calvin's English admirers as "stripping," "ripping," "battering," and "beating," colored an assortment of devotional manuals, pastoral letters, books, "lean-to lives" appended to funeral sermons, and commonplace books, all the narratives that charted the way that faith in Jesus's atonement issued in assurance of salvation.[5]

Readers and auditors were told or shown how to dramatize "godly sorrow" for their sins. William Perkins, the most widely read

Calvinist of his generation and for many years thereafter, preached often in Cambridge from the late 1580s to his death in 1602. He was intent on turning the faithful from spectators into performers, and, to that end, he stressed the difference between "unfeigned repentance" and "feigned righteousness." God, he said, would not allow the latter to pass. Humanity was too keenly aware of its wretchedness to keep up the act, ashamed of its outlandish transgressions of God's laws and, less daring perhaps but no less serious and self-important, its remorseless and "ever repining at [God's] arrangement of human affairs." On the other hand, Perkins knew that "unfeigned repentance" was the one chance to turn shame and disgrace into assurance of election and salvation. Agonizing self-analysis was not just an occasion to apprehend the immensity and gratuity of divine mercy. It also attested the analyst's (and analysand's) standing "in the estate of grace." By all accounts, the elect were unlikely to be assured instantly. But questioning or doubting their standing was the very same as reconfirming it. So Perkins required reformed Christians to "feele continually the smart and bitternes of their owne sinnes." "Unfeigned repentance" unsettles, he said, and "the meanes to attaine to the sight of sin is by a diligent examination of a man's owne selfe ... which ransacketh the heart to the very quicke."[6]

To illustrate, Perkins staged an encounter between a pastor and parishioner. The latter had just learned of the magnitude of his offenses and consequently began to doubt the sufficiency of his faith. He feared that God had rejected him, and the more he tried to assure himself, the more achingly he was assured of his damnation. Yet Perkins's pastor put a very different spin on the parishioner's despondency; for faith "feeleth many doubtings and waverings," the pastor interjected, "even as the sound man feeles many grudgings of diseases, which if hee had not health, he could not feele." Shrewdly put, but the parishioner's doubt, fears, and general dis-ease persisted. The pastor seemed unable to comb away snags and suspicions, and the impression that Perkins wanted it that way is not without warrant. "Sighes" and "groans," the author editorially pronounced, were indispensable constituents, reliable symptoms of one's assurance of election. However many hours the elect logged in self-analysis and in conference with their pastors, the dis-ease hung on and ought not to be wished away because "the perfection of a Christian man's life stands in the feeling and confession of his imperfections," in his feeling "continually the smart" of his sins and self-reproach.[7]

Katharine Maus lately revisited William Perkins's theological anthropology, claiming interiority was increasingly important to him even as the late Renaissance was generating misgivings about the extent to which one could say anything definite about inner reality. For Perkins, she went on, "subjectivity becomes part of the proof of God's existence" and "the structure of internal experience is thought necessarily to imply observation by a divinity." Individuals were objects of what Maus calls "double scrutiny." Others saw fallibly and superficially; God watched infallibly and with penetration. The problem that obsessed the prolific Perkins, however, was self-analysis and the difficulty of devising indispensable techniques of meditation, "excavation," and introspection to enable the faithful to perform, as well as to understand, the dramas of their "unfeigned repentance."[8]

A few unrestrained Calvinists made spectacles of their self-reproach. Until he met William Hacket in 1590, Nicholas Copinger importuned leading Calvinist divines at every opportunity to ask whether God's work in conscience may not be accompanied by signs and wonders. Hacket was the answer he was looking for, because Hacket's virtuosity in prayer and self-recrimination proved to him that God still worked miracles. So Copinger coaxed friends, acquaintances, and strangers in the streets of London to follow him to Hacket's lodgings and hear the miracle of Hacket's prayer and prophesy. Job Throckmorton complained that Copinger just about dragged him to performances where Hacket "used many ... ohes, loude sighes, and groninges." The prayers, Throckmorton said, were not "squared after the rule of knowledge"; each was "like the wildgoose chase, [with] neither head nor foote, rime nor reason." And each prayer was "stuffed and interlarded with sundrie bitter imprecations." Hacket raved against himself: "let vengeance consume me"; "let the earth open and swallow me." Perkins probably would have cringed and thought the performance "feigned." Copinger was obviously and absolutely enthralled. Throckmorton let on to authorities that he had been appalled.[9]

