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## **“Thou mightst have done this without thy beard and gown”: William Shakespeare and the Language of Disguise**

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### **Abstract**

William Shakespeare’s use of theatrical disguise can be assessed through the discourses his disguised characters employ, having significant ramifications at a socio-political, linguistic and metatheatrical level. In illustrating this view, I will explore the role(s) of Edgar in *King Lear*; drawing on the views of Stephen Greenblatt, Mikhail Bakhtin and Ludwig Wittgenstein. I will then examine my conclusions and align them to Autolycus in *The Winter’s Tale* and Feste in *Twelfth Night*, while determining whether any recurring socio-political, linguistic and metatheatrical patterns emerge. Finally, I will determine whether it is possible to formulate a strategy of a language of disguise as Shakespeare saw it.

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During the Elizabethan and Jacobean era, English society, as Stephen Greenblatt noted in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, was undergoing an anxiety of the self.<sup>1</sup> The social world was continually changing and the signposts of individual and social identity were becoming less fixed and subject to increasing manipulation. As Greenblatt argues though, it was difficult to uphold the assumption that the middle-class, aristocracy and writers of this period could therefore shape or fashion human identity as they saw fit. Instead,

[...] I perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions – family, religion, state – were inseparably intertwined. In all my texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. (Greenblatt 1980, 256)

The theatrical use of disguise by playwrights of this period appealed to them as it seemed to offer freedom from identification, holding the view that the self was no longer fixed and was now one which was unstable and constructed.

What is important to consider is exactly what a definition of theatrical disguise is, and in doing so, I wish to turn my attention to the work of William Shakespeare. As Peter Hyland notes in *Disguise on the Early English Stage*, it may, at first hand, be difficult to assign a greater accolade to Shakespeare than his contemporaries when it comes to employing disguise in its non-verbal definition, marked by swift changes in costume, the use of masks and so on (Hyland 5). Furthermore, unlike his fellows such as John Marston and Ben Jonson, Hyland argues that, “Shakespeare does not use the device of the virtuoso multi-disguiser at all: the closest he comes is Autolycus in *The Winter’s Tale*, and perhaps Edgar in *King Lear*; though most of Edgar’s roles do not involve a change in clothing but only of vocal tone or accent” (Hyland 5).

The last lines of these comments are significant. In trying to downplay Shakespeare’s contribution to theatrical disguise, which Hyland himself tries to deny, the necessary relationship of theatrical disguise to language has been acknowledged and yet overlooked. We must acknowledge that theatrical disguise is “[...] not merely a matter of costume and prose” (Downer 260), as Alan S. Downer believes. Furthermore, as Anna Cetera emphasises, “true theatrical disguise operates predominantly in the sphere of language which is the key component of the character’s identity [...] manifest chiefly in the verbal sphere of Elizabethan performance” (80).

In this paper I therefore want to consider that we can appreciate Shakespeare’s contribution to theatrical disguise through language. As I go on and explore this relationship, I want to pay attention to the discourses that some of Shakespeare’s characters employ. I will argue that these discourses have a significant bearing in establishing the relationship of the self to our own identity, while signifying ramifications at a socio-political, linguistic and metatheatrical level.

My first two case studies are centred on those Peter Hyland himself mentioned – Autolycus, and my intended starting point, Edgar, in *King Lear*.<sup>2</sup> While looking at these characters, I will determine whether any common socio-political, linguistic and metatheatrical patterns emerge. After that, I will introduce the character of Feste, from *Twelfth Night*, to then establish whether it is possible to formulate an overall strategy of theatrical disguise, through language, as Shakespeare saw it.

