Memoria di Shakespeare

A Journal of Shakespearean Studies

Thinking with Shakespeare

edited by
Rosy Colombo *and* Nadia Fusini

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Editorial

Rosy Colombo, Nadia Fusini

1. Myriad-minded Shakespeare
(Nadia Fusini)

It is not our intention in this issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare* to reopen the old quarrel, already ancient for Socrates, concerning the relationship between literature and philosophy. Neither do we, friends and lovers of Shakespeare, want to come to his defence and proclaim his superiority. Nor do we want to excite the hidden rivalry between disciplines. Behind the question there isn't some kind of professional jealousy; we Shakespeareans have no wish to assert the supremacy of the artist over the philosopher, as if we were prey to a competitive impulse, possessed by a will-to-power over philosophy. Not at all. This is certainly not the case: we have come to terms with the old rivalry between poetry and philosophy, we have 'overcome' Plato.

The question we pose is not of the commonplace kind: "Is Shakespeare your favourite writer?" Rather, we ask some of our friends, philosophers by profession: "How central is drama, and particularly Shakespearean drama, to your thinking?" Or, more insistently: "Is or is not Shakespeare the potent force that has made our world the way it is?" – something of which Harold Bloom assures us when he states that "Shakespeare invented us"[1]. Or, more sympathetically: "How deeply Shakespearean do you feel you are, or think you are? Is Shakespeare an ally of yours in your thinking?". In other words, we ask our philosopher friends if, in order to think, they *must* go

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[1] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, London, Fourth Estate, 1999, pp. xvii-xviii.

to Shakespeare. Or whether they *can* think without Shakespeare. Because we Shakespeareans cannot…

This does not mean that we Shakespeareans know *what* Shakespeare thought of this or that; the man is elusive, has left us no ideological or moral legacy. But we *know* that he thought: through his characters he has articulated a complex system of values and countervalues, of beliefs and disbeliefs, of ideas, meditations, reflections… Even more, it seems to us that Shakespeare has the gift of posing fundamental questions, questions of capital interest for his as for our age. What interests Shakespeare is the theatre of the mind, which is incredibly alive, informed by his keen interest in subjectivity as shown in *Hamlet*, in *Macbeth*, who are first of all heroes of the mind.

Shakespeare has undoubtedly created at least two icons of thought, Hamlet and Macbeth. Not that other heroes of his do not think: Brutus thinks, Iago and Othello think, Lear and his Fool think. But with Macbeth and Hamlet thinking is shown as a dramatic act, a tragic one indeed. And it is not by chance that in both thought explodes, destroys them. And you know why? Because in order to think one needs courage, if thinking means, as it does for Macbeth, finding in himself the instinct for regicide, or for Hamlet a parricidal, incestuous desire.

In different ways Shakespeare questions the nature of man. "What's a man?" is a question that does not resonate only in Hamlet's most famous monologue. In different registers Shakespeare meditates on the mystery and wonder of thinking. Nor does he shun the most difficult question: *unde malum?* while exploring the individual microcosm and the interior space of human subjectivity – there discovering another New Wold, with its own shadowy recesses and obscure areas, where something lies unknown, unacknowledged – an extraneity found in the uncanny intimacy of an 'I' that discovers itself in the 'other'. Before its assumption by Rimbaud, "Je est un autre" is Viola's line in *Twelfth Night* (III.i.143[2]) and Iago's cue in *Othello* (I.i.64[3]). In their respective plays, with their negations ("I am not what I am" is their mode), both of them open the doors of a

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[2]   William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik, The Arden Shakespeare, London-New York, Routledge, 1988.

[3]   William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann, The Arden Shakespeare, Walton-on-Thames, Nelson, 1997.

philosophical meditation that introduces us to our modernity. The ego's unity is already a chimera in Shakespeare, whom Freud reads with an unsurpassed intensity, finding in him a source of inspiration. "Freud is deeply Shakespearean" David Hillman comments, even if "Freud's Shakespeare is hardly Shakespeare at all"[4].

Undoubtedly our world has been "Shakespearized", to quote Emerson, certain as he was that "Shakespeare wrote the text of modern life", that "[a] good reader can, in a sort, nestle into Plato's brain and think from thence; but not in Shakespeare's. We are still out of doors. For executive faculty, for creation, Shakespeare is unique"[5]. An assertion that anticipates the brilliant intuition of Wittgenstein when he defines Shakespeare not as "poet", but as "creator of language": "Sprachschöpfer", not "Dichter". Shakespeare cannot be compared to any other poet, Wittgenstein insists; he has "the supple hand that created new natural linguistic forms"[6]. Like nobody else he can play the language-game.

It is as though with Shakespeare we return to the idea of poetry as *ainigma* – which is precisely what poetry was for the ancient men of wisdom, the Greek masters, long before the philosophers by profession came into existence; an *ainigma*, an obscure illogical dark saying, which withholds its meaning, refuses itself, resists exegesis and forces us to the allegorical posture of speaking on its behalf.

That is what we Shakespeareans do: confronting the *ainigma*, which in the Shakespearean text thickens, darkens, grows denser as readings and interpretations accumulate through the centuries, we, his devoted readers, go on reading, repeating, learning by heart, paraphrasing, commenting his words with our words in a kind of "interminable entertainment"[7], knowing very well that there is nothing to explain. Nothing to illuminate, except our fascination. Our task is not to interpret Shakespeare; we Shakespeareans know too well that the

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[4] David Hillman, "Freud's Shakespeare", in *Great Shakespeareans: Marx and Freud*, eds Crystal Bartolovich *et al.*, London-New York, Continuum, 2012, pp. 104-35; p. 103.

[5] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Shakespeare; or, the Poet", in *Ralpho Waldo Emerson*, ed. Richard Poirier, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 329-42.

[6] I comment on these crucial assertions by Wittgenstein in *Di vita si muore. Lo spettacolo delle passioni nel teatro di Shakespeare*, Milano, Mondadori, 2010, pp. 6ff. See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright, in collaboration with Heikki Nymann, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994, p. 84.

[7] Maurice Blanchot speaks of *L'Entretien infini*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969.

Shakespearean text will resist any conceptual framework in which we try to confine it so as to make sense of it… It lives off our defeat and subjects us to a kind of dialectical reversal, where we the readers are the ones being read… In this sense reading Shakespeare is like the encounter with the Other, it's like the exposure to the Other. And therefore an adventure of knowledge, and therefore a philosophical experience: a hermeneutical experience.

This is precisely what happens with *Hamlet*, when Freud, Goethe, Nietzsche, Lacan, Levinas, Derrida read it. Or with *Othello*, when Cavell reads it. It is a kind of exposition from which the philosopher by profession, and the literary critic too, should they so wish, protect themselves through learning – with recourse, that is, to a technique of appropriation and domestication. Although, I repeat, the kind of exposure Shakespeare invites us to is not one of learning; on the contrary, if truly accepted, if deeply thought, *that* exposition is an experience of the 'real'. And if anything it requires us to forgo 'knowing'.

T. S. Eliot is absolutely right in his *Four Quartets*: "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality"[8]. But we don't forget that, in the very act of reminding us of our frailty vis-à-vis the ultimate meaning, he offers us his poem, and with it a 'poetic way' to reality, to truth, to life and its representation.

Much in the same mood, but in his own philosophical way, Heidegger teaches us that "thinking may be the same as wandering"[9], as moving along paths that are interrupted, broken, opening us into clearings not knowing where they lead, exposing us to the most varied dangers. May Shakespeare's theatre be one of those paths? We Shakespeareans wonder, ready to swear that it is (it's our strong belief).

We Shakespeareans know perfectly well, of course, that Shakespeare *is not* a philosopher. Nor was he a systematic thinker. Shakespeare is an actor, stage manager, poet, and *playwright* – a term which in itself must be dissected. Shakespeare was all that, but *not* a philosopher. We don't go to Shakespeare for his philosophy, of course; we refuse the very idea of a Shakespearean philosophy – in the sense that we

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[8]   T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton", in *Four Quartets*, London, Faber & Faber, 2009, ll. 44-45.

[9]   Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, Engl. transl. by Peter D. Hertz, New York, Harper & Row, 1971, pp. 71-72.

talk of a Cartesian or Kantian philosophy. We see the difficulty poetry poses for philosophy. Still, we believe that poetry (literature, drama, and generally speaking the imagination implied in the creative act) is an exercise in thinking. And if this is true, at this sport Shakespeare excels, and his plays are "exercises at the edge of human possibility"[10]. But it remains true for us that Shakespeare is above all a *playwright*.

This is Shakespeare for us Shakespeareans: a writer for the theatre, one who writes and stages what he writes – and produces it in the mode of 'play'. Shakespeare is an *homo ludens* as characterized in Huizinga's fine book[11], which among many other things helps us understand the suffix *play* in the word *playwright*. There is a *Spieltrieb*, an impulse to play, Huizinga explains; where 'play' – one sees this with children – is carried out in all seriousness. And it is characterized by order, tension, solemnity, fervour; so much so that a sense of a sacred act slowly insinuates itself into the idea itself of play.

Playwright is the definition most appropriate for Shakespeare. It translates into a more common, vulgar linguistic register, the time-honoured profession of the dramaturg, or dramatist – the creator of dramatic texts, be they comedies or tragedies. The *playwright* produces stage-plays: *produces*, not *writes*; because *wright* does not allude to the act of writing, has nothing to do with *writer*, despite the similar sound, which is pure coincidence. The word *wright* refers us instead to the verb *to work*, and thus to the action of the person intent on forging some kind of matter; it alludes to a craftsman or builder, so that we say *wheelwright* or *cartwright*, for example, to refer to the person who makes wheels or carts. In short, the term *wright*, like the more archaic *wrytha*, is used to refer to someone who makes things, objects which exist in the world because man has made them. In this minimal, microcosmic way, yes, man is a *creator* and Shakespeare one who *makes* plays.

Shakespeare is not Milton. He is not Dante. He is one who works for the theatre. He is a poet in the same sense in which are *poietes*

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[10]　A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 382.

[11]　Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, London, Paladin Books, 1970, p. 33. See also Nadia Fusini, "Shakespeare: Playwright or 'Sprachschöpfer'?", in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 8 *On Authorship*, eds Rosy Colombo and Daniela Guardamagna (2012), pp. 95-118.

the very first playwrights in Western literature whose works survive: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. For them too the term *poietes* was used with a connotation that put the accent on *making*. And so it is with the term *playwright*, that in fact translates *poietes*, as referring to the person who performs that special act of *poiesis* – that consists of producing a spectacle, which in a broader sense may include forms of entertainment, such as acrobatic games, leaps and somersaults, flawless exhibitions; in short, the kind of things that in Elizabethan times were done at fairs – precisely what was imagined by poor Sly, duped by his hosts, when he is promised a pleasant entertainment in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

'Comediographer', 'tragediographer', 'dramatist' are terms which in their etymologies evoke a noble loftiness which the 'vulgar' term 'playwright' does not. But this term certainly comes closer to defining more exactly the trade of Shakespeare working for the theatre.

The word *play* is an interesting one. Reflecting on Old English, Huizinga notes that within the semantic area of *play*, alongside *lâc* and *plega*, there is the word *spelian*, which has the precise meaning of 'doing something for another', 'to be in the place of another'; thus, to represent someone, to act on his behalf – and here the semantic field of ritual and acting opens up. Someone 'playing' another. The cross-dresser, someone in disguise, 'plays' another being. He *is* actually another being. And what is being represented is a *drama* – that is, an action performed as representation.

At its most ancient stage, the mood of drama is Dionysian ecstasy, festive excitement, dithyrambic enthusiasm, in which the actor is transported into the extraneous I, which he does not represent but embodies, drawing the spectators along with him into the metamorphosis. Which is just what happened at the end of the sixteenth century to those who went to 'see' Shakespeare.

Huizinga explains that ancient tragedy and comedy were born within the spheres of play and competition. The ancient poets indeed created their works for the Dionysian contests. In the broad sense of the original word, *poiesis*, poetry arises within the domain of play and this consciousness of its ludic nature is preserved especially in the theatre, where the *drama*, the action, is *play*. And there is weeping and laughing, just as with Shakespeare, because the true poet – we have Socrates' word for it – is at once comic and tragic. The same person, affirms Socrates in the *Symposium*, "should be

able to write both comedy and tragedy"[12]. For all of life is at once a tragedy and a comedy, is it not? The upshot of the matter, Socrates explains to Protarchus, is that in tragedies and in comedies, and not only on stage but "in all of life's tragedies and comedies, pleasures are mixed with pains"[13].

This no doubt is how it is with Shakespeare, who plays in all seriousness, conveys onto the stage of his theatre the great anxiety of knowledge about existence typical of his age. For we do well to remember that in that special, late Renaissance of the Elizabethan age it is not only an élite, conscious of itself, that forces life into a play of imagined perfection, but an entire people who seeks to grasp the emotion of existence in the theatrical game/play. Humanity is disturbed by its own existence: experience is given first of all as emotion, the emotion of existing, of being in the world, of having a destiny. In the theatre, Shakespeare represents, imitates, reflects with a spiritual attitude that is play – not frivolous, but intensely ludic.

Shakespeare comments many times on the mystery and marvel of the theatre; in his plays and through his characters he *thinks* fundamentally. He has a natural gift for that. His thought is never still. There is a Protean quality that makes all the difference. In Nuttall's words, he has "a knack of asking fundamental questions"[14]. His thinking adapts wonderfully to the most different realities and the most varied cases, and attunes to endless desire and mobile energy in such a fantasmagoric way, that his medium favours and facilitates, because theatre, especially Shakespearean theatre, does in fact multiply and complicate identifications, bringing out into the open the way the internal world of the human subject is inhabited by a multitude, as Pessoa would say. It is in this sense that Cavell speaks of "the immense intelligence of the Shakespearean corpus"[15]. The creative dimension makes the difference here: the very richness of the plays, the very impossibility, due to their richness, of imposing a final meaning upon them is precisely what makes them philosophical quarries.

