To the Editor:

Richard Gilman's article presents a good deal of interesting information, but it also demonstrates a remarkable propensity for quoting out of context.

Mr. Gilman repeats some words of Dr. Johnson's as if they were - like Coleridge's and Goethe's - his final comment on the nature of the play. Actually, Johnson is criticizing the progress of the play's plot; he claims that "the conduct is perhaps not wholly secure against objections." To provide an example, he makes the statement of which Mr. Gilman quotes only the first half: "Of the feigned madness of Hamlet there appears no adequate cause, for he does nothing he might not have done with the reputation of sanity." That is, Hamlet's putting on "an antic disposition" seems intended as a tactic in forwarding his revenge, but why and how it does so is never clarified in the subsequent action.

Worse, Mr. Gilman closes his article by quoting the dying Hamlet himself to demonstrate the ultimate inscrutability of his character: "Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me." Mr. Gilman then expostulates, "Ah, sweet, fertile, forever partly hidden prince." In fact, the speech says exactly the opposite of what Mr. Gilman claims, but he distorts it by hiding away the subject of the verb he reproduces. What the dying Hamlet really says is "O God, Horatio, what a wounded name/ Things standing thus, shall live behind me." (The quarto has "shall I leave behind me," which makes little difference here.) Hamlet then proceeds to impose on Horatio a last duty of friendship: "Absent thee from felicity a while,/And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,/ To tell my story." Hamlet presumes not that he is unknowable, but that his story, if told, can be understood. Just a few lines earlier he had said the same thing to Horatio - and it might also be said to the sweet, fertile, forever partly quoting Mr. Gilman - "Report me and my cause aright/ To the unsatisfied."

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