After Copinger and Hacket staged an impromptu public demonstration and were charged with treason, Throckmorton strenuously tried to dissociate himself from that fanatical fringe of the reform party. For when Copinger recruited Henry Arthington, the ecstatics' belligerence increased. Arthington even challenged Archbishop Whitgift to "a combat of praier," which should, he said, be staged in the queen's presence,

> wherein ... I will first begin to pray against my selfe that if he be not as deepely guiltie as I have charged him [Whitgift], then that God's vengeance may presently consume me, both body and soule into hell for ever ... But if he see me leape up for joy as one that discovered him to be a traitor, then, if he dare fal down in like sort and make the same praier, that the like vengeance may fal upon himself if he be so deepely gilty as I have charged, and if God's vengeance fall not upon him before he depart out of her presence, let me be hanged, drawn, and quartred for laboring to empeach a counsellor's credit.[10]

Calvinists more openly devoted than Throckmorton and Perkins to the prevailing ecclesiastical order caught the scent or stench of sedition in "extraordinarie gifts" and derided the dissidents' "dexteritie in conceiving extemporall prayers." Richard Cosin did not accept a plea of insanity, claiming at length that Copinger and Hacket were revolutionaries. Cosin probed Hacket's past with the tenacity of an investigative reporter. He published accounts of "trayterous imaginations [and] compassings," as if informants were all along reporting on the "conspiracie." (Henry Arthington did, in fact, "turn state's evidence," so to speak, though only after his associates had taken to the streets and were caught.) Matthew Sutcliffe branded the dissidents "new upstart divines," preferring, he said, that they not pray at all rather than pray so extravagantly. Sutcliffe added that he had come across pared-down versions of the ecstatics; he saw "like disorder" and heard "like outcries" in a number of churches: "people upon very small occasion, yea upon no occasion, will take upon them suddenly to powre forth ... prayers, scarce knowing the difference betwixt Christian praying and bitter cursing." Cosin agreed, noting that "execration against oneself" widely passed as "a noble vertue" and as "a matter of rare zeal."[11]

Little is left of the performances that annoyed Sutcliffe and Cosin. Impromptu, unscripted prayers, for obvious reasons, have not survived. All we have is the evidence of contemporary disagreements between reformers and critics like Cosin. Hacket was an extreme case. He seems to have been less interested in argument than in performance. Unconcerned with the proprieties and deportment that mattered much to Sutcliffe, he prayed with abandon and stormed heaven with his sins. He prayed from the scaffold, warning God that if he were denied redemption he would "fire the heavens" and even "teare thee from thy throne with my hands."[12] Other, more moderate reformers, defended the "extemporall" and claimed that set or scripted prayers were no prayers at all. Prescribed prayers, they said, were "stinted"; scripts prohibited energetic self-analysis. John

Greenwood, for example, contended that it was impossible to examine oneself and give voice to one's sorrow with sentiments and supplications one borrowed from books. Yet George Gifford answered that the words of others often prompted a "deeper sighing and sorrowing" than the "frantike" prayers of independent, arrogant Christians who "imagine they knowe more than all the churches of God in the earth." Gifford, Greenwood's colleague in the Essex ministry, persuaded himself that the advocates of "conceived," impromptu prayer, if they had their way, would substitute bedlam for the harmony of interests enshrined in set liturgies.[13]