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[12]   Plato, *Symposium*, 223D.

[13]   Plato, *Filebo*, 50B.

[14]   Nuttall, p. 378.

[15]   Stanley Cavell, "Foreword", in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. John J. Joughin, London, Routledge, 2000, p. xiii.

Not by chance, trying to define the poetical character, Keats refers to Shakespeare as the supreme model of the "Man of Achievement". What is precisely his achievement? A kind of superhuman humanity? Clearly, Keats is very impressed by a sort of immeasurable magnitude of his achievement, he is shocked by the vast extent of his creative capacity, how his wit rages freely – he considers him a master of imaginative and emotional effects: so intelligent! so rich in tones and nuances![16] It is *unheimlich*, the way Shakespeare can catch thinking as a process; it looks as though thinking were for him directly a dimension of the form and the movement of language. His thinking is open and mysterious at the same time.

In this 'poetic' sense – the sense of Keats's 'poetical' understanding – Shakespeare's plays are philosophical dramas, and retain an ethical dimension. They immediately articulate questions of high metaphysical matter. He has such a feeling for language, he is so finely attuned to the languageness of language, that his plays lay open to us questions otherwise opaque. And help us to come to terms, somehow, with our 'otherness within'. With the effect of making all other thoughts appear 'poor'. Or too elaborate. Or too logical. Or systematic.

In writing about Shakespeare our philosophical friends demonstrate – *verba volant, scripta manent* – that reading Shakespeare is an exercise of the mind and a training of the soul, moving us towards a kind of thinking which transcends conventional philosophical categories and provides access to the very conditions of philosophical questioning itself. So much so that we might say that we come to thought precisely when, in the act of thinking radical questions, we find ourselves, as Hamlet does, in front of an impossibility: "Ay, there's the rub" (III.i.64[17]) – a rub which reveals us to ourselves as "gendanken-arm". As Heidegger says in his *Gelassenheit*, he who must think, because it is his job, may find himself *gedanken-arm*, thought-poor.

It is precisely then, when we find ourselves disarmed, speechless, struck dumb by the poverty and penury of language, when logic defeats us, when reason stumbles and falls in the absence of thought, precisely then, we Shakespeareans suggest, Shakespeare may help.

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[16] Letter to George and Tom Keats, December 21, 1817, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Robert Gittings, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 43 (see also the Italian edition: John Keats, *Lettere sulla poesia*, ed. Nadia Fusini, Milano, Mondadori, 2005, p. 38).

[17] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, eds Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006.

2. *A scene of mourning*
(Rosy Colombo)

The relevance of Shakespeare's language for philosophical think-ing, which Nadia Fusini has just asked us to consider – and which has rarely been considered in Italy[18] – has led in the course of time to a discourse that clearly shows how the early modern universe is a decidedly 'post-Renaissance' world. And taking up with her Ha-rold Bloom's thought-provoking argument, it is in such a world that Shakespeare's invention of the human took shape, inhabiting the landscape of modernity as an experience of mourning – mourning for the loss of reason, of faith, of desire. "All passion spent": the final chord in *Samson Agonistes* indicates the unease of an experience that is shared both by the tragic shadows of Shakespeare and the burnt-out ones of Samuel Beckett, with their passion for silence.

Enter Hamlet, of course. Unmanned by the loss of his father, hor-rified at the discovery of his mother's lust, shattered by the appari-

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[18] Benedetto Croce's impassioned appeal ("Shakespeare", 1919, in *Ariosto, Shakespeare e Corneille*, Bari, Laterza, 1961) to consider Shakespeare as a "shared cultural herit-age" has been largely ignored. Apart from Massimo Cacciari (e.g. *Hamletica*, Milano, Adelphi, 2009), Remo Bodei (*Piramidi di tempo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006) and a few oth-ers (for the plays, we might mention Franco Ricordi's recent study, *Shakespeare filosofo dell'essere*, Milano, Mimesis, 2011), a discussion of the relations between Shakespeare and philosophical thought has tended to be marginal in Italy, alien to the academic world (where we should in any case distinguish between philosophers and lecturers in philosophy). It has been even more marginal, and still is, in criticism of Shakespeare, apart from a few scholars with epistemological interests, like Nadia Fusini (in her re-cent, compelling study *Di vita si muore*), Alessandra Marzola (who has contributed to this issue), or Silvia Bigliazzi (*Nel prisma del nulla*, Napoli, Liguori, 2005). It was Luigi Trenti, an Italianist, who responded to the invitation of one of Italy's greatest experts in English literature, Agostino Lombardo, to heed Croce's words on Shakespeare: see Luigi Trenti, "'I Know You What You Are': Croce e Shakespeare", in *Memoria di Shake-speare*, 6 *Shakespeare e l'Italia*, ed. Rosy Colombo (2008), pp. 121-34. The situation in the last thirty years has been very different in the English-speaking world, particularly in the U.S.A; this first digital issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies* has given that world our attention, and we have received support and col-laboration in return. There have been valuable studies, among others, by Tzachi Zamir (*Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*, Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2007), Paul A. Kottman (*Philosophers on Shakespeare*, Stanford, Stan-ford University Press, 2009), Stanley Stewart (*Shakespeare and Philosophy*, New York, Routledge, 2010). A recent seminar on "Shakespeare and Philosophy", convened by Paul A. Kottman and Philip Lorenz for the 40th annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Boston, 5-7 April 2012, has also produced important results. For other studies see the citations in this editorial. Stanley Cavell's contribution has, of course, been fundamental: for this, see note 20.

tion of a ghost, whose eternal suffering of the moment of death – "in the blossoms of [his] sins / Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled" (I.v.76-77[19]) – embodies the Lutheran denial of redemption. The student prince engages in a passionate discussion of reality and illusion with his friend Horatio – a friendship that, significantly, developed in the intellectual climate of Wittenberg; as the ghost appears and disappears the tension grows, until Hamlet asks Horatio to accept the exposure to Otherness as a measure of the impotence of human reason.

Fatherless by destiny and, having repudiated the substitute father, by choice, Hamlet withdraws into the solitude of a consciousness that is already wholly modern, irreparably split: he elaborates his melancholy in this fault line, attuned to the reformation theology that was agitating traditional dogma. Indeed, one of the first symptoms is precisely the crisis of a strong sense of identity based on the name of the father, a crisis which is dramatized in the young Hamlet's inability to know what to call the ghost. "I'll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane" (I.iv.44-45) he says to the shadow, whose appearance is similar to but not identical with the image of his father, a paradoxical hybrid of presence/absence. The original ontologically stable and certain identity of the name is now displaced into a "questionable shape" (I.iv.43), a spectral alterity that evades all meaning. Which makes these the lines that have come to mark indelibly the style of modernity: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (I.v.165-66).

While it grafts onto the body of reformation theology the doubt about knowledge once cultivated by stoics and skeptics, and later cancelled by the metaphysical claims of humanism, this memorable line is actually in mourning for philosophy; not of a particular philosophy, of course, but of all philosophy and its statutory vocation to find an explanation of the foundations of reality. The loss of the primacy of the *logos* is inscribed in the play, then, as a great drama of mourning and loss; in fact, it is the driving force of Shakespearean tragic form, which Stanley Cavell has related to skepticism – Emerson's and Wittgenstein's in particular –, stoic morality, and the very idea of tragedy, "the story and study of the failure of acknowledg-

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[19]   All quotations from *Hamlet* are taken from the Arden edition (cf. note 17).

ment" and therefore of the knowability of the self[20]. Like the ghost in *Hamlet*, who, "throbbing between two lives"[21], introduces a fracture in the knowable, modern reason continues to inhabit – and haunt – artistic forms although it no longer resides in them, and no longer belongs to them. It is at once *here* yet evanescent, as in the spectral meeting at dawn in *Little Gidding*, in humanity's renewed experience of bereavement, which was then the war: "'What! are *you* / here?' Although we were not"[22].

3. Legacy
(Rosy Colombo)

Following Derrida, today we tend to read Shakespeare's presence in modern culture as a spectral presence[23]: Shakespeare is a *revenant* both in the field of creative writing and in philosophy (an issue which is highlighted in the current debate on his legacy). The normal demarcation of branches of knowledge does not hold in Shakespeare, who has them converse with each other. As we know, Shakespeare haunts all artistic forms, modulating himself in them without residing in any; but he also plays a disturbing role in philosophical thought: he challenges the truths of the father, he empties of sense absolutes and ontological demarcations – in short, he undermines the traditional codes of knowledge.

A recent example of this is Andrew Cutrofello's *Continental Philosophy*[24] – a search, starting from Kant, for an alternative to the age-old academic rivalry between the logical-analytical tradition of English and American philosophy on the one hand, and the so-called 'philosophi-

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[20] I refer to his challenging *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press,1979, as well as the later and better-known *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, updated ed. 2003, in which Cavell recognizes his longstanding indebtedness to Wittgenstein, and relates it to his choice of Shakespeare as an indispensable companion.

[21] See T. S. Eliot, "The Fire Sermon", in *The Waste Land*, London, Faber & Faber, 1999, l. 218.

[22] T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding", in *Four Quartets*, ll. 45-46.

[23] See, among others, Maurizio Calbi's recent study of present-day media adaptations of Shakespeare: *Spectral Shakespeares*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

[24] Andrew Cutrofello, *Continental Philosophy*, New York-London, Routledge, 2010.

cal humanism' of Europe on the other. The book develops through a sequence of Shakespearean quotations, placed as epigraphs to each chapter, and that function both as constant dialectics in the history of thought and as a dramatization of some 'winters of discontent' in the very heart of philosophy. Cutrofello's study offers a 'Shakespearized' perspective, as Nadia Fusini highlights in these pages with reference to Emerson. This perspective, in the wake of the later Wittgenstein, is where Stanley Cavell fashioned his linguistic skepticism, which leans on Emerson's conception of philosophy as deconstruction of knowledge: "truly speaking it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul" is the epigraph that sets the tone for *The Claim of Reason*. In this tonality emotion – which is paradigmatic of the language of poetry – is not only accepted, but sought after as a necessary moment for extending the rational basis of philosophy, and sets off a desire for 'thinking with Shakespeare', which we want to examine here. With Shakespeare philosophy equips itself to look outside itself; in art, in language, in history, and in life. It comes close to music, a language where intensity of pathos combines with the utmost mathematical rigor.

Throughout *Continental Philosophy* fragments of the Shakespearean *corpus* show his immanence in crucial questions such as the self, time and death. Evidence of this immanence can be found in some of the contributions to this journal: it is to be found in the philosophical canon of the nineteenth century (Herder, Hegel, Nietzsche), but still more in certain philosophers of the twentieth century, when the crisis of the foundations disowned the ontology of origin and turned in the direction of linguistic difference, causing a dramatic swerve in the very essence nature of the thought process: one example is the deconstructionist landscape of Levinas, Derrida and Lacan, in which the real is constitutionally resistant to being fully symbolized. To proceed with Nadia Fusini's argument, as the perception of crisis becomes stronger, so does the relevance of Shakespeare for philosophical reason. A dialogue proves to be necessary: in Hannah Arendt's *Life of the Mind*, for example; or in Heidegger's and Adorno's abandonment of metaphysics. Intuitive knowledge and rational knowledge are clasped in a dialectic knot. Art and philosophy may remain two distinct forms of thought, but they are no longer set against each other. Yet again *Hamlet* is a case in point: in the play, alongside the Wittenberg community there is a community of players, and both are equally inadequate to 'catch' the real.

Shakespeare has become an essential part of the process by which culture has been emancipated from the constraints of authority and the claims of teleological patterns**.** Did he anticipate all this? Emmanuel Levinas, often referred to in this issue, puts it this way:

> Il me semble parfois que toute la philosophie n'est qu'une méditation de Shakespeare[25].

Similarly, Terry Eagleton, quoted by the editors of the Arden Shakespeare *Hamlet*:

> Though conclusive evidence is hard to come by, it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida[26].

Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor themselves in turn object:

> Is it because in so many ways Shakespeare got in first, anticipating many of the major concerns of later writers, or is it because they were themselves overwhelmingly influenced by him? *Hamlet* has certainly featured in some of the key texts in modern philosophy and psychoanalysis. Marx developed a revolutionary theory of history in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (1852) through a subversive reading of the Ghost of Hamlet's father. Freud famously first sketched his theory of the Oedipus complex (later developed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900) in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess in October 1897 in which he argued that, in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's "unconscious understood the unconscious of his hero" in this way[27].

It is pointless trying to come down on one side or the other; perhaps both views of the matter are true.

For all those who have lent Shakespeare their ears, however, the legacy is not experienced as a debt, a compulsion to repetition, or an

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[25]   Emmanuel Levinas, *Le temps et l'autre*, Paris, PUF, 1983, p. 60.

[26]   Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, pp. ix-x, cit. in Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, p. 26. Of course, in this context, there is no need to completely exclude Marx and Freud as thinkers from the category of philosophers in the strict (i.e. systematic) sense of the word. See Hillman, "Freud's Shakespeare".

[27]   Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, p. 26.

obligation. It is rather a choice: a habit of freedom, to be relaunched in the challenge of interpretation. This is where Shakespeare is different, never inherited in full; since no legacy – in Derrida's terms – is ever identical to itself[28]. It is a cluster of fragments dropped from the past, a spectral thing, *the thing*, that obsesses the modern imaginary, which has been given over to the demon of 'hauntology'.

