

WHAT DOES A SHAKESPEAREAN CHARACTER SAY
WHEN HE OR SHE SAYS "I"? EXPLORING NOTIONS OF 'SELF'
IN SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMA

Dra. FERNANDA TEIXEIRA DE MEDEIROS
Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ)
Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil
(femedeirosuerj@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT: What does a Shakespearean character say when she or he says "I"? That is the question that encapsulates a reflection on the representation of subjectivity in Shakespeare's drama. To examine the modes Shakespeare employs to build his characters' experience of their own selves in tragedy, comedy, romance and history plays, I propose a discussion of the early modern conception of self, especially the one we find in Michel de Montaigne's essays, as well as an investigation of early modern discursive practices where models of subjectivity were being engendered: the rhetorical education provided by grammar schools; the topography of inwardness as the site of the "true self"; and the Stoic doctrine, mostly in its belief that reason governs human nature.

Keywords: Early Modern Self. Representation of Subjectivity. Shakespeare's drama.

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O QUE UM PERSONAGEM DE SHAKESPEARE DIZ QUANDO DIZ "EU"? DISCUTINDO A NOÇÃO DE SUBJETIVIDADE NO TEATRO SHAKESPEARIANO

RESUMO: O que um personagem de Shakespeare diz quando diz "eu"? Essa é a pergunta que sintetiza a reflexão sobre a representação da subjetividade no drama shakespeariano. Para discutir os modos pelos quais Shakespeare constrói as experiências de si de seus personagens em tragédias, comédias, romances e peças históricas, proponho um exame da noção de identidade (*self*) na modernidade nascente, cujo modelo encontra-se na obra de Michel de Montaigne, bem como uma investigação de práticas discursivas nas quais modelos de subjetividade estavam sendo forjados: a educação retórica das *grammar schools*; a topografia da interioridade que preconiza um "eu verdadeiro" interiorizado; e a doutrina estoica, sobretudo sua crença de que é a razão que governa a natureza humana.

Palavras-chave: Identidade na modernidade nascente. Representação da subjetividade. Teatro shakespeariano.

EARLY MODERN SELVES

Early modernity offers us a rich array of sites for the presentation of the self, with a variety of textual and dramatic genres for its display, such as sonnets, essays, theatrical speeches and soliloquies. This large interest in the first person and its movements of thought and expression is one of early modern humanism's trademarks and an essential trait for the development of Western civilization as we know it today, a civilization where individuals play the central role, for the good and for the bad.

The early modern self differs significantly from the romantic self, our model *par excellence*, even in a post-Freudian world. The romantic "I" believes that it speaks with a genuinely authentic and particular voice, uncontaminated by other voices and words. The early modern self, in its turn, is more likely to be aware that it is not possible to subtract the individual from

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a network of selves and quotations, and that subjects are necessarily intertextual beings. The emblematic figure of this mode of self-description and self-perception is Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), an author that succeeded in inventing a textual template – the essay – which accommodated his being and his perspective alongside his interlocutors – Plutarch, Seneca, Lucretius and Cicero, among many others –, in a permanent dialogue.

The first publication of Montaigne's *Essays* took place in 1580, and the translation into English, by John Florio, in 1603. James Shapiro believes that Shakespeare's expertise at writing soliloquies, especially as he shows it in *Hamlet* (1601), is tributary to the development of essay writing – which attests to the mutual influence among those writings of the self in the sixteenth century. Shapiro dedicates one chapter of his *1599 – A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* to "Essays and soliloquies", bringing to light the virtually unknown work of English essayist William of Cornwallis (1576-1614), who, according to Shapiro, was directly inspired by Montaigne and probably familiar to William Shakespeare. Cornwallis published a first collection of his essays in 1600 and may have read them in public, in similar circles to the ones where Shakespeare may have circulated his sonnets (SHAPIRO, n/d, p. 297).