For all that divided Gifford from Greenwood – and both from Hacket and Copinger – one could say that they formed a very loose federation on the left of the reformed ranks. They required that standard ascetic themes be prayerfully – and publicly – performed. There was no scriptural warrant for confining contrition to the confessional, they said, no closets alongside the Jordan River, where sinners confessed and were baptized by John (Matthew 3:6) and no secrecy at Ephesus, where the sorcerers confessed to the apostle Paul and burned their books "in the sight of all" (Acts 19:18). Perkins repeated Paul's wishes, "I desire that in every place the men should pray" (1 Timothy 2:8), and argued that all "religious distinction of places" be "abolished." Neither those closets (confessionals) nor even churches should be considered the required rigging for remorse. Assurance of election was on offer wherever the faithful performed their rituals of self-examination or "descents," as Perkins referred to them.[14]

"In every place," he said, but not at any time. Moderate Calvinists tried to control prayer, in part, by placing it in tandem with preaching. The prayerful self-evaluation and self-incrimination that authenticated election followed sermons and, Henry Smith proposed, showed how well the preachers' doctrines were "digested." William Harrison independently developed the same simile, memorably describing prayerful self-inventory as mastication, as chewing a wholesome cud, privately retrieving and re-preaching what had been heard from the pulpit so that lessons might "work more effectually upon emotions." Preachers were told to get sinners to fret about their "estates," to "ransacke" and "rippe" the wicked self, fashioning "godly sorrow" and a better self, to boot. "Rebuke them sharply," the apostle Paul advised (Titus 1:13), advice that Calvinists explained with some care, for the purpose was not to make parishioners "live like pettie angels [who had] dropped out of the cloudes."

Instead, sermons were to work on auditors' consciences to sustain "good motions," which Richard Greenham defined as "a sweet disliking of sinne" and "an irking of ourselves for the same." The "irking" and a correspondent dis-ease were expressed in prayer. But Greenham knew that soul-searching infrequently followed even the finest sermons, wherein God, with the preacher's indictments, "commeth downe into the church, as it were, among us,"

> and when we pray, we mount up, as it were to heaven, among the angels. . . . Fools thinke they have done well . . . never preparing their hearts or examining their owne wants. But we must learn truly to search our selves. . . . For, alas, what precious seede is cast on the high wayes side because by meditation it is not laide up, but the devil is suffered to come and steale it from us? To what end is the word, if we live not according to that which we have learned, if every man shall enter thus unto himself: O Lord, how many sermons have I heard, but how little I have profited by them? How long have thy ministers preached, but how slenderly have I practiced?[15]

Prayers "laide up" the seed. The best prayerful performances exhibited near operatic remorse for evildoing and doubt, for that "remnant of unbeleefe which yet hangeth upon us." It was patently unnatural to despair of nature's ways, namely to regret one's sin and skepticism. Therefore, to "complaine of lumpish, earthly, and dead spirits," as Greenham obliged, was to show the leaven in the lump and to confirm that the complainants were neither altogether earthly nor dead. While William Perkins taught a few miles away in Cambridge, Greenham preached a few sermons each week through the 1580s in the village of Dry Drayton. From both lectern and pulpit, then, reformed Christians heard the same message, the "most righteous are their own greatest accusers."[16]

III

For three acts and into the fourth, Hamlet does little but accuse himself. He complains about his delinquency, grumbles over his predicament, to a point, at which we may be excused now and then for expecting him angrily to quit his play. But he stays and manages to keep most theatergoers in their seats. Shakespeare mastered the challenge that baffled many other authors of revenge drama: he got his play and protagonist from injury to retaliation without losing audience interest. Hamlet is what Greenham would have called a "lumpish" character, but there is much leaven in that lump. Hamlet rises to each occasion, but his every rise follows and precedes a fall.

One might say that the alternating spasms of desperation and resolve supply the play's suspense and entertainment. Unlike Hamlet, Thomas Kyd's Hieronimo stews for a short time ("I will rest me in unrest"). The playwright got his *Spanish Tragedy* from first crime to last by posting a number of murders along the route.[17] Violence in *Hamlet* holds interest as well. Meddling Polonius is stabbed. Rosencranz and Guildenstern are executed offstage. But the violence is eclipsed by Hamlet's self-analysis and self-accusation, which sprawl across the play, assessing the meaning of action, virtue, intention, and identity in an imperfect world.