## 1. Edgar: The Tortured Self and Voices of the Underclass

Edgar’s immediate need to disguise is to seek self-protection. He desires to outwit those seeking his capture, having been duped by his brother, Edmund, and banished from the court. He intends to assume the role of a Bedlam beggar, Poor Tom. It is a remarkable role that sees Edgar begin an immense, intense, internal struggle with his self and its identity. When donning the disguise, he declares:

EDGAR. [...] Edgar I nothing am. (2.2.192)

Here, we see someone trying to negate his identity, subsume it entirely into the role itself, as we, the audience view the actor now playing the beggar's role. In *Poor Tom: Living King Lear*, Simon Palfrey reminds us of the description given to Edgar in the Quarto title of the play that Poor Tom has a 'sullen and assumed humour,' which Palfrey claims is not a condition that confers Edgar's ability to improvise at will but rather one that highlights Edgar's inability to discard Tom, in spite of the other disguises he will later assume. So Tom "may epitomise the sleepless dependence of Shakespeare's existential contract: an actor with a part, one that isn't him, perhaps isn't even his, but which cannot be off-loaded" (Palfrey 21).

When Poor Tom emerges in Act 3, Scene 4, confronting Lear and his retinue on the heath, we are ourselves confronted with

EDGAR. Fathom and half, fathom and half: Poor Tom! (3.4.38)

This may seem to document Edgar's descent into darkness, a personal hell where the beginning of the negation of his personal identity is marked.<sup>3</sup> What follows is a display of language and discourse that becomes very much a spontaneous improvisation, one running counter to Edgar's initial intention to impart the rehearsed speeches of a beggar with its

EDGAR. [...] lunatic bans, sometimes with prayers,  
Enforc[ing] their charity. (2.2.190–191)

However, it causes Edgar immense discomfort as we see him struggling to be understood, straining an ability to hold onto the disguise. In Tom's parody of the Ten Commandments, we feel emptiness in Edgar's voice, and Lear himself expresses our collective failure to assign any recognisable mode of conversation in this beggar's role:

EDGAR. Take heed o'the foul fiend; obey thy parents, keep  
thy word justly, swear not, commit not with man's  
sworn spouse, set not thy sweet-heart on proud array.  
Tom's a cold.  
LEAR. What hast thou been? (3.4.78–82)

Edgar's speech may appear as a contemporary attack on the revelling and corruption of the Jacobean court, as R. A. Foakes states (277), and yet it also continues to be characterised by its distinct lack of a recognisable socialised discourse, one that Lear tries to converse with:

EDGAR. Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind,  
says suum, mun, nonny, Dauphin my boy, my boy,  
cessez! Let him trot by. *Storm still.*

LEAR.       Why, thou wert better in a grave than to answer  
              with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies.  
              Is man no more than this? (3.4.96–101)

Foakes assumes Edgar's discourse here to be "presumably deliberately mad nonsense" (278). The deliberation is intended but mad nonsense, it isn't. To me, Edgar's 'nonsense' lines (they abound throughout the part of Poor Tom) remind me of Wittgenstein's discussion and refutation of private languages outlined in his *Philosophical Investigations*: "If I were to talk to myself out loud in a language not understood by those present, my thoughts would be hidden from them" (220).

Edgar's 'nonsense' is his attempt to enforce his disguise and construct his own private language but as I will soon explain, he is unable to do this as the language that he goes on to construct is from a range of borrowed discourses. Furthermore, this struggle raises questions of stable identity. When Edgar parodies the Seven Deadly Sins in Act 3 Scene 4, the 'I' in "wine I loved deeply" (88–89) becomes the 'thy' in "keep thy foot out of brothels" (94) and finally the 'my' in "Dauphin my boy, my, boy" (97).

The mask of Poor Tom briefly slips in Edgar's aside as he sympathises with Lear's plight after the Quarto's mock trial scene of Lear's daughters, Edgar's struggle to maintain his disguised role evident:

EDGAR.     My tears begin to take his part so much.  
              They mar my counterfeiting. (3.6.58–59)

Later, we learn,

EDGAR.     Poor Tom, thy horn is dry. (3.6.72)

He senses that the purpose of the role is becoming redundant. Soon we hear,

EDGAR.     Tom, away. (3.6.107)

Here is a desire to rid himself of the role and its borrowed discourses, once and for all. In Act 4, witnessing his now blinded father, Gloucester, Edgar declares that he can no longer act the part and maintain his disguise:

EDGAR.     I cannot daub it further. (4.1.55)