Becoming acquainted with Montaigne's work proves tremendously helpful in our appreciation of Shakespeare, in general, and as is our case here, in our reflections on how Shakespeare conceived of selfhood and of composition. Peter Mack, in *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare* (2010), studied the two authors from a comparative perspective, arguing that this approach would be more useful in highlighting their similarities than the attempts at assessing precisely how much Montaigne Shakespeare read, which is impossible to affirm with accuracy, as he explains in his book's opening:

The aim of this book is to compare Montaigne's and Shakespeare's methods of using the material obtained from their reading in order to develop their own ideas and expressions. The key to understanding how both writers exploited what they read is to be found in Renaissance rhetorical training. (MACK, 2010, p. 1)

Mack wants to discuss Shakespeare and Montaigne as writers-readers, that is, writers who were practising modes of composition inherited from

classical rhetoric – *inventio*, *imitatio*, *emulatio*¹ – and experimenting their own voices amid other voices, following a typical humanist procedure not unlike what Petrarch himself (1304-1374), a pioneering humanist, believed in, as he defended that on drawing material from the great writers of the past, one should do so "in a way which is neither servile nor too visible: the writer may follow in another man's tracks, but not exactly in his footsteps" (Quoted by MANN, 2001, p. 13).

The process of recycling preexisting materials, the condition of never starting from scratch, but adapting, appropriating and dialoguing – practices which we easily associate with postmodern arts, interestingly enough –, are always at the origin of composition, implying a permanent negotiation between an author's individuality and his elected interlocutors. There is no effacement of the author's voice, but his sources and imitated methods of production remain identifiable, and it is desirable that it may happen this way. In an essay entitled "On the Education of Children", dedicated to a woman friend of his, Madame Diane de Foix, Comtesse de Gurson, who is choosing the best means to provide good education for her children, Montaigne discusses his position as an author who makes use of other authors' voices as a means to enhance his thoughts, making these borrowings explicit and criticizing those who do not:

To cover themselves, as I have seen some writers doing, so completely in other men's armour as not to leave even their finger-tips showing; to compose a work of pieces gathered here and there among the ancients – an easy task for a man of learning who is treating an ordinary subject – and then to attempt to conceal the theft and pass it all off as their own, this is in the first place criminal and cowardly [...]. (MONTAIGNE, p. 51-2)

He does, besides, in the same essay, express his concern about how the educational process should take place, wishing for a training which will replace parroting with a more active participation of the pupil:

[...] I should wish great care to be taken in the selection of a guide with a well-formed rather than with a well-filled intellect [...]. The usual way is to bawl into

¹ In rhetorical terms, "inventio" means collecting ideas, as the derivated contemporary word "inventory", suggests, having nothing to do with spontaneous creation. "Imitatio" is a reproduction of someone else's technique, and "emulatio" is the reproduction of someone else's technique with an additional element produced by the author.

a pupil's ears as if one was pouring water into a funnel, and the boy's business is simply to repeat what he is told. I would have the tutor amend this state of things, and begin straight away to exercise the mind that he is training, according to its capacities. He should make his pupil taste things, select them and distinguish them by his own powers of perception. [...] I would not have him start everything and do all the talking, but give his pupil a turn and listen to him. (MONTAIGNE, p. 54-55)

In Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, we envisage the coexistence of the authorial voice and its model, in a tension which is resolved in terms of parody. "My mistress's eyes are nothing like the sun", an anti-Petrarchan poem in the Dark Lady Sequence and one of the most beautiful sonnets Shakespeare wrote, embodies an attack on Petrarchan procedures carried out in a strictly Petrarchan mode. The lady's eyes are not like the sun, her hair is black, her voice is not melodious, her cheeks are not rosy, her breath even reeks... The model, even if turned upside down, is there in all its strength: a woman is to be described in terms of certain parts of her body, which should look in such and such a fashion. In the final couplet, though, the sonnet's real 'protagonist', the speaker-as-poet, emerges, affirming the precedence of his own perspective over every other one, foregrounding his "I" and its individual taste above other poets', which are necessarily untrue in their Petrarchism, according to the speaker: "And yet by heaven I think my love as rare / As any she belied with false compare". This position of the first-person, digging its way amid models, asserting itself in the company of others, to be found both in Montaigne and in Shakespeare, is very representative of the idea of an early modern self.