Hamlet's ups and downs, punctuated by those soliloquacious assessments, are now taken as symptoms of identity diffusion or dissolution. Historians of subjectivity think the destabilizing unprecedented, but I believe David Aers is right: that novelty, in the eyes and arguments of the beholders, attests "one of the most monumental pieces of amnesia in the radical histories of the subject."[18] Aers specifically refers to an Augustinian tradition of inwardness that cultural historians apparently have forgotten or overlooked. Their late sixteenth century looks new because the medieval centuries look flat and uninteresting to them. Petrarch, for instance, is seldom sited within reach of the early modern subject. And students of Hamlet's soliloquies seem not to have factored the influence of Augustine's fourth-century *Soliloquia* or other sources to which Richard Rogers appealed when he called Calvinist meditations "soliloquies" in treatises published early in the seventeenth century. Rogers mentioned similarities between Calvinist "soliloquies" or "intermissions" and Cicero's sessions, wherein the orator typically and temporarily retired from public life to reflect on public virtue and public service. But Rogers also noted a colossal difference: reformed Christians, heirs of Augustine, pondered weightier, personal matters, contemplating salvation and their "inconstancie, weaknesse, and wavering" in response to God's love. Calvinists' soliloquies, therefore, were not sanctuaries for afflicted souls. Instead, their intermissions were miniature revenge dramas, for puritan preachers spoke about complaint and self-criticism as revenge. Roger Fenton suggested that Catholic confessors required too little and were satisfied with "sleight humiliation" and "small griefe." He told reformed Christians to "work revenge upon [them]selves for offending such a gracious God." Their soliloquies must be ordeals, as profoundly disorienting as Augustine's in the *Confessions* yet as informative and therapeutic as his *Soliloquia*.[19]

Did Hamlet's soliloquies resemble those commended to English Calvinists? He brooded about "human inconstancie, weaknesse, and wavering" for over four acts but without any idea or intelligence of God's love. And he was oddly unrepentant, expressing little regret for dispatching Polonius and less for having Rosencranz and Guildenstern done to death, "not shriving time allowed." Indeed, Hamlet confided in Horatio that the sad fate of his former friends was "not near my conscience" (5.2.58). No wonder, then, that a number of contemporary critics shut their gates to the prince of Denmark. They think him cruel and selfish, possibly spry but befuddled and sick, at best. All agree that he is angry. He learns immediately after his mother's wedding to the murderer that his father's death had been no accident. Her remarriage and the apparently counterfeit character of the newlyweds' grief for his father, their "seeming," sicken him. One might imagine him hurling La Rouchefoucauld's maxim into the wedding festivities: "nothing so much prevents our being authentic as our efforts to seem so." Instead, he soils his slate at the start, strenuously protesting his authenticity, "I know not seems" (1.2.76).[20]

Protests of that sort, geyser-like eruptions of passionate discontent, periods of sullenness and self-absorption: symptoms such as these were frequently found in diagnoses that had little to do with drama or divinity. A major medical publication of the time, Timothy Bright's *Treatise of Melancholie*, distinguished an anguished response to corruption from the moods of melancholy, asserting that medical discourse only suggested natural causes for the latter "that hath no sufficient ground of reason." For Bright, anguish was not illness and dis-ease was not disease. Though Elsinore might consider Hamlet a melancholic, a misfit, muttering unintelligibly to and about himself, playgoers heard the soliloquies as extended asides, betraying an anguish which had "sufficient ground of reason," what William Perkins termed the soul's "proper anguish." One could argue that "sufficient ground of reason" for Hamlet's anguish was the ethical dilemma posed by the directive he received from the ghost to avenge his father's murder. But I am persuaded by James Calderwood's fine study of Hamlet's delays to extend that "ground of reason" far enough to cover the protagonist's encounter with the riddling prospect that any and all action contaminates character, that action necessarily implicates character in a corrupt world and compels actors to trade worthy intentions for unforeseen, usually unwanted, consequences. Hamlet, then, looks to be "undergoing the agony of disillusion," as States acknowledged, but the Dane's is a reliably principled dissent, and indeed a "descent" inward, as Perkins and other Calvinists mapped it, to locate the source of his principles.[21]

> Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
> That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
> Worse than the mutinies in the bilboes. Rashly
> And praised be rashness for it – let us know
> Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
> When our deep plots do pall, and should learn us
> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough hew them how we will. (5.2.4–11)

The final lines seem to nod more or less acquiescently to the Christian doctrine of providence. Hamlet's stoic companion Horatio possibly heard more Cato than Calvin there, but related remarks unmistakeably allude to the Christian scriptures, to "a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (5.2.208–09). As for the first lines, they have only recently been related to the puritans' prayerful performances. And it is proper to do so, for Richard Greenham stipulated in no uncertain terms that "amongst the many testimonies of our estate in grace and favour with God, there is none more evident than is that conflict which we find and feele in ourselves." Whether one referees Hamlet's "kind of fighting" or reviews the "conflict which we find and feele" in puritan "descents," narratives of intrapsychic struggle seem to suggest self-catharsis rather than self-cancellation.[22]

The possibility that *Hamlet* was camouflaged Calvinism has not been and ought not to be taken seriously. I started out to restore an important part of the play's environing culture, to attend to soliloquies in the play and in the devotional dramas scripted by the more "advanced" English Calvinists during the last decades of Elizabeth's reign. I learned that the puritans bred a new strain of what Foucault had called "the confessing animal" and that they circulated instructions for staging its recuperations. The plural is appropriate because, as reformed Christians understood, every recovery was complicated, requiring repeated effort. The faithful were ceaselessly tempted to barter heavenly reward for worldly success. "Lord, how will we labour, toile, travel, go, run, ride, speake, sue, and sue again," John Stockwood exclaimed in a London sermon delivered nearly twenty-five years before Shakespeare gave *Hamlet* to the Globe. As for the preacher's antidote to the obsessions of his parishioners, Stockwood commended what Richard Rogers later recognized as a soliloquy or "intermission": "let us therefore enter deeper into a consyderation of our selves and into a thorough examination of our owne soules and consciences."[23] Stockwood's "consyderation" was relatively tame and typical of the 1560s and 1570s. Had the self-scrutiny of Hamlet been scripted and staged at that time, perhaps the performances would have been less turbulent. For in the early decades of Elizabeth's reign, calls to prayer yielded no sense of the tolls that Phillips (torment), Fenton (revenge), Greenham (conflict), and Perkins (desperation and misery) hoped that prayerful self-examinations would exact. But the demands on prodigal sinners intensified during the 1580s and 1590s, and we need not search far for the explanation. Church and government officials were increasingly successful in stifling radicals' initiatives to reform discipline more thoroughly; as radicals realized that their petitions and admonitions were unlikely to move the authorities to scrub their churches of such "Catholic" accretions as episcopacy, they turned instead to scrub the slums of their souls. They turned inward, that is, with a vengeance.

I already agreed with David Aers: this inward turn marks no sudden, sensational change. Still, the change I identified above and located in late Tudor religious culture affected perceptions and performances of subjectivity. Granted, "we need to write a 'history' which does not know, before the exploratory work has been done, that there was a totally new and far greater sense of 'interiority' in 1600 than in 1380 or 1400."[24] But we also need to know that devotional literature during the 1580s and 1590s consistently interiorized the drama of deliverance. The aim was to reconcile the irresistibility of grace with the "inconstancie and wavering" experienced by the elect. Calvinists learned that God only appeared to forsake the faithful, who only appeared to fall from grace. The ordeals of the elect were signs of God's presence and favor. Doubts and despair about "inconstancie" were therapeutic. They thumped the conscience, Perkins warranted, "to quicken and revive" "the hidden graces of the heart."[25]