And yet we do not actually witness any degree of resignation from Edgar, the actor, in his desire to leave Poor Tom behind. On the contrary, he wishes to extemporise and revel in his role, going onto employ a range of other disguises

and discourses, refuting, like Wittgenstein, the possibility to maintain and uphold a private language.<sup>4</sup> It is as though Edgar is now determined to continue adopting a range of voices as we saw in Poor Tom, to show that discourse resides, in Mikhail M. Bakhtin's words, in essentially social modes that we can find in "the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs" (209). So we witness the changes in voice in Edgar, who leads Gloucester to the cliff-top, and later, the west-country yokel accent in the duel with Oswald, perhaps constructed as Simon Palfrey argues, as a means to produce violence in Edgar and to kill his assailant (253).

When faced with the task of killing his own brother in yet another, knight's disguise, Edgar proclaims:

EDGAR. O know my name is lost. (5.3.119)

Edgar cannot of course reveal his name and yet we sense that the parts Edgar has played have made him forget who he once was, as he subconsciously reveals the chaos raging in his mind. And so we see someone very much struggling to accept and to affect the role. His knight's part also seems unconvincing, perhaps even childish as he announces his charges against Edmund:

EDGAR. And from th' extremest upward of thy head  
To descent and dust below thy foot  
A most toad-spotted traitor. (5.3.134–136)

In the play's final scene, the Folio gives Edgar the closing words of Albany, further enhancing his role, as R.A. Foakes believes (392). And yet, is he once again Edgar or is he still in disguise here? Given Albany's lines he retains Albany's register and while expressing his desire, as Anna Cetera states, to discard his adopted roles and discourses (89), he is also lamenting an irreversible departure from his former self:

EDGAR. The weight of this sad time we must obey.  
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. (5.3. 322–323)

As Simon Palfrey states, Edgar, as Poor Tom, comes to embody "the tortured subject of renaissance and reformation" that I referred to in my introduction, which is also, as Palfrey describes, "the atomized dispersal of making energy [...] creating anew the direction of history" (127). This view echoes Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicist interpretation of Edgar's role (1988, 94–123) and is compelling when trying to determine what Shakespeare's strategy of disguise is. Edgar's language of disguise is highly politicized, as Greenblatt argues, because in borrowing heavily from Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, designed

to expose the fraudulence of Catholic exorcism, Shakespeare is exchanging and employing the energies of the exorcist theatre with the theatre in the playhouse, which is in turn, activating the social energies of the audience. We see in Poor Tom's role countless references to devil's names which are echoed in Harsnett:

EDGAR. This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet; he begins  
at curfew and walks till the first cock; he gives the web  
and the pin, squinies the eye and makes the harelip;  
mildews the white heat and haunts the poor creatures of  
earth. (3.4.112–115)

As W.C. Carroll notes, it is important too, to look at the political ramifications of Edgar's language beyond Greenblatt's views (22), particularly when Edgar replies to Gloucester:

GLOUCESTER. What are you there ? Your names ?  
EDGAR. Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad,  
the tadpole, the wall-newt and the water  
[...]  
swallows the old rat and the ditch-dog  
[...]  
who is whipped from tithing to tithing and stocked, punished  
and imprisoned – who hath had three suits to his  
back, six shirts to his body. (3.4. 125–131)

In Shakespeare's examination of the political in Edgar, we are reminded of those fallen out of social consideration and a notable "inversion of royal and social power" (Carroll 22). What is equally significant is that Edgar's disguise is in the prose form which serves as a distinct counterpoint to the higher language of the play, which in turn, becomes a valid discourse representative of the dispossessed in society. Moreover, it is a discourse, as Simone Weil claims, that enables Edgar to tell the truth of their plight, where "all the others [in the play] lie [...] attenuate, mitigate, soften and veil the truth."<sup>5</sup>

Thus far, I have wanted to show the important implications of Edgar's language through his theatrical disguises to not only outline the relationships of the self with its identity and its metatheatrical implications but also the social, political connections of his language and discourses. Now, I turn my attention to the role of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, the other "virtuoso disguiser" in Hyland's words, to see if similar strategies of theatrical disguise, through language, are deployed.