One can never come into full possession of a legacy, least of all Shakespeare's. It is not a *corpus* to appropriate or identify with; it is a living thing yet always other. Its power lies in an endless process of deferral, a game that never reaches a conclusion. The meeting is constantly being renewed, but is never completed; it is rather the driving force of an unending metamorphosis. The phantom is both past and present: it goes on speaking, it always has something more to say, and yet, precisely because it is living, it retains its mystery, undermining – as Beckett understood better than anyone else – all desire for closure. Shakespeare's legacy is a horizon: it recedes the more one tries to approach it. But in the meantime one has moved forward.

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[28]   See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, Paris, Galilée, 1993, p. 40. I am indebted to my friend Silvano Facioni for this important reference, along with other valuable suggestions while I was writing these pages.

Presentazione

Rosy Colombo, Nadia Fusini

1. *Il divino Shakespeare*
(Nadia Fusini)

Non è nostra intenzione con questo numero riaprire l'annosa questione, già antica per Socrate, del rapporto tra poesia e filosofia. Né tantomeno venire, noi amici e studiosi di Shakespeare, in soccorso della poesia, per esaltarne la superiorità. O sollecitare una nascosta rivalità tra discipline. Non è così: con la vecchia rivalità tra filosofia e poesia abbiamo fatto i conti, e abbiamo 'superato' Platone.

Né la domanda è del genere: "Shakespeare è il vostro scrittore preferito?".

Piuttosto, chiediamo ad alcuni nostri amici filosofi di professione: Shakespeare è o non è la forza potente che ha fatto il nostro mondo così com'è? – cosa di cui ci assicura Harold Bloom, quando afferma che "Shakespeare ci ha inventato"[1]. E quanto profondamente shakespeariani vi sentite, o siete, o credete di essere, voi filosofi? Shakespeare è per voi un alleato nell'atto del pensare?

Chiediamo, in altri termini, ai nostri amici filosofi se per pensare loro *debbano* ricorrere a Shakespeare. O addirittura, se *possono* pensare senza Shakespeare. Perché noi studiosi di Shakespeare no, non possiamo…

Non per questo 'we Shakespeareans' sappiamo *che cosa* Shakespeare pensava; l'uomo è in realtà reticente[2], non ci ha lasciato dichiarazioni

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[1]   Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, London, Fourth Estate, 1999, pp. xvii-xviii; tr. it. *Shakespeare. L'invenzione dell'uomo*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2001, p. 16.

[2]   È la tesi di A. D. Nuttall, nel suo splendido libro *Shakespeare the Thinker*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2007.

ideologiche di nessun tipo. Sappiamo però *che* pensava; anzi, a noi
pare che abbia il dono di porre le questioni fondamentali alla sua,
come alla nostra epoca.

Senza dubbio Shakespeare ha creato due icone del pensiero, Am-
leto e Macbeth[3]. Non che altri suoi eroi non pensino: pensa Bruto,
pensano Iago e Otello, pensano Lear e il suo Fool. Ma con Macbeth
e Amleto si mostra in atto la natura *drammatica* del pensiero; ovvero
che pensare è un atto *drammatico*, addirittura *tragico*. Non a caso, in
entrambi i personaggi, il pensiero esplode come se fosse dinamite e li
distrugge. E sapete perché? Perché ci vuole del coraggio a pensare, se
pensare significa come nel caso di Macbeth ritrovarsi con il desiderio
criminale, regicida; o come nel caso di Amleto, col desiderio parrici-
da, incestuoso.

In più modi, Shakespeare si interroga sulla natura dell'uomo:
what's a man? è domanda che risuona non solo nei più famosi mono-
loghi di Amleto. Nei registri più diversi indugia sul mistero e sul-
la meraviglia del pensiero. Né si ritrae dalla domanda più difficile:
unde malum?, mentre si esercita nell'esplorazione dell'individuo e
dello spazio interiore della soggettività umana – lì scoprendo un al-
tro Nuovo Mondo, coi suoi recessi d'ombra, che custodiscono un
che di non saputo, non conosciuto, un'estraneità colta nell'intimi-
tà perturbante di un 'io' che ritrova in se stesso l''altro'… Prima di
essere un'affermazione di Rimbaud, "Je est un autre" è la battuta
di Viola nella *Dodicesima notte* (III.i.143[4]), di Iago nell'*Otello* (I.i.64[5]),
che con le loro negazioni ("I am not what I am" è il loro *refrain*) ci
spalancano le porte di una riflessione filosofica che ci introduce alla
nostra modernità. L'unità dell'io è una chimera già in Shakespeare,
che non a caso Freud legge con un'intensità senza pari, riconoscen-
do in lui una fonte di ispirazione. "Freud is deeply Shakespearean"
commenta David Hillman, anche se "Freud's Shakespeare is hardly
Shakespeare at all"[6].

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[3] Si veda Nadia Fusini, *Di vita si muore. Lo spettacolo delle passioni nel teatro di Shakespe-
are*, Milano, Mondadori, 2010, pp. 360ss.

[4] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik, The Arden
Shakespeare, London-New York, Routledge, 1988.

[5] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann, The Arden Shakespeare, Wal-
ton-on-Thames, Nelson, 1997.

[6] David Hillman, "Freud's Shakespeare", in *Great Shakespeareans: Marx and Freud*, eds
Crystal Bartolovich *et al.*, London-New York, Continuum, 2012, pp. 104-35; p. 103.

Senz'altro il nostro mondo è stato "Shakespearized" per dirla con Emerson, il quale afferma senza mezze misure che "Shakespeare wrote the text of modern life". E aggiunge: "A good reader can, in a sort, nestle into Plato's brain and think from thence; but not in Shakespeare's. We are still out of doors. For executive faculty, for creation, Shakespeare is unique"[7]. Un'affermazione che anticipa l'intuizione bruciante di Wittgenstein quando definisce Shakespeare non "poeta", ma "creatore di lingua": "Sprachschöpfer", più che "Dichter"[8]. Shakespeare, sostiene Wittgenstein, "non può essere messo alla pari di nessun altro"; con la sua mano leggera e agile sa creare "nuove forme linguistiche"[9]. Come nessun altro Shakespeare sa giocare il gioco della lingua, ripete ammirato.

È come se tornasse vera con Shakespeare un'idea antica di poesia: la poesia come *ainigma* – che è precisamente ciò che la poesia era per gli antichi sapienti, prima che esistessero i filosofi di professione: un enigma, ovvero un dire oscuro, illogico, che si sottrae e resiste all'esegesi e impone al lettore e allo studioso la posizione allegorica di parlare in sua vece.

Così facciamo 'we Shakespeareans': di fronte all'enigma, che nel testo shakespeariano si presenta sempre più fitto di oscurità e di ambiguità via via che nei secoli si addensano le letture e interpretazioni, noi suoi devoti cultori leggiamo, ripetiamo, mandiamo a memoria, parafrasiamo, commentiamo quelle parole con altre parole ancora, in un infinito intrattenimento, ben sapendo che non c'è niente da spiegare. Niente da illuminare, se non la nostra fascinazione. Non si tratta di 'interpretare' Shakespeare: il testo shakespeariano, 'we Shakespeareans' sappiamo fin troppo bene, resiste a qualsiasi struttura concettuale in cui si cerchi di stringerlo, catturarlo, comprenderlo… Vive semmai del nostro scacco, e piuttosto ci obbliga a un rovesciamento dialettico, in cui siamo noi ad essere letti… In questo senso il teatro di Shakespeare è fondamentalmente una esposizione all'Altro. E dunque un'avventura della conoscenza. E dunque e certamente per il lettore un'esperienza filosofica.

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[7]   Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Shakespeare; or, the Poet", in *Ralpho Waldo Emerson*, ed. Richard Poirier, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 329-42.

[8]   Commento queste affermazioni cruciali di Wittgenstein in *Di vita si muore*, cit., pp. 6ss.

[9]   Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Pensieri diversi*, Milano, Adelphi, 1980, p. 153.

È certamente quanto accade con l'*Amleto,* quando a leggerlo sono Freud, Goethe, Nietzsche, Lacan, Levinas, Derrida. O quanto accade con *Otello*, quando lo legga Cavell. Si tratta di un genere di esposizione da cui il filosofo di professione, come del resto il critico letterario, *possono* volendo ripararsi grazie al sapere, mettendo in campo una strumentazione di appropriazione e addomesticamento. Ma, ripeto, l'esposizione cui ci invita Shakespeare non è del genere del *sapere*; anzi, se accolta fino in fondo, se *pensata* fino in fondo, è un'esperienza del 'reale'.

T. S. Eliot ha ragione quando nei *Quattro quartetti* ci insegna: "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality"[10]; ma nel ricordarci la nostra fragilità di fronte al significato ultimo, pure appresta per noi nel suo poema una 'via poetica' alla realtà, alla verità, alla vita e alla sua rappresentazione. Heidegger, del resto, dalla sua parte filosofica, ci insegna che il pensiero è un cammino, con i suoi proprii e interrotti e accidentati sentieri, che aprono su radure, che non si sa bene dove portino, esponendoci così ai più diversi rischi nell'andare. Il teatro di Shakespeare potrebbe essere uno di questi sentieri? – questa è la domanda. 'We Shakespeareans' siamo propensi a credere (è quasi un atto di fede) che lo sia.

'We Shakespeareans' sappiamo bene che Shakespeare *non* è un filosofo: Shakespeare è un attore, un impresario teatrale, un capocomico, un poeta. Certamente non ci rivolgiamo a Shakespeare per la sua 'filosofia'; anzi, non crediamo affatto che esista una 'filosofia' shakespeariana, nel modo in cui parliamo di una filosofia cartesiana, o kantiana. Crediamo però che la letteratura, la poesia, il teatro – in genere l'immaginazione implicata nell'atto creativo – siano un esercizio del pensiero. E se è così, in esso Shakespeare eccelle.

Shakespeare, ripeto, è soprattutto un *playwright* – il termine che trasporta nella lingua volgare la nobile professione del 'drammaturgo', ovvero del creatore di testi drammatici, siano essi tragedie o commedie; attività per la quale le parole più auliche sono 'tragediografo', 'commediografo', e appunto 'drammaturgo'. *Playwright* in inglese abbassa l'enfasi a nominare chi 'produce' testi drammatici per la scena: 'produce', attenzione – non 'scrive'; perché quel '*wright*'

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[10]   T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton", in Id., *Four Quartets*, London, Faber & Faber, 2009, vv. 44-45.

non allude all'atto della scrittura, non ha niente a che fare con il verbo 'scrivere' (*write*), come potrebbe sembrare. Il termine *wright* ha a che fare con il verbo 'work', e rimanda all'attività di chi lavora un qualsiasi tipo di materiale con il fine di creare un qualche oggetto, o cosa. L'operaio che lavora il legno per creare il carro è il *cartwright*, ad esempio. Insomma, il termine *wright*, come il più antico *wrytha* alludono a qualcuno che fa cose, oggetti, che esistono nel mondo perché lui li fa. In questo senso minimalista e microcosmico, sì, l'uomo è un *creatore*, e Shakespeare è uno che *fa* drammi.

Non è Milton. Non è Dante. È uno scrittore di teatro, che scrive per il palcoscenico e produce nel modo dello spettacolo, del *play* per l'appunto. In questo senso Shakespeare è *homo ludens* nel senso di Huizinga, il cui magnifico libro, che porta appunto quel titolo[11], ci serve a cogliere l'intensità semantica della prima parte del termine composto: *playwright*.

C'è uno *Spieltrieb*, un impulso al gioco, Huizinga spiega; dove il gioco – come si vede nei bambini – è condotto con estrema serietà, svolto con ordine, tensione, solennità e fervore, tanto da sembrare quasi un atto sacro. In inglese il termine *play* è interessante, come è interessante l'area di significati che si sollevano sullo sfondo coi termini *lâc* e *plega* e *spelian*; specialmente, con quest'ultimo – con il suo preciso significato di 'fare qualcosa per un altro', o 'essere al posto di un altro'.

Si apre così il campo semantico di un rituale, dove qualcuno in maschera 'gioca' a essere un altro. Ricordiamo che nel suo stadio più antico, il *mood* del dramma è l'estasi dionisiaca, l'eccitazione della festa, l'entusiasmo ditirambico – quando l'attore è trasportato a essere un 'io' estraneo, che non tanto rappresenta, quanto incarna, trascinando con sé gli spettatori nella metamorfosi. La stessa cosa accade con Shakespeare.

Shakespeare commenta più volte il mistero e il miracolo del teatro, e nei suoi drammi *pensa* teatralmente e in maniera radicale. Ha un'abilità[12] istintiva nel farlo. Il suo pensiero è sempre in moto e mutevolmente si adatta e si articola e si incarna e contraddice nei vari

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[11] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, London, Paladin Books, 1970, p. 33. Si veda Nadia Fusini, "Shakespeare: Playwright or 'Sprachschöpfer'?", in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 8 *On Authorship*, eds Rosy Colombo and Daniela Guardamagna (2012), pp. 95-118.

[12] A. D. Nuttall parla di "knack", in *op. cit.*, p. 378.

personaggi, in una fantasmagoria proteica che la funzione drammatica favorisce. È questa "l'immensa intelligenza del corpus shakespeariano" di cui parla Stanley Cavell[13].