"Hidden graces" is a suggestive phrase; it connects English Calvinist or puritan pietism to the confessional autobiography of an earlier age, to Augustine's *Confessions*, to name the specimen most often cited. For Augustine was also sure that God chastened to strengthen and hid to be found. Reformed Christian soteriology seemed to gravitate toward late antiquity, if only to distinguish the personal consequences of its exegesis from those of Catholic, unreformed practice. Even now some scholars advance distinctions that the Calvinists could have sanctioned. Medieval exegetes read the Bible, according to Barbara Lewalski, to discover what to do, whereas reformed exegetes read the Bible to discover what God was doing in, and for, them and only then to "assimilate [themselves] into God's typological design." The elect were unfaithful; Israel was unfaithful. They were reclaimed and rededicated as Israel was reclaimed and recovenanted. The psalmists' sorrows became sorrows of the late sixteenth-century prodigals. Patriarchs', prophets', and apostles' struggles were the struggles of the elect as well. When they read of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles submitting to God's will, the elect sought an identical outcome. And the lesson to be derived from Jesus's question from the cross was that the inconstancy of the elect authenticated their election. Puritans read about despair and doubt in the Scriptures and in the diaries and journals they kept to repossess and recapitulate their experience of assurance. It could be said that the English Calvinists performed their perseverance whenever they revisited and revised their journals, the material sites of their self-fashioning.[26]

Puritans reread to reenact. At prayer, they improvised or recited from scripts to recover assurances of their election. In consequence, devotional practice, much as theatrical performance, served as "a vehicle of inward change."[27] Elizabethan Puritans, as petitioners, were unlikely to assume that their prayers would change God's mind and their destinies. Changes of that kind were inconceivable, given what preachers of their "practical divinity" said about the prevenience and finality of divine design. No, the puritans prayed to change themselves, and Huston Diehl now claims that by staging a "distinctly puritan habit of mind" in *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare was looking to change more than the antics of his actors. "In privileging interiority and self-reflexivity over the theatrics of the court and the spectacle of earlier modes of drama," Diehl says, "Shakespeare explores the potential of the stage to reform his spectators."[28]

Perhaps so, but I am less concerned with the playwright's explorations than with the "descents" of his Calvinist cousins, and I am interested in affinity rather than in influence. Those "questions of theatrical or intellectual influence in the narrow sense," as Katharine Maus put it, seem less fascinating (to Maus and me) than "questions about the general disposition of early modern culture." Puritans' preoccupations with and performances of "inconstancie" memorably, if not also comprehensively, yield information about that "general disposition" and thus about the spread of Hamlet's "kind of fighting."[29]

Do puritans' preoccupations and performances suggest stage directions as well? Hamlet's soliloquies are occasionally played as prayers, as abstracted and nearly absent-minded asides rather than as a cathartic "kind of fighting" – one learns as much from that colossal catalogue of performance alternatives compiled in 1992 by Marvin Rosenberg, and one discovers that there has been startlingly little theatrical interest in the *echt* Hamlet, that is, in a performance's plausible reconstruction of the original. Indeed, playgoers have come to expect militant anachronism, and much of it is marvelously done. But should impresarios rally to summon the Elizabethans' Hamlet from the hinterlands of history texts, if trends continue, they may be left with decentered and detached or disoriented Danes, and playgoers will have to settle for melancholic protagonists droning soliloquies in voice-overs. My vote goes to Stanislavsky. He knew nothing of the Calvinists' prayers, but he discountenanced undemonstrative Hamlets, stating his preference for "passionate and intensive self-searching" and for soliloquies "full of anxiety and exaltation."[30]

NOTES

1 George Levin, "By Knowledge Possessed: Darwin, Nature, and Victorian Narrative," *New Literary History* 24 (1993), 369–73.