## 2. Autolycus: The Vagabond and Reformulator of Artistic Truth

Autolycus' arrival, somewhat late into the action, demands us to ask what exactly his purpose in the play is. In my attempt to explain this, we need to seek an answer to that posed by Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, where he challenges "anyone to read the play through, to seat himself at table, and write down what Autolycus does to further the plot" (238–239).

Autolycus enters the play in song, and it is a form of discourse which proves significant as I shall later return to. What we witness too, like Poor Tom, is someone out of a job, a former servant of Florizel, and resorting to the life of a vagabond. Autolycus employs the language of thievery as Shakespeare turns to the underworld of the contemporary criminal, borrowing and exchanging the terminology from Robert Greene's *Second Cony Catching* (Pafford 86), particularly when Autolycus seeks to define himself as:

AUTOLYCUS. [...] a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. With die and drab I purchased this caparison, and my revenue is|  
the silly cheat. (4.3.26–28)

We then encounter his first disguise and it is interesting to examine the role of the self, as I did with Edgar and Tom, in relation to the disguise. Does this create a crisis for the self as we saw with Edgar, when needed to don the disguise and act the role convincingly? The answer has to be an emphatic 'no':

AUTOLYCUS. I can bear my part; you must know 'tis my occupation.  
(4.4.296–297)

He seems to revel, even excel in the role, seeing great profit to be made behind the mask. In parodying the robbed, the Good Samaritan, deceiving the clown and later pickpocketing him, Autolycus remains focused on his interests, even preparing to name himself while disguised as his own victim:

CLOWN. What name of fellow was he that robbed you?  
AUTOLYCUS. A fellow sir, that I have known to go about with  
troll-my-dames: I knew him once a servant of the  
prince  
[...]  
Some call him Autolycus. (4.3.83–97)  
It is in the clown's lines that such vagabonds  
CLOWN. [...] haunts wakes, fairs and bear-baitings. (4.3.99)

We hear echoes of the dispossessed Tom but Autolycus is not a character with a sullen humour as Shakespeare cast in Edgar. In contrast, Autolycus becomes a merrier voice of the outcast and one that endears himself to the audience, even

endorsing his crimes with an understandable honesty, especially in relation to those committed by Leontes in the first half of the play:

AUTOLYCUS. Softly, dear sir [picks his pocket]; good sir, softly. You ha'done me a charitable office. (4.3.74–75)

Before, examining Autolycus' disguise as a seller of ballads, I wish, firstly, to examine his exchange of clothing with his former master, Prince Florizel, when/ during which he acquires Florizel's pastoral disguise and which then he attempts to display to the Shepherd and clown as a courtier's robes. Maurice Hunt remarks here that this exchange has produced "an excessive complexity in which one disguise cancels another" and one that "insists on the artificiality of the convention and points out its logical absurdities" (Hunt 185). The playwright reminds us, as he did with Edgar's acquisition of many roles, that a change in costume is not the foundation in understanding his definition of theatrical disguise.

Autolycus nevertheless identifies the advantages which his new costume offers, and he takes to the prospect of his new role with a customary aplomb, a stark, somewhat striking contrast to the actor within Edgar, struggling to adjust to his roles. What we witness is the confidence of someone sensing upward mobility, appearing in a comedy, in opposition to Edgar, who has fallen out of his sphere in a tragedy:

AUTOLYCUS. I understand the business, I hear it. To have an open ear, quick eye, and a nimble hand, is necessary for a cut purse; a good nose is also requisite also, to smell out work for the other senses. I see this is the time that the unjust man doth thrive. What an exchange had this been without boot! What a boot is here with this exchange. (4.4.670–676)

Autolycus's social roles, like Edgar's, are about to reverse. Like Poor Tom's dispossessed voice, Autolycus, himself a vagabond too, uses the form of prose and Green's thieving terminology to again, like Edgar, refract against the high language of the play. It is a comical reversal that William Carroll feels goes beyond one symbolising a socio-political inversion, where the accents and values of those higher in status are impersonated, but which also provides an opportunity to speak the voice of the lowest rank of society, which is "to be that force which naturally seeks to rise, and therefore constitutes a political energy" (Carroll 24).