Ed è questa la qualità suprema che riconosce John Keats, quando prende Shakespeare a modello. Shakespeare è per Keats il sublime modello "of the Man of Achievement"[14]. Cosa intende precisamente Keats con questa definizione? Una specie di sovrumana umanità? In un certo senso è così: Keats è colpito da quella che considera l'incommensurabile grandezza delle gesta di Shakespeare, delle sue imprese – che sono i suoi drammi, che il giovane poeta inglese legge e rilegge estasiato. Impressionante è la vastità del loro compasso emotivo, la varietà del registro linguistico shakespeariano; impressionante come il genio di Shakespeare scorre liberamente – niente lo frena. È così intelligente! nota Keats. È così ricco di toni e sfumature. È conturbante per Keats il modo in cui Shakespeare sa cogliere il pensiero in movimento, quasi che il pensiero fosse per lui una dimensione della forma e del significato della lingua che crea per i suoi personaggi – un impasto materico in cui idee, immagini, riflessioni, ricordi, giudizi, intuizioni e visioni tutti insieme si fanno pensiero drammatico.

In questo senso poetico i drammi shakespeariani sono drammi filosofici, e hanno una dimensione etica. E giungono fino ad articolare questioni di ordine metafisico. Cosa che i nostri amici filosofi in questo numero di *Memoria* confermano nei loro scritti, perché scrivendo di Shakespeare i nostri amici filosofi dimostrano nei fatti – *verba volant*, *scripta manent* – che leggere Shakespeare è un esercizio della mente, una ginnastica dell'anima, che educa a un modo del pensiero che ci viene in soccorso quando nell'atto del pensare questioni radicali ci troviamo come Amleto davanti a scogli – "Ay, there's the rub" (III.i.64[15]) – che ci rivelano "gedanken-arm"[16]. Sì, proprio quando ci ritroviamo nella povertà e nell'indigenza, proprio quando la logica difetta, quando la ragione inciampa nell'assenza di pensiero, la parola di Shakespeare ci aiuta.

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[13]   Stanley Cavell, "Foreword", in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. John J. Joughin, London, Routledge, 2000, p. xiii.

[14]   Lettera a George e Tom Keats del 21 dicembre 1817, in John Keats, *Lettere sulla poesia*, a cura di Nadia Fusini, Milano, Mondadori, 2005, p. 38.

[15]   William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, eds Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006.

[16]   Martin Heidegger, *L'abbandono*, Genova, il melangolo, 1983, pp. 28-29.

2. *La scena del lutto*
(Rosy Colombo)

L'ascolto della parola di Shakespeare da parte della ragione filosofica sul quale Nadia Fusini ha appena invitato a ragionare – cosa accaduta raramente in Italia[17] – disegna un universo *early modern*, chiaramente postrinascimentale. E riprendendo con lei la suggestiva tesi di Harold Bloom, è qui che ha preso forma l'invenzione shakespeariana dell'umano che abita lo scenario della modernità come esperienza di privazione e di lutto: della ragione, della fede, del desiderio. "All passion spent": l'accordo su cui Milton chiude il *Samson Agonistes* segnala l'inquietudine di un vissuto condiviso sia dalle ombre tragiche di Shakespeare, sia da quelle sfinite di Samuel Beckett, con la loro passione del silenzio.

Sulla soglia si affaccia Amleto, naturalmente. Prostrato dalla perdita del padre, inorridito alla scoperta della lussuria della madre, sconvolto dall'apparizione di un fantasma che nell'eterno patire l'evento

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[17] L'appello appassionato di Benedetto Croce ("Shakespeare", 1919, in Id., *Ariosto, Shakespeare e Corneille*, Bari, Laterza, 1961) a considerare Shakespeare "comune patrimonio della cultura" è per lo più rimasto inascoltato. Con l'eccezione di Massimo Cacciari (per es. *Hamletica*, Milano, Adelphi, 2009), di Remo Bodei (*Piramidi di tempo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006) e di pochi altri (segnaliamo il recente studio di Franco Ricordi, *Shakespeare filosofo dell'essere*, Milano, Mimesis, 2011, sul versante del teatro), un discorso sui rapporti fra Shakespeare e il pensiero filosofico è rimasto per lo più marginale in Italia, estraneo all'ambiente accademico (nel quale occorre comunque distinguere fra filosofi e professori di filosofia). Ancora più marginale esso è stato, ed è tuttora, nella critica shakespeariana, salvo che in qualche studioso più impegnato a livello epistemologico, come Nadia Fusini (nel suo recente *Di vita si muore*, cit.), Alessandra Marzola (presente in questo numero), o Silvia Bigliazzi (*Nel prisma del nulla*, Napoli, Liguori, 2005). È piuttosto un italianista come Luigi Trenti ad aver accolto l'invito del grande anglista Agostino Lombardo ad ascoltare la voce di Croce su Shakespeare: si veda Luigi Trenti, "'I Know You What You Are': Croce e Shakespeare", in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 6 *Shakespeare e l'Italia*, a cura di Rosy Colombo (2008), pp. 121-34. Diverso è invece stato, nell'ultimo trentennio, l'orientamento anglosassone, soprattutto negli U.S.A.; ad esso questa nostro primo numero di *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies* in formato digitale ha rivolto la propria attenzione, ricevendone sostegno e collaborazione. Preziosi sono stati gli studi di Tzachi Zamir (*Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*, Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2007), di Paul A. Kottman (*Philosophers on Shakespeare*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009), di Stanley Stewart (*Shakespeare and Philosophy*, New York, Routledge, 2010). Importanti i risultati del seminario "Shakespeare and Philosophy", a cura di Paul A. Kottman e Philip Lorenz, per il 40° incontro annuale della Shakespeare Association of America, Boston, 5-7 aprile 2012. Per altri studi si vedano i riferimenti nel corso di questo *editorial*. Fondamentale fra tutti è, naturalmente, Stanley Cavell, per il quale rinvio alla nota 19.

della morte – "nel fiore dei [suoi] peccati, / Senza sacramenti, senza unzione, senza esame di coscienza" (I.v.76-77[18]) – incarna il diniego luterano della redenzione. Il principe studente discute appassiona-tamente con l'amico Orazio – un'amicizia maturata non a caso nel clima intellettuale di Wittenberg – di realtà e illusione; fra l'apparire e lo svanire del fantasma la tensione cresce, finché Amleto invita Ora-zio ad accettare l'esposizione all'Altro quale misura dell'impotenza della ragione umana.

Fatherless per destino e, ripudiato il padre sostitutivo, per scelta, Amleto si ritrae nella solitudine di una coscienza già tutta moder-na, irrimediabilmente scissa: nella faglia lavora la propria malin-conia, in sintonia con la teologia riformata che agitava il dogma tradizionale. E infatti, un primo sintomo è proprio la crisi di una coscienza identitaria forte, non più fondata sul nome del padre; crisi drammatizzata nella battuta in cui il giovane Amleto non sa come chiamare il fantasma. "Ti chiamerò Amleto, / Re, padre, re-gale Danese" (I.iv.44-45) dice all'ombra percepita come simile ma non identica all'immagine paterna, incrocio paradossale di presen-za/assenza. L'identità originaria ontologicamente stabile e certa del nome è adesso dislocata in una "forma dubbia" (I.iv.43), un'alterità spettrale che sfugge alla cattura del significato. Ecco allora la battuta che segnerà in modo indelebile lo stile della modernità: "Ci sono più cose in cielo e in terra, Orazio, / Di quante non ne sogni la tua filosofia" (I.v.165-66).

Mentre innesta nel corpo della teologia riformata il dubbio sulla conoscenza coltivato a suo tempo da stoici e scettici, e cancellato in seguito dalle istanze metafisiche dell'Umanesimo, la memorabile battuta annuncia invero il lutto della filosofia: non di una filosofia particolare, beninteso, ma di tutta la filosofia, della sua vocazione statutaria a trovare, in quanto tale, una spiegazione dei fondamenti della realtà. La caduta del primato del *logos* si inscrive nel gran-de teatro del lutto dell'*Amleto*; e di fatto costituisce il motore della forma tragica shakespeariana, da Stanley Cavell messa in relazione con lo scetticismo – di Emerson e di Wittgenstein in particolare – con la morale stoica, con l'idea stessa di tragedia, "storia e studio

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[18]   Tutte le citazioni da *Hamlet* sono tratte dall'edizione Arden (cfr. nota 15). Qui e nel
seguito, se non diversamente indicato, tutte le traduzioni sono mie.

del mancato riconoscimento" e pertanto della conoscibilità di sé[19]. Simile al *ghost* dell'*Amleto*, che "pulsante tra due vite"[20] insinua una crepa nello scibile, la ragione moderna, che pure seguita ad abitare la forma artistica, non vi risiede; non le appartiene più. È simultaneamente *qui* ed è evanescente, come nell'incontro spettrale dell'alba a "Little Gidding", nel nuovo lutto dell'umanità che è adesso la guerra: "'Come! Siete *voi*, qui?' / Benché non fossimo noi"[21].

3. Eredità
(Rosy Colombo)

Sulla scorta di Derrida oggi si tende a leggere la presenza di Shakespeare nella cultura moderna come presenza spettrale[22]: Shakespeare è un *revenant* sia nella produzione estetica, sia nei percorsi della filosofia, evidenziati in questo numero che appunto ne interroga l'eredità. Modello dialogico riguardo alla demarcazione dei saperi, Shakespeare, si sa, abita tutte le forme artistiche che attraversa, modulandosi in esse e senza risiedere in nessuna; ma svolge anche, nel pensiero filosofico, una funzione perturbante: provoca le verità dei padri, svuota di senso gli assoluti e le demarcazioni ontologiche, smonta insomma i criteri tradizionali della conoscenza.

Un panorama significativo al riguardo è offerto da uno studio recente di Andrew Cutrofello, *Continental Philosophy*[23]. A partire da Kant, l'autore cerca una soluzione all'annosa rivalità accademica fra la tradizione logico-analitica propria della filosofia angloamericana

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[19] Mi riferisco all'importante *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press,1979, ripreso successivamente nel più noto *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, ed. aggiornata 2003 (tr. it. *Il ripudio del sapere. Lo scetticismo nel teatro di Shakespeare*, Torino, Einaudi, 2004), nel quale Cavell riconosce il suo debito verso il pensiero di Wittgenstein, e motivando in questa chiave la sua scelta di Shakespeare come compagno di strada.

[20] Cfr. T. S. Eliot, "The Fire Sermon", in Id., *The Waste Land*, London, Faber & Faber, 1999, v. 218.

[21] T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding", in Id., *Four Quartets*, cit., vv. 45-46.

[22] Si veda, fra gli altri, il recente studio di Maurizio Calbi sugli adattamenti mediatici di Shakespeare nel contemporaneo: *Spectral Shakespeares*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

[23] Andrew Cutrofello, *Continental Philosophy*, New York-London, Routledge, 2010.

e il cosiddetto 'philosophical humanism' continentale ricorrendo a
una catena di citazioni shakespeariane, collocate in esergo a ogni ca-
pitolo e assunte sia come costanti dialettiche nella storia del pensie-
ro, sia come drammatizzazione di alcuni 'winters of discontent' nel
cuore della filosofia stessa. Lo studio di Cutrofello intese un'ottica
'Shakespearized', come suggerisce in queste pagine Nadia Fusini con
riferimento a Emerson. In essa, sulla scia del secondo Wittgenstein, è
maturato lo scetticismo linguistico di Stanley Cavell, che si appoggia
alla concezione emersoniana della filosofia come decostruzione del
sapere: "a dire il vero, quanto riesco a ricevere dall'anima di un altro
non è istruzione, ma provocazione" è l'esergo che dà il tono a *The
Claim of Reason*. In questa tonalità l'emozione – paradigmatica del
linguaggio della poesia – non soltanto è accettata, ma è cercata come
momento necessario ad allargare la base razionale della filosofia, at-
tivando così il desiderio di 'thinking with Shakespeare', nel quale si
vuole qui indagare. Con Shakespeare la filosofia si attrezza a guardar
fuori di sé; nell'arte, nella lingua, nella storia, nella vita. Il suo lin-
guaggio si avvicina a quello della musica, dove l'intensità del pathos
si coniuga col massimo rigore matematico.

In tutto il corpo di *Continental Philosophy* tracce del *corpus* di Sha-
kespeare ne mostrano l'immanenza in questioni cruciali come l'io, il
tempo, la morte. Testimonianze di tale immanenza sono presenti in
alcuni contributi a questo *journal*: la si ritrova infatti nel canone filo-
sofico dell'Ottocento (Herder, Hegel, Nietzsche) ma ancor più in certi
filosofi del XX secolo, quando la crisi dei fondamenti ripudia la que-
stione dell'origine e muove in direzione della differenza linguistica,
rendendo più drammatica la natura del pensiero: è il caso del paesag-
gio decostruzionista di Levinas, di Derrida, di Lacan nel quale prevale
una costitutiva irriducibilità del reale alla piena simbolizzazione. Per
riprendere la tesi di Nadia Fusini, quando più forte si fa la percezio-
ne della crisi, l'incontro con Shakespeare diventa necessario: alla *Life
of the Mind* di Hannah Arendt per esempio, come pure all'uscita di
Heidegger e di Adorno dalla metafisica. Stringe in un nodo dialettico
conoscenza intuitiva e conoscenza razionale. Arte e filosofia restano
pur sempre due forme distinte del pensiero, ma non sono più con-
trapposte; già nell'*Amleto*, del resto, accanto all'universo travagliato di
Wittenberg, c'è quello festoso degli attori: entrambi mancano il reale.

Shakespeare è diventato un elemento integrante del processo di
emancipazione della cultura da autorità vincolanti e da un'ipoteca

teleologica. Che abbia anticipato tutto questo? Così pensa Emmanuel Levinas, più volte citato in questo nostro numero:

> Il me semble parfois que toute la philosophie n'est qu'une méditation de Shakespeare[24].