2 See Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London, Methuen, 1984); Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London, Methuen, 1985); Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); *idem*, "Desire is Death," in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stalleybrass (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 369–86; Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London, Verso, 1983); and my *Prayer, Despair, and Drama: Elizabethan Introspection* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1996), particularly pp. 32–36, 107–11. "Inconstancie" extends the argument of *Prayer* and addresses the issues raised in the literature that subsequently came to my attention, notably the work of Bert States, Katharine Eisaman Maus, Huston Diehl, Tom Webster, David Aers, and Ramie Targoff.

3 Barker, *Tremulous*, pp. 35–37; and Moretti, *Signs*, pp. 70–72.

4 See Bert O. States, *Hamlet and the Concept of Character* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 202 and, for the theatricality of

Calvinists' devotions, Ramie Targoff, "The Performance of Prayer: Sincerity and Theatricality in Early Modern England," *Representations* 60 (1997), 55–58.

5 Tom Webster, "Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality," *The Historical Journal* 39 (1996), 35–36. Quotations are drawn from Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.14.5 and 4.16.30, accessible today in John T. McNeill's edition, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1977), and accessible to Elizabethans in several editions, for which see *A Short-title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad*, ed. A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave (London, The Bibliographical Society, 1986), pp. 195–96.

6 William Perkins, *A Treatise tending unto a Declaration whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace*, in *Works*, vol. 1 (London, 1616), pp. 364–65; *idem*, *A Golden Chaine* (London, 1591), sigs. Q5v–Q6r; and, for "every repining," Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992), pp. 152–59.

7 Perkins, *Treatise*, pp. 409–13.

8 Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and the Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 8–11.

9 See *The Defence of Job Throckmorton against the Slaunders of Maister Sutcliffe* (London, 1594), pp. 3–7.

10 Arthington's challenge is quoted by one of Whitgift's former students, Richard Cosin, in *Conspiracie for Pretended Reformation* (London, 1592), pp. 64–68. Also see Matthew Sutcliffe, *An Answer unto a Certaine Calumnious Letter* (London, 1595), fos. 62v–64r.

11 See Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 5, 35, and 85; Matthew Sutcliffe, *A Treatise of Ecclesiastical Discipline* (London, 1590), pp. 199–202; and Sutcliffe's *Answere*, fos. 60v–61r.

12 Cosin, *Conspiracie*, pp. 71–72.

13 See George Gifford, *Sermons upon the Whole Book of Revelation* (London, 1599), pp. 189–90; Gifford, *A Short Treatise against the Donatists of England whom we call Brownists* (London, 1590), pp. 22–25, 42–43; and especially Gifford, *A Plaine Declaration that our Brownists be Full Donatists* (London, 1590), p. 105, against Greenwood, *A Fewe Observations of Mr. Giffard's last Cavills about Stinted, Read Prayers and Devised Leitourgies*, in *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1591–1593*, ed. Leland Carlson (London, Allen and Unwin, 1970), pp. 56–57.

14 William Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostle*, in *Works*, vol. 1 (London, 1616), pp. 284, 293–94 and Perkins, *A Commentarie or Exposition upon the first five chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians*, in *Works*, vol. 2 (London, 1617), p. 182. Also consult the work of John Phillips, specifically *The Perfect Path to Paradise* (London, 1588), sigs. E11r–E12r and *The Way to Heaven* (London, 1625),

pp. 42–43; and see George Gifford, *Foure Sermons uppon the Seven Chiefe Vertues* (London, 1584), sigs. E8v–F3r. Cultural and literary historians write of the generation of contrition in Calvinism as "inculpation," *culpabilisation*, for which see Jean Delumeau, *Le pêche et la peur: la culpabilisation en Occident, XIII au XVIII siècle* (Paris, Fayard, 1983), pp. 244–45, 315–16; Jean Deprun, *La philosophie de l'inquietude au XVIII siècle* (Paris, J. Vrin, 1979), specifically pp. 123–28; and John Stachniewski's *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991). My reservations are recorded in Kaufman, "Religion on the Run," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 25 (1994), 85–94.