Returning to Autolycus's disguise as a ballad seller, a pedlar of songs at a sheep-shearing festival, the use of those songs and ballads help to clarify his function in the play, which is essentially artistic. Here, Shakespeare uses Autolycus as a vehicle of truth telling, to let his often bawdy and profane material challenge

and frustrate the expectations of the sublime Apollonian overtones of the plays first three acts. Therefore, his material provides a much needed change of dramatic tone, tainted with eroticism, affirming as Maurice Hunt states, “the audience’s need for assurance that truth may be found within the poetic lie” (Hunt 186):

AUTOLYCUS. The lark, that tirra-lirra chants  
 With heigh! with heigh! the thrush and the Jay,  
 Are summer songs for me and my aunts,  
 While we lie tumbling in the hay. (4.3.9–12)

His ballads act as the perfect cover to his thievery as he confesses after the sheep-shearing festival, to have

AUTOLYCUS. [...] picked and cut most of their festival purses. (4.4.415–16)

Furthermore, as J.M. Ortiz notices, Autolycus’ ballads on fantastical subjects and their themes of transformation and metamorphosis, seem to predict the final scenes of the play (Ortiz 205):

AUTOLYCUS. Here’s another ballad, of a fish that appeared upon  
 the court on Wednesday the fourscore of April, forty  
 thousand fathom above water [...]
   
 It was thought she was a woman, and was turned into a cold  
 fish for she would not exchange flesh with one that  
 loved her. (4.4.276–282)

So here, we look ahead to the play’s final scene, already moved to laughter by this outrageous ballad, and meet Paulina, asking her onstage audience to accept the truth of the transformation of a painted statue into a breathing woman. Indeed, the themes that occupy the final act of the play – metamorphosis, death, sexuality, regeneration – are to be found in Autolycus’ ballads.

The effect underlying Autolycus seems to overwhelm and eventually subdue the man himself as the ‘miracles’ that occur in the final act infuse art into life, rendering Autolycus more of a subservient cog in the play, stripping him of his customary gaiety. Ironically, as B. J. Sokol argues, the recognition of human capacity for regeneration and reconciliation in the final act escape Autolycus (181), and what is more, he becomes divested too, of his need to disguise. When he is reunited with the clown he had deceived while playing the Good Samaritan, it is ironic that Autolycus wants the clown and the shepherd to recommend him as an ‘honest man’ and therefore find a job at court. He seems to accept their fantasies in order to benefit from them:

- AUTOLYCUS. I humbly beseech you, sir, to pardon me all the faults I have committed to your worship, and to give me your good report to the prince my master.
- SHEPHERD. Prithee, son, do; for we must be gentle, now we are gentlemen.
- CLOWN. Thou wilt amend thy life?
- AUTOLYCUS. Ay, and it like your good worship. (5.2.149–155)

Autolycus has learnt, perhaps, that the unjust man does not in fact thrive, seeking to once again serve those around him. However, the audience cannot forget the impact of the rogue upon this play. We have seen a profound questioning into artistic truth, through ballads and prose, a character seeking social elevation, to speak, indeed sing, the voices of the dispossessed. We witness a disguised character, like Edgar, whose function is also to make the audience realise that art must recognise these voices, considered poetic lies in the face of Apollonian ideals, as such voices mirror and reflect the audience's own discourses, their own reality.

### 3. Feste: The Manipulator of Words

I conclude this study by looking at Feste's disguise of Sir Topas in *Twelfth Night*. It is Maria who suggests Feste's disguise as she seeks to prick the pomposity of an ever encroaching Malvolio. The robed priest is the one to undertake an extraordinary trial of Malvolio's sanity, as the captive is held and bound in a dark room, awaiting his fate. As Feste dons his disguise, a contemporary audience would have been reminded, says Stephen Greenblatt, of the allusion to the Puritan priest John Darrell (1988, 115):

- FESTE. Well, I'll put it on, and I will dissemble myself in't  
and I would I were the first that ever dissembled in such  
a gown. (4.2. 4–6)