E Terry Eagleton, citato dai curatori dell'*Amleto* per l'Arden Shakespeare:

> Anche se non ci sono prove definitive, è difficile leggere Shakespeare senza avere la sensazione che, quasi sicuramente, conoscesse le opere di Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein e Derrida[25].

Obiettano a loro volta gli stessi Ann Thompson e Neil Taylor:

> È perché Shakespeare è arrivato prima, anticipando molte questioni centrali degli scrittori successivi, o è perché loro stessi sono stati influenzati da lui in modo preponderante? L'*Amleto* è sicuramente presente in alcuni testi chiave della filosofia moderna e della psicoanalisi. Marx ha costruito una teoria rivoluzionaria della storia nel *Diciotto Brumaio* (1852) grazie a una lettura sovversiva del Fantasma del padre di Amleto. Freud, com'è noto, ha tracciato per la prima volta la teoria del complesso di Edipo (in seguito sviluppata nell'*Interpretazione dei sogni*, 1900) in una lettera a Wilhelm Fliess dell'ottobre 1897 in cui sosteneva che nell'*Amleto* "l'inconscio di Shakespeare comprendeva l'inconscio del protagonista" in questo modo[26].

Inutile cercare di venirne a capo; forse sono vere entrambe le ipotesi.

Per tutti coloro che hanno ascoltato Shakespeare, comunque, l'eredità non si configura come debito, ma come scelta: pratica di libertà, da rilanciare nella sfida dell'interpretazione. Sta qui la differenza di Shakespeare: il suo lascito – per dirla con Derrida – non si raccoglie mai interamente; poiché l'eredità non è mai una con se stessa[27]. È un

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[24] Emmanuel Levinas, *Le temps et l'autre*, Paris, PUF, 1983, p. 60.

[25] Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, pp. ix-x, cit. in Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, cit., p. 26. Si noti che Marx e Freud, quantunque non filosofi in senso stretto, sono riconosciuti come maestri del pensiero. Cfr. Hillman, *op. cit.*

[26] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, cit., p. 26.

[27] Cfr. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, Paris, Galilée, 1993, p. 40 (tr. it. *Spettri di Marx*, Milano, Cortina, 1994). Devo all'amico Silvano Facioni questo importante rinvio, insieme ad altri preziosi suggerimenti nel corso della stesura di queste pagine.

insieme di frammenti di passato, una cosa fantasmatica, *la cosa* che nella modernità ossessiona un immaginario consegnato al demone della 'hauntology'.

Dell'eredità non ci si può mai appropriare fino in fondo, tanto più di quella di Shakespeare. Non è un *corpus* da catturare, con il quale identificarsi; è un'eredità viva e tuttavia sempre Altra. Nel differimento all'infinito sta la sua potenza. È un incontro sempre rinnovato e mai compiuto, non un punto d'arrivo, piuttosto il motore di una metamorfosi incessante. Continua a parlare, ha sempre qualcosa da dire; eppure, proprio perché viva, serba il suo mistero, frustrando – come Beckett più di ogni altro ha compreso – ogni desiderio di compimento. È un orizzonte: si allontana quanto più gli andiamo incontro. Ma nel frattempo ci siamo spostati.

Shakespeare and Philosophical Criticism*

Tzachi Zamir

1.

Shakespeare's poems and plays frequently offer sententious specu-
lations about life, its meaning (or lack of it); about love, friendship,
trust, pain; language (or speechlessness); action (or the inability to
act); about the meaning of being a parent, or a friend; or the loss
of self-respect; about honour and reputation; about the theatricality
that imbues action. Philosophy is the reflective activity whereby such
existential spheres and processes are rigorously examined. Pithy ar-
ticulations of such experiential kernels would, accordingly, appear to
be natural candidates for Shakespeare's 'relevance' to philosophers.

While such lofty speculations immediately come to mind when
thinking of Shakespeare and philosophy, when one actually attempts
to think through such a linkage in a specific textual moment, one
comes up with very little. Consider, for example, Macbeth's equating
life with a poor player who "struts and frets his hour upon the stage
and then is heard no more", or Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy,
debating the pros and cons of existence, or Ulysses and his reflections
on value in the eyes of others, or Falstaff's philosophizing about hon-
our emptying into a mere word, or Timon's insights regarding the cor-
rupting power of money. All of these are surely deep moments in the
plays. Such moving speeches suggest the philosopher's capacity to rise
above the quotidian hustle and bustle, coolly and dispassionately ap-
prehending a facet of life and issuing its succinct articulation.

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*   Extract (c. 5000 w) from pp. 623-40, ch. 34 "Philosophy" from *The Oxford Handbook
    of Shakespeare*, edited by Arthur Kinney (2012), www.oup.com. Free permission Au-
    thor's own material.

But suppose now that such claims are removed from their context and introduced as proposed truths in a gathering of philosophers. "I can perhaps see why Hamlet might believe that he should either live and suffer life's humiliations or die and risk afterlife punishment, but why should one hold that this disjunction is applicable to the lives of other individuals?" would ask one puzzled philosopher. "May we know what necessary and sufficient conditions are being presupposed with regard to 'life' and 'acting' when Macbeth identifies 'life' with a poor player?" demands another philosopher. "Why should one hold that 'honour travels in a strait so narrow where one but goes abreast'?" wonders a third, upon pondering Ulysses' remark, "Does Ulysses ground this claim regarding honour's limited distribution on empirical fact or on conceptual necessity?". The problem is obvious: such claims about life or honour, moving and effective as they are in their dramatic contexts, are partial, vague, and unsupported when examined as proposed truths. Furthermore, since such generalizations are (thankfully) not being argued for in their fictional context, they are not even candidates for philosophical scrutiny. Such statements can, at best, embellish an independent philosophical argument. They add spice that might appeal to the bookish. No more.

2.

A second unpromising route through which Shakespeare's philosophical import may be established is to place his work in dialogue with themes developed more systematically by his contemporaries. Thinkers such as Montaigne, Bodin, Hooker, More, or Calvin have formulated elaborate ideas regarding the limits of knowledge, the illusiveness of free will, or the nature of salvation. Why not examine the explicit and implicit interplay between Shakespeare's work and such an established philosophical corpus? There are three reasons that advise against this. Firstly, we are either faced with the daunting and ultimately thankless task of attempting to distill Shakespeare's own thoughts from his plays, or the equally unappealing project of hounding implied philosophical positions in the plays. The problem with implied positions is that the plays offer too many varied and conflicting ideas and attitudes. One would have to flatten the numerous incoherent and ad hoc reflections found in them into some coherent 'idea'. "Reason and love keep little

company together" says Bottom, and it will not be hard to find a critic capable of interweaving this observation into debates regarding the place of the passions in the good life in early modern England. But how to square this remark with the opposite process at work in some of the plays or particularly in the sonnets, whereby love occasions a privileged access to reality, a sharper penetration into it, rather than mere insulation?

Secondly, even when philosophical positions can genuinely be discerned, they are formulated by characters with whom we sympathize to a limited degree or not at all. What, for example, is the significance of Shakespeare's allocating the remark above to Bottom? Does Bottom's low status undermine the statement? Or perhaps, on the contrary, it being uttered by a fool strengthens it? Both options are interpretively viable. Moreover, how should one approach the complex, sometimes contradictory relations between asserted content and overall effect? Hamlet's dismissals of life are rendered through powerful images that energize both language and actor to an extraordinary degree. Such lines constitute a celebration of life even when life is being disparaged. Which idea is unfolded at such moments? Are we witnessing an articulation of nihilism or its opposite? Jaques finds nothing but theatricality in the lives he dispassionately views around him. In old age – the last of the seven ages of man – he sees no more than disability and dependency. But it is often unnoted that just after the famous speech, Shakespeare has Orlando entering carrying an old loyal servant, frantically looking for scraps of food through which Orlando can nourish him. Is Jaques a mouthpiece for Shakespeare's own view of life as nothing more than a stage? Is Shakespeare alternatively, subtly criticizing Jaques's lugubrious and reductive stance by showing how old age can become an opportunity to give and receive?

Finally, to historicize Shakespeare's philosophical relevance means to relegate his philosophical significance to the history of philosophy (and not to one of its grander moments at that) rather than making him a partner to contemporary thought. Granted, for some philosophers philosophy *is just* its history. But even for such philosophers, one would have to demonstrate that Shakespeare is an important player in the evolution and refinement of some concepts or themes. Yet it seems strained to claim that Rosalind's jolly disregard of Jaques's cynicism plays a similar role to, say, Locke's criticism of the theory of innate ideas. After Locke's critique, it was no

longer possible merely to iterate the idea that universally accepted propositions imply innateness. In what sense is Rosalind's sprightly dismissal of Jaques's morbid stance a substantive critique? In what way does our sympathy for her constitute an argument that should counteract nihilism? Does the exchange truly advance our sense of the shortcomings of nihilism? Can it be reapplied? Does it expose nihilism's limitations in the same way in which, say, Kant exposes a possible error in Anselm's ontological argument by undermining the presupposition that existence is a predicate?

If not the memorable contemplative statements or the interplay between such statements and ideas, what can philosophers qua philosophers achieve by immersing themselves in Shakespeare's works? And what can literary critics gain if they eavesdrop on (or risk undertaking) such philosophically-oriented readings of Shakespeare?

3.

> No longer mourn for me when I am dead
> Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
> Give warning to the world that I am fled
> From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell.
> Nay, if you read this line, remember not
> The hand that writ it; for I love you so
> That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot
> If thinking on me then should make you woe.
> O, if, I say, you look upon this verse
> When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
> Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
> But let your love even with my life decay,
> Lest the wise world should look into your moan
> And mock you with me after I am gone.

The 'world' opens and closes *Sonnet 71*[1]. It is introduced as the unimpressed abstract recipient of the news concerning the speaker's death. Then it becomes a detested, 'vile' context, acoustically and

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[1]   I reproduce the sonnet's text and punctuation as given in William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, eds Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, The Oxford Shakespeare, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 759. Other editions give a slightly different punctuation that will not modify my claims.

graphically resonating in the world-worm reverse rhyme. Finally, the "wise world" poses the threat of external ridicule. Shakespeare's sonnet thus construes the poem's intimacy – the poem as an enactment of intimacy with a projected recipient and an eavesdropping reader – as a private space, predicated on the positing (or invention) of an opposing and externalized 'world'.

But what does the speaker infuse into this loving space upon insulating it from the world? Surprisingly, what we hear are thoughts of death. The sonnet catalogues prescriptions to the beloved, forbidding the latter to mourn over the speaker once he is gone. The speaker offers to spare the beloved the pain and scorn such grief would inevitably evoke. A profoundly selfless loving gesture seems to be extended. We note, though, that the mere verbalization of the possibility (not to say the wish) to be forgotten by the beloved amounts to conjuring up a nightmare. The injunction to forget becomes particularly poignant if the sonnet is read (as Joseph Pequigney reads the entire sequence) as a homoerotic disclosure. Following such reading, the world will "mock you with me after I am gone" reveals the maddening loneliness of same-sex grief in Shakespeare's cultural context[2]. The plea to be forgotten comes to entail an earnest wish that the beloved will move on, thereby sparing himself additional suffering.

But we are also aware of an unmistakable counter-movement: the self-reinstatement paradoxically constituted by this repetitive command to be erased from consciousness. We might also glimpse the attempt to control the beloved's thoughts after the poet is gone. Should he read this line, the beloved is asked to perform the impossible – to disremember the very hand that wrote it. The ostensibly selfless, other-oriented surface of the argument thus gives way to an opposing self-centred refusal to be erased from thought. The beloved is not really allowed to move on. He is, rather, being cleverly manipulated into grief when the speaker can no longer wring a binding attachment in person.

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[2] "The character of the relationship between the speaker and his beloved [in *Sonnet 71*] is not greatly changed whether the beloved was a man or a woman", Jack M. Davis and J. E. Grant assert in "A Critical Dialogue on Shakespeare's *Sonnet 71*", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 1:2 (Summer 1959), pp. 214-32; p. 215. Yet the nature of the 'mock' alluded to does depend heavily on the kind of eroticism one imagines to be articulated and, in this particular sonnet, renders the homoerotic reading far more moving. For Pequigney's argument, see *Such Is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985.

The combination of selflessness and aggression is not being mere-
ly described, disclosed, or expressed. The relations between emotion
and language are more complex than implied by these categories. A
sonnet is not merely a linguistic formulation of a pre-existing senti-
ment. A Shakespearean sonnet (to follow Helen Vendler) is an ac-
tion performed in language whereby a distinct thread of love is be-
ing created. The speaker evolves through this action, allowing the
reader not merely to comprehend a state or grasp a truth, but to fol-
low sympathetically the temporal steps through which a distinct and
personal sentiment is being crystallized. The sonnet allows its reader
to eavesdrop into this private process. It also invites the reader to
partake in the temporality entailed in following a creative act. The
sonnet thereby forms an unstable mixture of descriptive, expressive,
and generative elements. Each of these elements can turn out to be a
mere façade, momentarily assumed by the speaker, only to conceal
the fact that another aspect is being mobilized.

Once a sonnet ceases to be regarded as a linguistic construction
which simply mediates between an independently existing emotion
and the real/imagined beloved or the real/imagined reader, once a
sonnet is regarded as, in part, a performative *creation* of a distinct
strand of love, its reader accesses an experiential configuration that,
if aesthetically persuasive, does not constitute a stylized mimetic
copy of reality or some elaborate formal description of it, but is a fea-
ture of emotional reality directly encountered. The reality unveiled
is not the material one of sticks and stones. It encompasses, rather,
intricately subtle states made up of a dynamic interplay between feel-
ing, image, and words. These states are fictional; they are proposed
as experiences of the fictional speaker who may or may not mirror
the thoughts and feelings of the living poet. But if the sonnet is aes-
thetically successful, it convinces its reader of its plausibility as the
articulation of a mindscape in love.