Whereas Montaigne made his written self out of a mosaic of authors, all presented in his essays in his constant quotes, Shakespeare made his whole work out of a mosaic of sources, many of which also drawn from Montaigne. Although Shakespeare did not perform his own first person in letters, diaries or essays, and I do not believe we can take his sonnets to be autobiographical, we may say that Montaigne as essayist and Shakespeare as playwright and poet performed the same compositional operations, within which their selves were mingled with others. Additionally, their eyes were concomitantly turned to the past and to the present; to the classical heritage and to contemporary life. This Janus-like stance is one of the causes of their curiosity and empathetic view of all that concerns humankind, their respect for the fallibility and inconstancy of people, their commitment to investigation and exploration

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rather than judgement and moralizing. Montaigne gives several samples of that empathy; in "Of Repentance", for instance, describing himself, he states that "Others fashion man; I repeat him and represent a particular one, but ill made and whom, were I to form a new, he should be far other than he is. But he is now made" (GREENBLATT; PLATT, 2014, p. 196). Acknowledging his own imperfection, he goes on with the description of himself as object, highlighting its mutability and instability, following its movements with curiosity, not establishing a truth about himself:

I cannot settle my object. It goeth so unquietly and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it in this plight, as it is at the instant I amuse myself about it. *I describe not the essence but the passage*. Not a passage from age to age, or, as the people reckon, from seven years to seven, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My history must be fitted to the present. I may soon change, not only fortune but intention. It is a counter-roule [catalog] of diverse and variable accidents and irresolute imaginations, and sometimes contrary: whether it be that myself am other, or that I apprehend subjects by other circumstances and considerations. Howsoever, I may perhaps gainsay [deny] myself, but truth (as Demades said) I never gainsay. *Were my mind settled, I would not essay but resolve myself*. It is still a prentise [apprentice] and a probationer. (GREENBLATT; PLATT, 2014, p.196, my emphasis)

I hold the assumption that Shakespeare's notion of selfhood includes the features Montaigne describes above and is nourished by different discursive practices available to him in his surrounding culture. The "diverse and variable accidents and irresolute imaginations, and sometimes contrary" in the subjectivities of his characters are handled with distinct doses of malleability, issuing the rigid selfhoods of tragic protagonists or the Protean comic characters. The theme of selfhood is one more topic Shakespeare puts into debate and contemplates from different viewpoints, thus our working question: What does a Shakespearian character say when she or he says "I"?

SHAKESPEARE AND THE FASHIONING OF SELVES

As a master in variety and in the art of debate, Shakespeare dramatized the self in a broad range of possibilities. Undoubtedly, understanding where and how individualities are formed is a topic of profound interest in his drama,

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as we see in the importance given to the first-person in so many instances, regardless of generic biases. King Lear's "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (*KL*, 1.4); Iago's and Viola's "I am not what I am" (*Ot.*, 1.1 ; *TN*, 3.1); Prospero's urge for Miranda to hear him because he will tell her who she is – "Thou art ignorant of what thou art" (*Temp*, 1.2), he says to her –, and Coriolanus' claim for a "nature" of his own and contempt for the idea of "playing the man he is" (*Cor.*, 3.2) are all examples of explorations of notions of self. Moreover, the characters' enunciations of theirs or others' first persons as quoted here, albeit distinct, tend to display the self as a condition of possibility, to be fulfilled on the basis of interactions with other characters and/or contingencies and circumstances.

In tragedy, the protagonist's self is the very core of the action; tragic protagonists are singled out by their intense and absolutizing self-experience, whether in enduring their inner divisions and conflicts, as happens with Hamlet, Macbeth, Mark Antony; or in unmasking their supposed wholeness, as in Othello, Lear and Coriolanus. It is in the tragic domain that we see characters being seriously punished for adhering to a reifying notion of selfhood or failing to acknowledge that there is no such a thing as self-as-nature. Every tragic protagonist dies of him or herself, after experiencing a deep estrangement from his or her being. Hamlet, for sure, is the character who most insistently thematizes the tragicity of being, enacting self-division insistently in his soliloquies. Tragedy proves that selves can never be whole and at the same time proves that not being whole may amount to tragedy.