Darrell is of course, one of those famed exorcists that I referred to in my study of Edgar. Immediately, in the way that Edgar does with Poor Tom, the disguise enables us to think about the fraudulent possession of demons and the ideas involved in exchanging with the social energies of the exorcist theatre. But before we come across specific references, Feste gives us an insight into his tour de force in the play, someone who revels in the ability to manipulate and play with language itself:

- FESTE. I am not tall enough to become the function  
well, nor lean enough to be thought a good student, but

to be said a honest man and a good housekeeper goes  
as fairly as to say a careful man and a great scholar. (4.2. 6–9)

This might be an exploration of the folly of paradox but also it is one which, as Keir Elam states, “implies the levelling of social differences between men” (306). We have to remember that Feste, despite holding a special licence, allowing him to overstep social barriers unpunished, is someone that is also a man, a fool, of low status. We are reminded therefore of Edgar, giving the dispossessed a voice as Poor Tom and also Autolycus seeking social advancement in Florizel’s clothes.

When we first view the role, Sir Topas opens with

FESTE. Bonos dies... (4.2.12)

Is it bad Spanish or does this, as Peter Hall suggests, indicate that Feste was trying to remember the discourse as a once failed priest? <sup>6</sup> Whatever the confusion this generates, the priest’s role soon again returns to the theme of exorcism, one that Stephen Greenblatt feels is even darker than that explored by Edgar. “Possession now is not a mistaken ‘suppose’ but a fraud, a malicious practical joke played on Malvolio” (Greenblatt 1988, 115). And so Feste, like Autolycus, often mocking the gentility and politeness that marks the remainder of his play, once again, like Poor Tom, names those possessing the victim:

FESTE Fie, thou dishonest Satan! I call thee by the most  
modest terms, for I am one of those gentle ones that  
will use the devil with courtesy. (4.2.31–33)

The malicious, practical joke that unfolds in the treatment of Malvolio echoes that of the devilish Edgar deceiving his father at the cliff-top. Malvolio is imprisoned in a dark room during his trial and Feste contradicts the view of a darkened ‘inner-stage’ to that of the playhouse itself:

FESTE Sayst thou that  
house is dark?  
MALVOLIO As hell, Sir Topas.  
FESTE Why, it hath bay-windows transparent as  
barricadoes, and the clerestories toward the south-  
north as lustrous as ebony, and yet complainest thou  
of obstruction. (4.2. 33–39)

Once again, as we witnessed with the blind Gloucester facing an illusionary fall, the reader / spectator is forced into an uncomfortable position, courtesy of Feste’s torment.<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare is trying to get us, the audience, to hold the impression,

through Feste, that Malvolio has become separated from sanity. And yet, there is the impression we hold that Malvolio is at the same time not mad, as Feste would have us believe.

Malvolio continues to be tormented by Feste's adroit verbosity as the victim refuses to accept the Pythagorean theory of metempsychosis, trapping him like a woodcock, echoing the words of the scheming Autolycus. As Feste realises that he has the power through his flexible tongue to do what his will commands, perhaps, too, playing on the name of the blue Topaz mineral (Elam 159), he confidently asserts:

FESTE. Nay, I am for all waters. (4.2.62)

Here, we see someone who can turn his hand to anything, someone like Autolycus who can play his part with conviction. In his final lines as Sir Topas he switches rapidly between the roles of fool and priest, further tormenting Malvolio, to show that he has mastery and control of his self and its identity:

FESTE. [*as Sir Topas*] Maintain no words with him good fellow. [*as himself*] Who, I sir? Not I, sir! God b'wi'you, good Sir Topas. [*as Sir Topas*] Marry, amen. [*as himself*] I will, sir, I will. (4.2. 99–102)

Unlike Edgar, Feste has relished the don of physical and verbal disguise because, like Autolycus, he sees profit in it. The 'boot' in Feste's exchanges is that he can use language as a vital tool, a way of helping someone of low social status to escape the 'cage' of his enforced social condition. Moreover, like Edgar and Autolycus, he has achieved this by speaking in prose. As Keir Elam says, Feste "is licensed to speak prose with everyone" (79), and this enables him to converse easily with higher and lower status characters, especially typified in Sir Topas' torment of Malvolio. Finally, Maria's response to Feste's performance is met with:

MARIA. Thou mightst have done this without thy beard and gown. (4.2. 63–64)

We are clearly left with the impression that it is with language that true theatrical disguise operates.