4.

With this view of poetic language, let us return to *Sonnet 71*, this time
with an eye for detail. I claimed that we are not relating to the sonnet
as an expression or a description. Instead, we regard it as the means
whereby an evolving sentiment is being progressively created before

us, different from the experiences that precede and follow it in the sonnet sequence as a whole.

The first four lines could be read in one breath[3]: "No longer mourn for me when I am dead / Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell / Give warning to the world that I am fled / From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell". The scene of the speaker's imagined funeral, evoked as the very last event in which he asks to be moaned for by the beloved, then gives way to an articulation of the moment of reading: "Nay, if you read this line, remember not / The hand that writ it". Collin Burrow notes how the complex 'you' of the love sonnets, which aligns the sonnet's reader with the real/imagined beloved, also occasions a metafictional unification of the speaker/poet[4]. The beloved reads the speaker's line; the reader reads the poet's line. The sonnet is thus able to question its status as mere fictional or stylized disclosure, exhorting the reader to ponder on the identity of the addressee. The poet is not here speaking to the reader over the beloved's head (as he does in *Sonnet 18*, for example), but draws on the first-person pronoun and on the invocation of the non-fictional moment of reading 'this line' to fuse rhetorically the beloved and the reader in the same posthumous action and moment.

The rhetorical objective of this ploy is, I think, to originate the broaching of a critical distance between reader and beloved. The self-humbling prescriptions generated by the speaker to the beloved might suit the latter. But once the reader is subtly united with the beloved, the nature of such a plea potentially encourages readers to refrain from following such implausibly self-abnegating demands. Why this request to be forgotten so quickly? Why this plea to go on after you die, as if nothing had happened? The more the beloved is construed as someone who might actually abide by a prescription of this kind, the more the reader is likely to withdraw from sharing such a cold stance. Rhetorically positioned as implied addressees, readers can thus perceive and resent more acutely the beloved's flippant and carefree mindset, one that can occasion such words of parting in the first place.

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[3] In "Breath, Today: Celan's Translation of *Sonnet 71*" (*Comparative Literature*, 57:4 [2005], pp. 328-51) Sara Guyer interestingly suggests that the reading of the first sentence effects a thematically-relevant effect of *breathlessness*.

[4] Collin Burrow, "Introduction" to the Oxford edition of Shakespeare's *The Complete Poems and Plays*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 122.

The sonnet's counter-theme is now introduced through a reversed chronology: the speaker invites the beloved to place himself in the position of loss and to then relate to him afresh. It is now revealed that under the guise of a poem about death and the relations between the living and the deceased, there hides a poem about life and the present bond between the living lovers. The sonnet thus mobilizes a familiar manoeuvre in erotic psychology (which will be rendered explicit in *Sonnet 73*): an intensification of feelings by way of imagining the death of the beloved. This thematic counterpoint – the introduction of life while referring to death – is reflected in word choice. The repetitive injunctions *not* to imagine the hand that is writing, or to *forget* the speaker's name, are being beautifully undercut by an obsessive iteration of the first person 'I,' 'me' and 'my' that permeate the sonnet's remaining lines.

Line 6 provides the transitional point between the imagined future moment of grief and the present: "for I love you so / That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot, / If thinking on me then should make you woe". The simple, unadorned "for I love you so", its shift from future to present tense, reinforce the naked, non-stylized sentiment that presses itself into the sonnet's figuratively dense surface. The disturbing request to forget the departed loved one betrays love's contradictions. Disappearance from memory through the imagined burial in the beloved's "sweet thoughts" acts as a mental analogue for the material decomposition evoked at the sonnet's opening (one hears echoes of *hearse* in "do not so much as my poor name rehearse", affiliating the beloved's verbalization of the poet's name with a burial). The "make you woe" which closes line 8 gives way to the expressive 'O' that opens line 9, thus uniting through acoustics and performed action ('woe'/'o') the speaker and the beloved. The speaker's exclamation not only audibly and semantically duplicates the beloved's 'woe' but also rhymes with "love you so", echoing, as it were, the loving sentiment conveyed by that suspended sentence in the following lines, carrying on the same contradictory sentiment: prescribing forgetting while soliciting remembrance.

Detectable too, is the hurtful imbalance – reiterated time and again in the sonnet sequence as a whole – between the loving speaker and the betraying and evasive youth. Your 'woe' is conditional and uncertain ("*If* thinking on me then should make you woe"). The speaker's 'O', on the other hand, is unconditional. As commentators

have repeatedly noted, behind this disturbing expression of utmost self-negation there lies the gnawing suspicion that the speaker will hardly be mourned at all[5]. One facet constituting the richness of the evolving sentiment is thus the speaker's attempt to reinterpret the beloved's potentially wounding future disregard of his death. By *not* moaning for him, the beloved would be dutifully *complying* with the speaker's death wish! The process, which the speaker undergoes in the sonnet, thus also includes an attempt to make peace with a loved one moving on.

The speaker is thereby able to combine, on the one hand, loving sacrifice which is conditioned by the limitations of same-sex grief and the – to my mind authentic – benevolent willingness to release the youth from the obligation to grieve. On the other hand, one may sense a tacit yet marked complaint that the speaker will not be sufficiently mourned; that he is already disappearing from the beloved's carefree heart. The request not to be mourned would render bearable the inevitable prediction that the speaker will soon be forgotten by this lover anyway. The speaker is, accordingly, compelled to recreate his fading presence in a mind already forgoing and forgetting. This contradictory (but emotionally consistent) combination of egocentric and selfless attitudes, tinged with the pain that issues from thoughts of loss, of a mocked beloved, of envy and, even, rage upon being already forgotten concludes the sonnet.

5.

How does *Sonnet 71* inform philosophy? Arguments, striking generalizations, or memorable sententious statements about life or love are not being offered by the sonnet. Moreover, unlike some other forms of literature, the Shakespearean sonnet (like the Shakespearean play) is not designed to instruct, demonstrate a point, or improve us. At the same time, it is insightful. How?

The sonnet extends an invitation to share a significant moment in the poet/speaker's experience. The wish to establish connection with

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[5] Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 329. For similar impressions, see Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, p. 122; and Joseph Pequigney's "*Sonnets 71-74*: Texts and Contexts", in *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer, New York, Garland, 1999, p. 287.

another may account for our need to read poetry in the first place. When the poetry is of superior quality, the connection also yields valuable insights, leading to a refined understanding of (in the case of the Shakespearean sonnets) love and its surprising modalities. Though non-general, highly contextual and private, the descriptions of such modalities remain potentially applicable to other contexts. Such renderings thereby become *truth claims*, potential truths. The fictional and artificial nature of the sonnet form does not undermine its capacity to adequately capture and convey a truth. On the contrary, stylization enables a slowing down of perception, hampering and thereby de-automatizing smooth processing.

The core of the response regarding a literary work's contribution to philosophy lies in this combination: an articulated potential truth taken in as part of an attuned state of mind created in the reader by a well-written text. Literature at its best offers evasive and nuanced truth-claims. It does so in a way that makes these claims resonate meaningfully within the reader. This reply is loosely satisfactory. To appease a philosopher it would need to establish further both the epistemic and the rhetorical components. Philosophers would wish to understand how poetic claims become upgraded into *truth*-claims. They would also like to know more about the responsive state created in the reader, and how such engaged suasion contributes to (rather than undermines) knowledge.

6.

How do we know that a particular poetic articulation is a truth-*claim* (which is not to be confused with a true *proposition*) rather than merely an idiosyncratic assertion? Defenders of literature's philosophical import often respond by arguing that literary insights can be poetically compelling because they cohere with the reader's sense of the depicted experience. Not that readers already know what Shakespeare is about to unravel. But they do relate to the articulated sentiment as a *successful* rendering of what they have already vaguely experienced. Yet the question remains: How do we know that a proposed poetic articulation of what we already independently fuzzily sense constitutes an enhanced rendering in the progressive mapping of our internal lives? How can we distinguish between successful ar-

ticulations that we ought to embrace and unsuccessful ones that we are unable to reject precisely because of our own unclarity regarding inner states?

While we are not utterly helpless regarding such matters (I have elsewhere investigated this problem in greater detail[6]), the answer is that we do not have at our disposal conceptual tools that can fully satisfy us on this score. This inability accounts for the sceptical, hesitant and suggestive quality of literary interpretation — as in the cautious nature of the claims above regarding *Sonnet 71*. Successful poetic articulations are *potentially* true (hence: truth-*claims*). Surprisingly, we are willing to allow them to *remain* in this state. We ascribe explanatory power to such claims, without turning them into demonstrable truths (whatever 'demonstrable' can mean in the context of contingent truths). This is to take a step beyond a highly fruitful insight offered by Peter Lamarque and Stein Olsen whereby they claim that 'thematic statements' can be understood without being construed as assertions[7]. One can agree with Lamarque's and Olsen's view that literary or literary interpretive statements should not be regarded as *assertions*. At the same time, such statements are also not merely comprehended. They are articulated as potential truths, as truth-claims.

Since anything can be 'potentially' true, philosophers might wonder how meaningful such an ascription ultimately is. Even when recognizing the contingent nature of claims regarding, for instance, the uneasy connections between generosity and control in a love relation, as formulated in *Sonnet 71*, and the implication which such contingent status entails vis-à-vis the unavailability of 'proof', the philosopher would strive to know what makes the successfully poetic articulation a *potential* truth. If the sonnet does not constitute an argument, if it does not merely fancifully recreate an experience akin to that which the reader has independently already sensed, in what other way can it support the soundness, the potential re-applicability, of its proposed observations? I, for one, have neither experienced myself nor detected in others the precise unstable combination of self-marginalization and self-reinstatement that I have just postu-

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[6]   Tzachi Zamir, *Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007, pp. 35-38.

[7]   Peter Lamarque and Stein Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 328.

lated as the leading sentiment developed in *Sonnet 71*. On what basis, then, am I willing to accept the sonnet as deeply informing my sense of what love might involve?

7.

The response to the above question begins by denying that the 'plausibility' in question relates merely or primarily to *descriptive* adequacy. The disanalogy between material reality and mindscapes dissuades a brash acceptance of the 'inner' as some pre-existing immaterial correlate to material objects. We thus arrive at a more nuanced and interesting position: the poetic articulation is only *partly* a description that conforms to what one imprecisely senses to be the case in another's love. The apprehension of such conformity is not based on some arbitrary intuition. It rests, rather, upon familiarity with other lives, sensitivities, difficulties, and forms of attraction and erotic dependency. Thus, even if I do not possess first-hand familiarity with the experience portrayed, the patterns I have been discussing harmonize with my previous sense of the plausible scope of erotic dependency and manipulation.

At the same time, and beyond its status as a description of experience, the poetic articulation is also partly a proposed *intensification* of that experience. Richard Shusterman aptly formulates such a thought in his attempt to articulate art as dramatization in the following way: "Art distinguishes itself from ordinary reality not by its fictional frame of action but by its greater vividness of experience and action, through which art is opposed not to the concept of *life* but rather to that which is lifeless and humdrum"[8]. The precision we attribute to successful art and literature involves both ingredients: the descriptive *and* the intensifying. The poet – at least this kind of poet – convinces us with his eye for lived detail even when we have not undergone such experience ourselves, as well as with his capacity to offer a distilled expression of a vivid experience which readers are invited to sense.

What characterizes this 'intensity'? Take, for example, the discussion of the speaker's transition in *Sonnet 71* from (your conditional)

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[8]   Richard Shusterman, *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 234.

'woe' to (the speaker's unconditional) 'O'. This linkage between unification in voice/action and complaint does not merely entail a description regarding how some pre-existing love happens to operate; nor is it some stylistically pleasing way of dressing up an independently existing sentiment. It constitutes 'intensification' in the sense of capturing in miniature, in the movement between two words, an emotional world encompassing several (three) distinct strands: utmost, genuine sympathy extended to the beloved's future pain (captured by the acoustic unification); the opposite, i.e. selfish concern that the beloved's future pain over the speaker's death would be insufficient (captured by the contrast between the beloved's conditional woe and the speaker's unconditional 'O'); and (thirdly) the dreadful thought that one will truly disappear from the beloved's world.

'Intensification' can take the form of this capacity to encapsulate into a detail numerous distinct *descriptively plausible* strands. It is opposed to what Shusterman calls "humdrum" reality because the humdrum entails precisely the deflation of content, the act of seeing and experiencing very little. By contrast, the best works of art and literature often attain their status by inviting absorption in a detail. The detail becomes 'intense' because so many distinct threads are woven into it.

Such quantitative concentration of independently valued, descriptively plausible components that are distilled into a condensed stylized form is what provides some art at some moments with the energized quality of a presentation of *heightened* experience. Rather than a set of descriptively correct observations on actual loves, poetic articulations operate modally: they suggest that life *could* attain the precise blend of precision and richness that we perceive in the work. When 'accepting' such articulations as plausible and rewarding, we do not merely regard them as adequately capturing a pre-existing complex state of affairs, but as a plausible intensification of experience as opposed to the 'humdrum', a rendering explicit of what a single moment can hold, when allowing ourselves to step back from homogenizing simplifications.