In comedy, the focus lies rather on groups of characters and types than on individuals. The first person is never solid, often dissolved into roles, disguises or doubles, as pairs of friends, siblings or twins, so typical of comedy, defy sharp individual contours and uniqueness. Comedy liberates individuals from their individualities, assuming that living is performing and thus avoiding the suffering provoked by the excess of self. Comedies deal playfully with identities, the price to be paid being an overall indiscernibility between Hortensios and Lucencios, Grumios and Gremios, Salerios and Salarinos, Fords and Pages, Hermias and Helenas. It does not matter, though, for not being different from the crowd protects one from the rigid self and its tragic ends. It is in comedies, rather than in tragedies, that we identify the early modern self more accurately represented.

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Romances – a group of four plays within the larger set of Shakespeare's last plays – feature a very interesting balance in the representation of selfhood, since the figure of the grandiloquent protagonist exists but mostly in a subaltern position in relation to Fortune's threats and whims. Hermione (*The Winter's Tale*), Pericles (*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*) and Prospero (*The Tempest*), for instance, are all struggling against external forces, measuring their strengths against a husband's folly, tempests and crimes, and usurpation, respectively. Leontes (*The Winter's Tale*), though, corresponds more typically to the tragic model, as he is a victim of his own pathological jealousy, but this is not the most usual character design in romance plays. Despite nuances characterizing each of the plays, it is worth noting that they all feature long time lapses in their plots (14 years in *Pericles*; 20 years in *Cymbeline*; 16 years in *The Winter's Tale*; 12 years in *The Tempest*) suggesting that *time* is also a component in the making of selves, which emerge as in permanent processes of elaboration and transformation.

In the histories, being such a blend of all genres, the possibilities for selfhood are the ones delineated above. What stands out in their case is Shakespeare's imaginative work over characters drawn from historical accounts, supposedly "real". For instance, the way royal figures are problematized, like Henry V, who is dealt with in Machiavellian terms by Shakespeare, may clash with conventional historical accounts; in addition, the freedom the playwright indulges in as he lets Queen Margareth alive in order to haunt and scare Richard III (*Richard III*, 1592-3), and the perhaps unexpected dignity bestowed on Catherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII or All is True* (1613), are also licenses Shakespeare gives himself to distort history or to make it work on behalf of his dramatic interests.

Before such a variety of conceptions of selves and their representation, and acknowledging that Montaigne and Shakespeare share what Mack called a "rhetorical training", it is productive to look into early modern culture and examine discursive practices where subjectivity is being engendered and described. In what follows I will highlight three of them and how they contrast and overlap: the rhetorical education offered in grammar schools, responsible for training young men in the skills of speech and debate, engaging thus a theatrical perception of existence; "the topos of inwardness", as discussed by Katherine Maus in her study of the representation of inwardness in early modern drama; and the Stoic doctrine and its principles of the extirpation of passions and care of the self.

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RHETORICAL CULTURE AND HUMANIST PEDAGOGY

Focusing on the teaching of Latin and classical Latin literature to boys and young men from 7 to 16 years old, grammar school education plays a hugely important part in our understanding of processes of subjectivation in early modernity. The schools' methodology was based on rhetoric, that is, on the idea that every linguistic product – the different types of texts dealt with by students, like sentences, proverbs, letters, fables, essays – was understood as belonging to a scene of persuasive communication. Language is always *discourse* within a rhetorical culture, which engages subjects necessarily in power relations when interacting verbally. As the term "rhetoric" tends to attract a large amount of prejudice, the following understanding of its role in early modern England proves quite helpful:

Rhetoric, understood not in its narrow, modern sense as deceptive eloquence or stylistic embellishment but in its broader, humanist sense *as a comprehensive system of training in reading, writing, argument, persuasion, and public performance*, structured the culture of the age. (TROUSDALE, quoted by MACDONALD, 2014, p. 164, my emphasis)

The goal of humanist education is to train pupils to be discursively competent, good at debating and persuading by cleverly choosing arguments and expressing them convincingly. Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric*, Book 1) signals that this sort of education invites a state of permanent awareness of the other. It is in order to reach this other and prevail over him/her that the self will be modelled and adapted, placing performance above being. As Lynn Enterline suggests, "Indeed, school training engrained what I have come to call 'habits of alterity' at the heart of schoolboy 'identity'" (ENTERLINE, 2012, p. 7), and such a claim interests us as it brings classrooms and theatres, schoolboys and actors, close together, helping us to envisage how the early modern self takes shape.