## Conclusion

The three characters which I have looked at, have long been misunderstood, misinterpreted by notable critics and stage practitioners,<sup>8</sup> their importance to the plays long lost in the minds of successive generations of audiences and readers.

However, they serve significantly in Shakespeare's strategy of theatrical disguise, which for the Western World's most noted playwright, lies within the realms beyond costume and gesture, and instead, is situated within language and discourse. Here, the lives of those dispossessed and often overlooked by society, unbound in their performances to the Apollonian and epic conceptions of drama, poetry and music, are revealed in their unfettered voices, usually in prose form, complete with the songs and ballads of the lower ranks of society. In turn, they are given a licence to profit, to thrive in the theatrical world which the audience desires to mirror their own. In that desire to reflect on our own reality, it is important, too, to recognise, as Stephen Greenblatt does, that Shakespeare was actively exchanging with the cultural theatre of his time, in a way that sought to energise the social consciousness of those watching and reading.

Shakespeare gives us three examples of men who are authentic products of society, taking on the challenges of their roles, their physical and verbal masks. For Edgar, a man not used to mimicking the discourses of the lower ranks, he nonetheless plays a valiant part. His struggle of the self and its identity in acquiring those voices still generates a protean and often mesmeric heteroglossia, combined with a breath-taking acting ability.

Edgar, Autolycus and Feste are united in a use of physical and verbal disguise that provides a means to aspire and later acquire the language of those with opposite social status and transgress the societal 'cages' they are forced to endure. It is a language of theatrical disguise that contains a new truth, validating poetic 'lies' in a recognition of a new way to view theatre in the playhouse and its unshakable support system in the society that created it.

## Notes

- 1 See Greenblatt 1980 (256). Also, Peter Hyland's introduction (4).
- 2 In examining how Edgar employs language in relationship to theatrical disguise, it is important to consider his treatment by the Quarto (1608) and Folio (1623) variants, to focus on all the language attributed to Edgar. Here we can fully experience the heteroglossia within the roles/voices that Edgar assumes. See Gary Taylor and Michael Warren *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear*, which comprehensively examines both Quarto and Folio variants.
- 3 There have been other interpretations of this line. Simon Palfrey views this as "an oblique self-annunciation, defying clear purpose or referent. The 'spirit' is heard before it is seen, just as it is here before it is noticed (true in both texts but made more explicit in the Folio). In this world, common knowledge is not the imprimatur of life. That the voice precedes his visible appearance suggests mystery or ghostliness. Disconnected from body, it is also

disconnected from source. Perhaps the exiles have stumbled upon some spring of nature's secrets; perhaps it speaks demonic automatism. Either way, it is not bound to a singular verifiable consciousness" (72–73). R. A. Foakes thinks that "Edgar calls as if he were taking soundings from a boat, or measuring the depth of water in the 'hovel'" (274).

- 4 "Now, what about the language which describes my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand? How do I use words to stand for my sensations? – As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensation? In that case my language is not a 'private' one. Someone else might understand it as well as I" (Wittgenstein 91).
- 5 Simone Weil, Letter to her parents, 1943. *Seventy Letters*. 1965. Translated and arranged R. Rees. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Published in Palfrey (173).
- 6 Peter Hall, promptbook for *Twelfth Night*. 1958. Shuttock, *TN* No. 98, (6) quoted in K. Greif (68).
- 7 I am indebted to Joan Hartwig's insights here (508–509).
- 8 I refer to Sir Arthur Quiller Couch's views of Autolycus mentioned earlier. Also see Anna Cetera's comprehensive analysis of Edgar's treatment by critics and stage practitioners, Cetera (82–84). For Feste's treatment, see Greif (61–64).

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