15 Greenham, *Very Godly Meditations on the 119[th] Psalm*, in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithfull Servant of Jesus Christ, M. Richard Greenham*, ed. Henry Holland (London, 1605), pp. 676–77; William Harrison, *The Difference of Hearers or an Exposition of the Parable of the Sower* (London, 1614), pp. 40–41, 194–98; and *The Works of Henry Smith*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, J. Nichol, 1866–1867), 1:499; 2:59–61; and 2:84–86.

16 See Greenham's sermon on Proverbs 28:15, in *Works* (1605), pp. 797–801 and *A Letter Consolatorie*, in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, M. Richard Greenham*, ed. Henry Holland ((London, 1612), pp. 872–73. Also see the *Sweet Comfort for an Afflicted Conscience*, in *Works* (1612), p. 103.

17 Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* is available in a superb critical edition, edited by Philip Andrews and reprinted in 1988 by Manchester University Press.

18 See Aers, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the History of the Subject," in *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. David Aers (New York, Harvester, 1992), p. 182.

19 Roger Fenton, *A Perfume against the Noysome Pestilence* (London, 1603), sigs. B7r–B8r. Also see Nicholas Bownde, *Sermon containing many Comforts for the Afflicted in their Trouble*, appended to John More's *Three Godly and Fruitfull Sermons* (Cambridge, 1594), particularly pp. 23–25, and Thomas Wilcox, *Discourse Teaching the Doctrine of Doubting* (Cambridge, 1598), pp. 290–91. For Calvinists' soliloquies and ordeals, see Rogers, *Seven Treatises* (London, 1610), pp. 407, 411–13.

20 Parenthetical citations in the text refer to act, scene, and line from the accessible *Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, following the so-called good quarto edition of 1604–1605 (Q2) and including important additions from the folio edition. For brief discussions of the textual variations, see R.A. Foakes, *'Hamlet' versus 'Lear': Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 90–97. And for Hamlet's cruelty and bewilderment, see D.W. Robertson, "A Medievalist looks at *Hamlet*," in *Shakespeare's Christian Dimension: An Anthology of Commentary*, ed. Roy Battenhouse (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 410–11.

21 See James Calderwood, *To Be and Not To Be: Negation and Metadrama in "Hamlet"* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1983). For the differences between melancholy and Hamlet's "descents," see Perkins, *Treatise*, p. 365; Timothy Bright, *Treatise of Melancholy* (London, 1586), pp. 184–94; and my discussion of Robert Burton's *Anatomy* in *Prayer*, pp. 122–24.

22 See Greenham, *Letter Consolatorie*, p. 879, and Kaufman, *Prayer*, pp. 112–27, 139–43.

23 See John Stockwood's *Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse* (London, 1578), pp. 30–31, 66, 113–15, and 134.

24 Aers, "Whisper," pp. 196–97.

25 Perkins, *Treatise*, p. 420.

26 See Webster, "Writing to Redundancy," pp. 47–52 and Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, "Typological Symbolism and 'the Progress of the Soul' in Seventeenth-Century Literature," in *Literary Uses of Typology from the Later Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Earl Miner (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 82–85, 90–92, for medieval reading and early modern "assimilation."

27 See Targoff, "Performance of Prayer," pp. 62–63, although she wonders whether the few instances of "hypocritical inwardness" in *Hamlet* suggest it "ultimately privileges outwardly convincing appearance" rather than "inward change."

28 See Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 90–91. Diehl's conclusions about the play's "privileging" seem sounder than Targoff's (note 27), but he also appears to me to be overly inclined to "Calvinize" the play and playwright.

29 Compare Maus, *Inwardness*, p. 36.

30 For Stanislavsky and related choices, see Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Hamlet* (Newark, The University of Delaware Press, 1992), pp. 466–73.