One of the most frequent exercises at schools was letter-writing; and Erasmus' (1466-1536) manual *De Conscribendis Epistolis* was part of every syllabus. Letters were written with the voices of historical, literary or biblical characters, in specific situations, and not with students' "personal voices" – perhaps they might not even have access to this notion. As Joel Altman puts it in *The Tudor Play of Mind*:

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In writing such letters, the student was taught to imagine himself in circumstances utterly unlike his own and to see with eyes other than his own; in formal terms this meant composing according to the decorum of person, audience, and matter, but psychologically it involved a systematic expansion of the imagination beyond its usual subjective limitations, and fostered an awareness of other human realities. (ALTMAN, 1978, p. 44-45)

Commonplace books, kept by all grammar school students, represent another crucial element of humanist pedagogy for the understanding of subject formation. In these books, containing "pre-prepared passages in an elevated style on particular topics (such as peace, justice or mercy)" (MACK, 2004, p. 43), students collected excerpts of different authors to quote in their written or oral works, constituting a habit of self-expression necessarily inclusive of voices of others.

Amid imitation and emulation, there was a concern on the part of early modern educators with the assessment of learning. When does real learning take place? Does repetition imply learning? Jeff Dolven dedicates a lot of attention to this topic in his *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (2007). He quotes, for instance, William Kempe's recommendation, in *Education of Children in Learning* (1588), the most detailed pedagogical manual of sixteenth-century England, that repetition be gradually replaced with larger autonomy: "Let him assay otherwhiles, without an example of imitation, what he can do alone by his owne skill alreadie gotten by the precepts and the two former sorts of practice." (Quoted by DOLVEN, 2007, p. 21).

This tension between doing by oneself and doing by imitation, or the modulation of one's voice along with others', echoes what we discussed above as far as Montaigne and Shakespeare handled the use of the first person's voice amid other voices. Looking at grammar schools alone and their methodology, one may even think of a process of de-subjectivation encouraged by this type of education, a replacement of "individual psychology" with a "humanist interiority", a process which entails the need, or the anxiety, to make sure that people were not converted into mere repetitive beings.

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THE "INWARDNESS TOPOS"

Side by side with the idea of self as performance or self as mosaic, as we find rhetorical education to be fostering, we witness the phenomenon of "Renaissance fascination with interior truths", as Katherine Maus points out in her study of the representation of inwardness in early modern drama. She argues that this fascination lies in "far-reaching political, religious, and economic realignments that constitute the English Reformation" (MAUS, 1995, p. 23). Amid the many important questions she raises, the need for secrecy entailed by religious persecution, the gradual urbanization of towns with notorious population changes and a widespread paranoia with security are noteworthy issues.

The topography of selfhood, tributary of Augustinian formulations, resulting from this environment, separates inwardness and outwardness, placing truth with the former and deceit with the latter. It is not hard to see how this conception will contribute enormously to the creation of dramatic characters and infuse an all-pervasive concern with the gap between essence and appearance into Shakespeare's works. Theatricality here ceases to refer to creation to turn into disguise alone, confronting us with the fact that a large number of Shakespearean characters actually play roles to each other, with different degrees of harmfulness. Lady Macbeth's urging of her husband to "look like the innocent flower and be the serpent under it" (*Mac.*, 1.5); Juliet's feigned obedience to her father before drinking the sleeping potion (*R&J*, 4.2); the crossdressing of Viola (*Twelfth Night*) and Imogen (*Cymbeline*); Prince Hal's forged adhesion to Falstaff and his gang (1 and 2 *Henry IV*) – these, among numberless other examples, account for the wide range of characters wearing borrowed robes and the varying consequences of such role-playing.