Apart from the dense richness, in which independently valued insights are crowded into the space of a detail, intensity also often denotes a quality marking the details themselves. Note, for instance, the bitter-sweet mood through which the speaker imagines his dissipation in the beloved's thoughts in "for I love you so / that I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot". Surrounded as this image is by two dis-

comforting glimpses into material decomposition – the subterranean aggression in this seemingly soft-spoken line, turns the beloved's mind (should he comply and forget the speaker as the latter supposedly requests) into a grave. The images thus militate against the mellifluous surface meaning, in which the speaker is pleading to spare the beloved pain. This is not 'irony' in the sense of asserting X and meaning Y. *Both* meanings, the selfless and the hostile, are being genuinely endorsed, and this contrapuntal movement of meaning lends a qualitative intensity to the line.

Such use of language is, again, opposed to the 'humdrum' and is, in this sense, 'intense'. This time, though, the contrast is not between quantitative richness of detail encountered in poetry as opposed to some watered-down version of reality which we ordinarily experience. Intensity, here, denotes a quality of the language: the planned organization of sense in a manner able to capture and voice the shades of emotion that are at work in a lived context. The 'voicing' is sometimes an amplifying. To tacitly present the beloved's mind as a grave transmits rage. The speaker does not curse or blame the future forgetful beloved. He is, rather, subliminally turning him into a sarcophagus, a locus of decomposition in which death takes place. The beloved becomes 'death' not in its abstract, conceptual sense but in its material and terrifying one. The *quality* of the line lies in this mixture: the powerful contrast between the genuine caring consideration extended to the beloved, and the underlying anger that cannot be fully repressed. Perhaps this is a sharper form of resentment than what people actually feel when imagining themselves being forgotten by their lovers. But the equation carries expressive precision, since it brings out and conveys an aspect of this state. The 'humdrum' is the opposite of this: it consists of the obtuseness involved in the inability to register such subtle ripples. Intensity thus entails both the weaving of many observations in a detail and a dimension pertaining to the formulation of the details themselves, an amplification of that which quietly throbs beside the louder, more noticeable movements of the inner life.

Return now to the question of what 'accepting' a poetic articulation means. Literary works offer various forms of experiential extension. These are accepted not only because they are descriptively accurate. Such articulations become opportunities for imaginative participation. Readers participate with a planned organization of experience in which far more takes place (in contrast to non-fictional

life) and in which minor inner movements are played up. Accordingly, when 'accepting' a poetic articulation as a potential truth, we grant it both descriptive force *and* the capacity to enable imaginative identification with an intense experience. Intensity itself relates both to descriptive richness and amplification. It is, accordingly, on the one hand an experience of an imagined state, and, on the other, an experience that is not divorced from, and is in fact intimately tied up with, truth. Such is the route whereby poetry is able to generate not truth, but a *potential* truth.

8.

While the discussion above is pertinent to art and literature in general in their relationship with philosophy, it is particularly apt to the particular merits characterizing Shakespeare's works; specifically, the fascinating quality of his language. I have suggested that the intensity of a work is predicated on its descriptive density and on its power to metamorphose weak and marginal movements of thought and feeling into moments of heightened awareness. We admire works that repay scrutiny of details and reveal more upon further perusal. But we are also moved by them because they enable imaginatively accessing an intensified state. This linkage is not universally applicable to all major works of poetry. Spenser's allegorical poetry, for example, is morally illuminating and intellectually profound at its best, yet its emotional appeal revolves around charged mental images and the transition between them, and is less attuned to the kind of intensity described above. But this linkage does hold true for Shakespeare's poetry, whether dramatized or not, possessing, as his work does, an experiential precision in its descriptive and expressive modes, coupled with a capacity to move its reader/audience powerfully – and even sometimes to effect a transformation in inner experience when verbalized and acted.

Such an effect on the reader/audience constitutes a second, additional source for Shakespeare's particular relevance to philosophy. Apart from the intensity of his language – and perhaps because of it – the reader/audience often undergoes unique experiences when engaging with Shakespeare's works. When Helena reminds Hermia about the meaning of friendship, when Coriolanus banishes Rome,

when Lorenzo woos Jessica through a disquisition over music, when Lear denounces filial betrayal, Hamlet philosophizes about replacing one's lover, Shylock about Judaism, Lady Macbeth contemplates murder, Claudius probes the meaning of prayer, or Isabella explicates justice – we are moved. What renders such experiences unique is not the strength of the effect (a well-made horror movie can shock us to a greater extent). What Shakespeare offers is, rather, the combination of the depth in which a state is explored by the character (to employ the terms above, the 'intensity' of the character's language) and the experience this creates within the reader/audience.

9.

What are these experiences? How do they differ from ordinary, non-literary experiences? How do they lead to knowledge? Let us respond to these in turn. The first question as to the nature of these experiences cannot be answered by appealing to some incontestable established experience that a literary work universally generates in every reader/audience. If the experience of a work was of such nature, we would have no need of literary critics. However, a thoughtful criticism of a work is not a report, but is, in part, a proposal, opening up fruitful and rewarding ways of experiencing the text. We need critics precisely because we sense that the more rewarding experiences are often not immediately accessible. In *Sonnet 71*, for example, I *suggested* that the reader's experience includes a sense of amused sympathy for the speaker's capacity to transform a painful forgetting into the loving compliance with a death wish. I have also *proposed* that the speaker succeeds in involving us in his state, suspended as he is between painful alternatives, which unfold in their indismissable force as the sonnet progresses. These feelings intertwine with the more immediate experience of attending another (the lover), who is disclosing a painfully torn inner state.

How do such literary experiences differ from non-literary ones? They do not. True, some experiences are distinctly literary; pitying a fictional character, while it certainly takes place as part of experienced reading, is never simply the same as feeling sorry for a non-fictional person. But this does not necessitate upholding a belief in some unique 'aesthetic experience' that characterizes all valued en-

gagements with art. All of the elements that I have catalogued can be encountered in a living exchange, unmediated by art or literature. The problem with lived experience is that life too rarely offers the kind of experiences that are the focus of literary works. When it does, we are usually belaboured by pragmatic concerns. Some action usually needs to be undertaken in response to what is being disclosed. We are also typically overwhelmed by the strength of such experiences (whereas experiences in art or literature are heightened and vivid, not strong).

Finally, how are such experiences connected with knowledge? Gary Iseminger has usefully distinguished between two different ways in which experiences as part of art have been traditionally associated with knowledge. The first – which Iseminger calls "phenomenological" – refers to experiencing what something is like. The second – labelled by him as "epistemic" – relates to non-inferential knowledge, "a non-inferential way of coming to know something – comparable, say, to seeing that something is a chair"[9]. Iseminger's terms are, I think, confusing (since the 'phenomenological' – the knowing what some state is like – is itself a mode of non-inferential knowledge). Yet we can still relate to the distinction as offering two distinct routes through which experiences act as non-inferential knowledge. The first of these relies on empathy, whereas the second relates to a state akin to witnessing or perceiving. Both modes of associating the experiences created by art and literature (with or without invoking the problematic construction of 'aesthetic experience') can illuminate the unique ways through which literature informs philosophy in a manner that philosophy on its own cannot access. Literature enables us to relate to its insights while undergoing an experience created by the work. According to the reading above, for example, *Sonnet 71* offers a plausible articulation of what it might be like to come to terms with the additional pain of secrecy in grief as part of homoerotic love in a hostile cultural context. This would be the *phenomenological* linkage between experience and knowledge.

The *epistemic* formulation of the claim for the knowledge-yielding capacities of literature asserts that the experience of a powerful literary work is never an argument that supports the insights the poem presents,

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[9]   Gary Iseminger, "Aesthetic Experience", in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, chapter 3.

but rather functions as what I have elsewhere called a "ground"[10]. The 'ground' is an element relating to justification in the sense of correcting beliefs (or modifying conduct or decision-making) because one is exposed to some new experience. Such experiences (literary or non-literary) have the power to turn some claims from formulations that are cerebrally acknowledged as potentially plausible, into accepted vivid truth-claims. In *Sonnet 71* we move from knowing that lovers are possessive to a specific and direct presentation of such possessiveness: the sonnet turns the dread of being forgotten by a beloved into an elaborate and anxious manipulation, in which one seemingly releases the beloved only to keep asserting control over his future once the speaker is dead. The sonnet allows us to *experience* erotic possessiveness by witnessing its unfolding, by following its temporal evolving from generosity to anger. Our familiarity with erotic possessiveness has not changed in terms of new propositions that we are accepting now and which we rejected before (even if such changes occur, new beliefs of this kind could easily be paraphrased and removed from the context of the literary work). Rather, literary experiences modify the *relation* between agents and beliefs, qualitatively enhancing the beliefs and thereby changing their place and import for the reader.

10.

Martha Nussbaum opens her *Love's Knowledge* with the following question: "How should one write, what words should one select, what forms and structures and organization, if one is pursuing understanding? (Which is to say, if one is, in that sense, a philosopher?)"[11]. The bracketed sentence, identifying philosophers with those who seek understanding, is difficult to reject: no philosopher would endorse a self-characterization that does not involve the pursuit of understanding. The controversy would relate to what philosophers mean by the term 'understanding'.

I have been advocating the following: Shakespeare advances our understanding in several distinct ways. Firstly, his poetic insights

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[10]   Zamir, pp. 11-14.

[11]   Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 3.

constitute descriptively accurate statements of inner reality. Secondly, these insights are often condensed into a narrow textual space, creating 'intensity', a term denoting both a denser and richer experience of reality than what one ordinarily undergoes, and a qualitative amplification of understudied, weak inner structures. Such intensity offers itself to the philosopher both as an opportunity for studying reality and also as an experiential invitation. When probed, such moments enable a slowing down of perception and intake of the complexities within seemingly simple, one-dimensional processes. When embraced as an invitation to be moved, such moments enable the philosopher to undergo an interpenetration of descriptive insight and experience (to invoke the terms of Aristotelian rhetoric: to merge *logos* and *pathos*). 'Understanding' is both the broadening of accessible potential truths and the modification in one's experience of particular truth-claims.

Such a position holds for art and literature in general, not just for Shakespeare's work. But it is exceptionally suited to the merits characterizing his dramatized and non-dramatized poetic language. Other virtues of his work – such as characterization, an eye for dialogue and emotional development, a sensitivity to images (spoken or staged), multifaceted humour, a gendered-specific attunement to affective shades, and political sophistication in which the conservative is played against the subversive – might relate to philosophy in other ways. Here I have confined myself to the distinctiveness of the most salient feature of his art – his language and how it can contribute to understanding. A meaningful response to Shakespeare's works promotes understanding in both senses spelled out above. After writing this essay and spending time with *Sonnet 71*, I know more about seemingly generous erotic gestures. This understanding is couched both in what the sonnet conveys, at least what I take it to mean, and how it makes me relate to such content.

If the above is correct, philosophers access important insights by engaging in dialogue with Shakespeare's works. Should literary critics be concerned with philosophical criticism of this kind? The following five reasons suggest that they should. Firstly, the idea that a literary work may offer knowledge and anchor it in unique ways creates a powerful bridge between literary studies and philosophy. We read Shakespeare's works not only because they provide pleasure, or enable us to access the implicit ideological formations in early modern England, or because of their canonical status and poetic merits. Such

works can become pivotal in promoting understanding, and examining them can become a facet of the examined life.

Secondly, as shown in the above analysis, a philosophical reading is always attentive to the specific contribution that the literary work makes *as* literature. The philosopher will always be concerned with justifying the detour to knowledge by way of literature. What accordingly ensues is an examination of the features that make up literariness (in the analysis above, 'intensity'). Far from being an instrumentalization of literature as some might fear, philosophical criticism reopens the question of the literary, and provides a range of answers that relate to the specific contributions of literature to knowledge or to moral attunement.

Thirdly, by specifying such contributions, philosophical criticism is able to advance the political objectives of much contemporary work undertaken in literary studies. The focus in the last decades on forms of marginalization and ideology formation as these operate in literary works, is complemented and sharpened once one is also equipped with a reasoned position regarding the specific ways by which literature can articulate suffering, or the specific ways by which it recreates a power nexus. A sophisticated and nuanced version of the 'cultural turn' cannot mean flattening all practices to some all-enveloping discursive network, in which the distinct rhetoric of literature is ignored. One must attend the actual contours of specific formations – specifically, literary formations – and the particular ways in which they can promote or undermine power. Philosophical readings of literary works pinpoint the uniqueness of specifically literary depictions in their relation to knowledge, thereby contributing to the understanding of such representations as constituents of power.

Fourthly, philosophical criticism's focus on understanding enables justifying the non-arbitrary attribution of aesthetic value to a literary work. A 'great' or 'canonical' literary work is one that, among other virtues, provides and promotes understanding. Since such understanding is not merely reducible to paraphrasable content, but is rooted in forging an experiential connection with that content, a work attains high merit if it invites visitation and revisitation. Philosophical readings elucidate this content and the contact with it, thereby justifying the return to the specific work and its high valuation. While such merit can be ideologically exploited in various ways and harnessed to various non-aesthetic goals, the attributing of aesthetic merit, if based

on the rich understanding provided by the work, also recognizes an intrinsically valuable aspect inherent in the work as such.

Fifthly, critical schemes in literary studies are never evaluated solely in relation to their defensibility. What ultimately matters is whether they can mobilize interesting and rewarding readings. Philosophical criticism facilitates such readings. It justifies approaching a work not by evaluating it on its own terms (whatever that may mean), or as a prism through which one studies its formative culture, but by attending to how the work and its close-reading informs our own autonomous engagement and interest in a particular dimension of life (love in *Sonnet 71*). The close-reading becomes concept-oriented, in the sense of asking what the work might tell us about an important concept, one that underlies many of our concerns. The reading also becomes rhetorically oriented, in the sense of examining the nature of the experience created by the work. The dialogue with the work – a reading – thereby becomes an interplay between what a text might be saying about life, and literature's particular way of making such claims. Philosophical readings thereby turn literature into a contemporary guide and partner in an examined life.