At any rate, we are warned that the experience of selfhood might be one of tension and anguish, since it would be affected by the need for protection from the public sphere. This is going to be more evident in the tragedies, as we suggested above. In comedies, characters do not represent themselves as being attracted to their own inwardness, or do not engage in exploring themselves; there would be not time for that, as action moves to the detriment of characters. The whole world is more fluid and provisional in comedies, and selves follow such rhythm. However, we cannot deny the enormous influence this topography of inwardness has played on our notion of self to these days.

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THE STOIC DOCTRINE

Stoicism is a Hellenistic philosophic school founded in the fourth century BC by Zenon, in Athens, having had a very strong penetration in Ancient Rome, mostly through Cicero's (106- 43 AC) and Seneca's (4-65 DC) works, and reaching early modernity by means of these two Latin philosophers. It interests us in the discussion of Shakespeare's design of selves since it helped to build, as in antiquity, a certain modality of relationship of the individual with itself, in its therapeutic treatment of the problems of life.

To the Hellenistic schools – Stoicism, Epicureanism and Skepticism being the most important ones – philosophy is comparable to a medical practice, aimed at helping individuals achieve their full flourishing. For the Stoics, this depends on cultivating *reason* above all: "[...] the most general strategy of Stoic therapy [is] that the pupil must be watchful and critical of the way in which she sees the world", says scholar Martha Nussbaum in her thorough study of Hellenistic ethics. Nussbaum goes on to explain that reason, for the Stoics, "is fundamentally connected with practical choice and avoidance, and the making of distinctions between good and bad in the sphere of action. The divine faculty of reason is also frequently called the faculty of *choice* [...]" (NUSSBAUM, 2009, p. 326-327). The idea of reason as constituting human nature itself results in an important ethical and political dimension to Stoic doctrine, which Nussbaum highlights as its "insistence on the equal worth of all human beings, male and female, rich and poor, high- and low-born" (NUSSBAUM, 2009, p. xvi).

The cultivation of reason was never detached from the domain of *action*, as we may observe in the convergence of reason and choice above. Cicero and Seneca were important spokesmen for the social dimension of the self within Stoic doctrine, and such dimension is endorsed by Michel Foucault in his extensive exploration of the importance of Stoicism in the formation of modern subjectivity. The French philosopher examines Stoic thought from Zenon to the new Stoicism of the centuries 1 and 2 AD, asserting that "the doctrines that were most attached to the austerity of manners – and Stoics can be placed at the top position – were also those which insisted the most on the need to accomplish duties in relation to mankind, peers and family [...]" (FOUCAULT, 1985, p. 47)².

² My version of: "as doutrinas que foram as mais ligadas à austeridade da conduta

Such intimate connection between reason and action and its resonance on social bonds will go as far as the precept of the extirpation of emotions, one of the tenets of Stoic thought. This dogmatic view that reason is supposed to achieve total control over passions turned out to be a problematic point in the reception of Stoicism by early modern thinkers, as Jill Kraye discusses in her "Stoicism in the Renaissance from Petrarch to Lipsius". On average, as Kraye claims, humanists from Petrarch to Erasmus "have nagging doubts concerning Stoic ethics, even though they held the philosophy in high regard" (KRAYE, 2001-2002, p. 30). To some humanists, Stoicism demanded a divine quality from men, an imperturbability that would equal men to Christ or God; to others, the supposed acceptance Stoics held of suicide was also a problem. Overall, there were tensions among early modern Christian humanists and the ideas of Stoic thinkers, who were pagan, despite the strong influence of Cicero and Seneca.

Shakespeare absorbed these tensions and dealt with Stoicism in a very ambivalent way. The status of reason as that which defines human nature is widely discussed by Shakespeare, who tends to show, whether in tragic or comic modes, that reason never fully accounts for the whole of the human self. When Puck exclaims "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" (*MND*, 3.2), he voices one of the sides of a debate whose other contender might reply to by saying "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! [...]" (*Ham*, 2.2). Moreover, having the arch-villain Iago as the champion of reason, as when the ensign preaches the foolish Roderigo on how individuals are able to exert absolute control of their appetites and bodies, as gardeners would in relation to their gardens (*Oth*, 1.3), attests to a deep suspicion of the dramatist towards an all-governing reason. It is with secondary characters, like Horatio, in *Hamlet*, that Stoicism can be seen positively. When Prince Hamlet describes Horatio with admiration, the qualities he enumerates are those that characterize Stoicism:

HAMLET (to *Horatio*): [...] for thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks: and blest are those

– e em primeiro lugar, pode-se colocar os estóicos – eram também aquelas que insistiam mais sobre a necessidade de realizar os deveres com relação à humanidade, aos concidadãos e à família [...]."

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Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee. (*Ham*, 3.2)

No doubt Shakespeare took large theatrical advantage of his characters' individual conflicts in search for reason; his tragic protagonists are all creatures who acknowledge that it is as advisable to be reasonable as it is impossible, and quite a few of their memorable speeches are devoted to this confrontation. Benedick, on the other hand, at the end of *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598), is comfortable enough to declare his anti-Stoicism after having done that which he had sworn never to do, i.e., to get married: "man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion" (*Ado*, 5.4). The self's own observation and control, the placing of reason as an – unattainable – ideal of human nature, are also part of the constellation of ideas available to Shakespeare in his representation of selves in his plays.

CLOSING COMMENTS

In *Shakespeare, Machiavelli and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (2002), Hugh Grady suggests that Shakespeare portrays subjectivity as an extremely malleable entity, a site of tensions and permanent debate,

as something of a dialectical negation of power, not a mere effect of its operations; as an orientation to multiple potential selves or identities, not merely the production of a unitary one; as a mental space critically distanced from, and not entirely defined by, the circulating ideologies and discourses of institutions of power. (GRADY, 2002, p. 5-6)

Grady adopts Montaigne as the reference for this kind of subjectivity, which we tried to describe as mosaic-like and which we envisaged as the model for Shakespeare as author. The idea of the Bard portraying characters who can keep a critical distance from "circulating ideologies and discourses of

institutions of power" implies that the notions of theatricality and conflict, or simply fluidity and plasticity operate in Shakespeare's appropriation of the culturally dominant discursive practices – rhetorical education, the inwardness topos and Stoic doctrine –, to which he and his contemporaries were exposed.

When a Shakespearian character says "I", our curiosity should be drawn to how much truth he or she is attributing to this "I"; and this individual perception of characters of their own selves and of what mettle they are made of is a topic of interest *per se* in Shakespearian drama. We may risk putting it that the more truth the character attributes to his or her self, the more he or she adheres to self as a nature, the closer we are to tragicity; whereas the nearer to provisionality and pure artifice, the nearer we are to comicality, and therefore to survival.

In a very radical experiment with the effacement of selves and identities as Shakespeare offered us with the two pairs of twins in *The Comedy of Errors* (1594), we have a very good example of self as sheer possibility, to which I fear we pay less attention than we should. Antipholus of Syracuse, one of the rich twin brothers, upon perceiving that people in Ephesus knew his name, knew him, but were treating him as if he were someone else – in fact, his twin brother and namesake, a local inhabitant, from whom he had been separated in infancy in a shipwreck – although feeling threatened, catches a glimpse of the likely pleasures of turning self into pure becoming:

ANTIPHOLUS OF SYRACUSE: Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?
Sleeping or waking? mad or well-advised?
Known unto these, and to myself disguised!
I'll say as they say and persevere so,
And in this mist at all adventures go. (*Er.*, 2.2)

Antipholus' disposition of delivering his being to the "saying" of others and to penetrating the mist of selfhood contains, in a nutshell, an important Shakespearian response to the dimension of self as performative and creative, an optimistic rendering of his rhetorical education and one of the most attractive aspects of his representation of the first person – as experiment. Montaigne might say, as an essay.

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FERNANDA TEIXEIRA DE MEDEIROS é mestre em Literatura Brasileira pela PUC-Rio (1997) e doutora em Literatura Comparada pela Universidade Federal Fluminense (2002), com pós-doutorado pela Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (2014). Professora associada de literatura inglesa da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), atuando na graduação (desde 1997) e na pós-graduação (desde 2003). Dentre suas publicações, estão artigos e capítulos diversos sobre Shakespeare e cultura retórica; Shakespeare na ficção brasileira contemporânea e Shakespeare no cinema.

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