11.

Where would philosophical studies of Shakespeare go in the future? Books on Shakespeare and philosophy are published all the time (I count six of them in the last three years). This growing interest need not imply a distinct orientation within Shakespeare studies. Much of this work searches for abstract thoughts in Shakespeare's plays or suggests tacit links between Shakespeare and the philosophical concerns explicitly voiced in the theology, philosophy, law, or political thought of his time. Such scholarship can obviously be profound and rewarding to read; but it does not differ significantly from other forms of contextualization routinely performed by literary critics.

The challenge facing work on Shakespeare and philosophy is whether it can amount to a fruitful, theoretically distinct approach to Shakespeare. From the standpoint of philosophers, the test for such fruitfulness is whether scrutinizing Shakespeare's works promotes the pressurizing of one's vocabulary, which is what philosophy ultimately is. For literary critics, fruitfulness would consist in the interpretive

payoffs that a concept-oriented reading yields. The disciplines need not be united in their verdict: philosophers might benefit from engagement with Shakespeare, while literary critics find that they gain little. Alternatively, literary critics might welcome readings by philosophers in a way that strikes other philosophers as intellectually shallow. Literary critics frequently cite and rely upon philosophers in their readings, often without the familiarity with the underlying philosophical motivations that philosophers bring to their enquiries. Philosophers might hesitate advocating practicing philosophy when, once it is exported into the context of a literary interpretation, it is unhappily liberated from the restrictions posed by a rigorous conceptual analysis. Such philosophizing can deteriorate into the production of seemingly profound, yet ultimately vague statements being applauded by practitioners of another discipline who lack the training enabling them to sift the wheat from the chaff.

Disciplinary labels aside, if the argument above regarding the different epistemologies underlying philosophy and literature is correct, literary interpretations (good ones) will often be philosophical – without mentioning it – by virtue of the unique interpenetration of insight and reader positioning that they explain and promote. An explicitly philosophical criticism would complement such interpretation with an examination of the epistemological state itself, what it includes or omits, and why it cannot be established by argumentation alone. The problem facing philosophical criticism here is the current disinterest in interpretation and close-reading within Shakespeare studies, and the preference for literary-oriented anthropology of various kinds. Shakespeareans, it seems, now restrict close-reading to their classrooms, allowing very little of it to trickle into their talks and publications. Accordingly, any reading-oriented, text-oriented (rather than culture-oriented) approach is likely to be suspected of a regressive agenda, a return to 'new criticism' and its latent conservative politics. Would developments within literary studies such as 'new aestheticism' or philosophical criticism recentralize the literary work? It is too early to tell.

By contrast to Shakespeare studies, the shifts within moral philosophy suggest a more optimistic future for philosophical criticism. The epistemic limitations of proposition-based, argument-based accounts regarding what it means to know are increasingly recognized. Alternatives to argument-based accounts are being sought. Literary works are being read with an eye to one compensatory thesis or another, in

which literature is seen as able to bypass limitations built into standard philosophical argumentation or into its default modes of moral reflection. There is a perceptible stream of work by philosophers who have not been daunted by Shakespeare or by the fear of being off-courted by Shakespeareans. Most of this work is anecdotal, in the sense of producing an insightful reading of one play or another. Rich and engaging as such interpretations often are, the greater philosophical challenge is to come up with a theoretically comprehensive project, in the sense of interpretations that are not haphazardly collected, but are rooted in an overarching position regarding the relations between philosophy and literature.

Since experience-based epistemological frameworks are proposed with growing refinement and sophistication within aesthetics, one can expect these to inform future philosophically-oriented readings of Shakespeare. I will risk a more specific guess (or hope) as to the contours of the next significant contribution to work done on the philosophy/ Shakespeare trajectory. Philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition (such as Shaun Gallagher, Mark Johnson, and Richard Shusterman) are very recently rethinking the body and the role of embodiment in world-processing (Continentalists have been doing this longer). This development could prove important to Shakespeare's philosophical critics. It could mean that Shakespeare's appeal as an author of *dramatic* poetry might begin to be focalized by aestheticians who are willing to experiment with the *enactment* of a poetically intense text and how theatricalizing words modifies understanding[12]. If the grasp of meaning is more than comprehension of a statement, if it can be significant to process propositional meaning when one's state is modified as well, if imaginative response to fictional characters qualitatively shapes and deepens what one understands, how would the dramatic acting of a text – its fuller embodiment – augment and consolidate what one knows? For example, what would a Stanley Cavell know, say, about the meaning of shame, if after completing his *Lear* interpretation, he acts (however amateurishly, but in earnest) in a performance of the play? I have recently watched a brilliant ageing actor remain naked before a large audience in the "off, off you lendings" scene. How does

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[12] Philosophical criticism would thereby reach out to include recent developments within performance studies regarding the unique status of the dramatic text. On this issue see William B. Worthen, *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

an experience of this kind affect one's sense and grasp of shame? The Shakespearean text is obviously pushing the actor further into exposure by enforcing partial or complete nakedness before others. What can such fuller imaginative embodiment teach?

Shakespeare is obviously not the only playwright whose work facilitates such enquiry in the context of dramatized poetry (not to mention non-poetic drama). But which other author furnishes a more fertile ground through which such a study can be undertaken?

Reading Shakespeare – Reading Modernity*

Kristin Gjesdal

In the history of German idealism, Hegel is often portrayed as the philosopher who, better than anyone else, captures the tensions of modern life, the way in which our search for autonomy and self-determination is linked up with the threat of alienation and homelessness. Herder, by contrast, is hardly known for his views on modernity. Instead, he is frequently portrayed as a thinker who prides himself on avoiding the problem of modernity altogether. 'Community' and 'belonging' are terms often used in discussions of Herder's work; the rhetoric of the fatherland and the mother tongue is never far away. Even the most charitable readers of Herder's work, such as Isaiah Berlin and Charles Taylor, are not usually in the habit of promoting him as a great philosopher of modernity. Herder, one might think, offers intriguing insights about the intertwining of thought and language, about history and the challenge of cultural differences. Yet it is Hegel, not Herder, who presents us with the true dilemmas of modern life.

This picture of Herder, I want to argue, is not entirely just. For although Herder does not engage in any straightforward discussion of modernity, this does not mean that he ignores the issue altogether. In order to see this, however, one cannot simply focus on the later Herder's discussion of cultural identity and belonging. Rather, one ought to consider the early Herder's reflections on art and history, and in particular his work on Shakespeare. Here, Herder focuses on the epistemic conditions of historical research and literary interpreta-

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tion. This area was surely not alien to Hegel either. However, Hegel's major contribution to this field is the idea of an all-comprehensive, continuous *Geist* in light of which past life forms present themselves to the hermeneutic mind as principally intelligible. Herder, by contrast, undermines this hermeneutic holism by emphasizing how past and distant civilizations, in their alterity, beg a conception of history that also takes into account the untranslatablility of the experiences that they convey. It is this aspect of his thinking – the deep-seated hermeneutic pluralism that he defends – that makes Herder a significant philosopher of modernity.

I shall explore these notions of modernity – Hegel's and Herder's – by, first, looking into Hegel's conception of reason in modernity, his discussion of Descartes and the predicament of post-Cartesian philosophy. I then go on to show how, according to Hegel, this predicament gets reflected within the framework of Shakespearean drama and how he claims that the tensions of early modernity are elevated into a higher unity by the coming to the fore of absolute knowledge. At this point Herder's philosophy of art and history offers an important alternative. Stepping back a good sixty years prior to Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, I explore the initial debate about Shakespeare in Germany, as well as the three different versions of Herder's essay "Shakespear". Finally, I conclude by sketching out the basic structure of Herder's hermeneutics and by suggesting how his theory of understanding fundamentally challenges the Hegelian tenors of later hermeneutic philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer.

1.

According to Hegel, no historical period can be understood in isolation. History, he argues, is a totality, an organic totality even. "The True", as he famously puts it, "is the whole"[1]. Any particular culture, any particular period of time, gains significance in terms of the larger, world-historical unity. Ultimately, this unity is conceptualized as the absolute, the unity of spirit, whose phenomenological journey through history culminates in the luminous transparency of speculative logic.

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[1]   Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Engl. transl. by Arnold Vincent Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 11.

Hence, in Hegel's view, the absolute "is essentially a *result*, […] only in the *end* is it what it truly is"[2].

Modernity is also inscribed within this grandiose Hegelian narrative. Like any other stage along spirit's path towards self-knowledge, modernity gains meaning and identity from previous times and periods. Yet in the story Hegel tells, modernity also emerges as something special. "A new epoch has arisen in the world", Hegel declares upon addressing the intellectual framework of his own period[3]. Modernity is our era, the point at which philosophy consciously retrieves the achievements of world-historical spirit. As such, it is the era of a reason that has grown up and matured[4]. Epistemologically speaking, this means that reason not only knows a number of things about the world, but also possesses a second-order knowledge of what knowledge is[5]. In this sense, modernity is the period when spirit has left the ontological level of a *being-in-itself* in favor of a dialectically mediated *being-for-itself* – the period of absolute spirit, the position in light of which previous philosophical conceptions of knowledge, culture, and morality gain their ultimate meaning[6]. In short, on Hegel's understanding, modernity is the period of self-reflection.

Self-reflection amounts to self-determination, Hegel thinks, and self-determination is tantamount to freedom. In post-revolutionary Europe, we encounter, for the first time, the idea of emancipation not just for a privileged minority but for all. Freedom is no longer an ab-

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[2] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 11.

[3] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Engl. transl. by E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1995, 3 vols, vol. III, p. 551.

[4] In light of this maturity, it applies that as far as factual information is concerned, "what used to be the important thing is now but a trace". Thus previous times are likened by Hegel to "exercises, and even games for children", *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 16.

[5] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 17. Or, as Hegel also puts it, its testing of knowledge is now "not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is" (p. 55). For a clear account of how this position critically carries on the perspective of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, see Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 191-93.

[6] With regard to the history of philosophy, Hegel concomitantly claims that "[a]ncient philosophy is to be reverenced as necessary, and as a link in this sacred chain [spirit's development], but all the same nothing more than a link". Furthermore, he reasons that "throughout all time there has been only one Philosophy", *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, pp. 547, 552.

stract principle. It is embodied, realized, and built into the teleology of our civil institutions. Because Hegel supports freedom, he supports modernity. Modernity is the highest stage of self-realizing spirit, and as such modernity is good.

However, for a dialectical thinker such as Hegel, no truth can be as plain and simple as that. If modernity comes across as a gain, this gain is the result of a painful and laborious *Bildung* in history. Knowledge and freedom are won through hardship and suffering[7]. Furthermore, having reached the level of absolute knowledge, spirit realizes that no progress is made without the tragic parting with times and life-forms past. Gaining something also means leaving something behind. Reflection on the development of spirit includes a dimension of lament and mourning – neither of static melancholy nor of petrifying obsession with the past, but of coming to terms with the ruination that is integral to the idea of the advancement of spirit as an advancement in history. This understanding of the history of spirit is reflected in Hegel's discussion of early modernity, and in particular in his reading of Descartes, the philosopher who came to initiate the paradigm of modern thinking.

2.

Traveling through a terrain that is basically unified, Hegel's world-historical spirit presents itself through a number of different characters and in different guises – "a gallery of images", as Hegel puts it towards the closing of the *Phenomenology*[8]. Its *modus* is that of "a self-originating, self-differentiating wealth of shapes"[9]; it is always the same, yet always different. This, however, does not mean that each historical constellation, each historical character, emerges as equally important. Hegel was no democrat in this sense of the term. Some figures, Hegel argues, articulate the intellectual watersheds, the junctions of history, in ways more apt than others. Within Hegel's retrieval of ancient Greek culture,

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[7]   Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Engl. transl. by Thomas Malcolm Knox, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975, 2 vols, vol. II, p. 1237. See also Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 7.

[8]   Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 492.

[9]   Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 9.

Antigone and Socrates work as such emblematic figures. When Hegel turns to his own field – that of modern philosophy – it is Descartes who stands out as the most significant voice. With Descartes, Hegel argues, reason is brought to consciousness of itself. This is the point at which spirit as we know it reaches familiar coasts[10].

Descartes, Hegel claims, liberated philosophy from theology[11]. In so doing, he did for philosophy what Luther did for religion[12]. Thinking was freed from the stifling grasp of tradition, and, in particular, from the doctrines of medieval scholasticism. One cannot, Hegel remarks, but admire the boldness of this maneuver. For the first time in history, individual thought made good on its own validity, and did so more or less from scratch. The ultimate touchstone is now "my own free thought"[13]. Philosophy emerges as responsible in a deeper sense than before.

Self-grounding is an a priori of modern thinking, an enabling condition, and to the extent that Descartes is the first to articulate this philosophically he is championed by Hegel as a hero of world-historical importance.

But if Descartes is championed as a hero of world history, he is nevertheless a hero of the past. Writing at the beginning of modernity, rather than at its end, Descartes could not possibly have reached the highest point of reflection, the maturity that Hegel found characteristic of his own time. Descartes's notion of self-grounding therefore cannot be ours, even if self-grounding in general is a principle that we adopt. What, then, hampers the Cartesian notion of self-grounding? According to Hegel, it is this: Descartes arrives at his famous cogito argument by hypostatizing the division between the freely determined scope of theoretical subjectivity and the causally determined realm of the material world. Descartes, Hegel finds, does not see that thought and reality are intertwined and thus ends up defending what Hegel takes to be an untenable form of philosophical idealism[14].

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[10] In Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy, the emergence of Cartesian philosophy is retrieved in the following terms: "Here, we may say, we are at home, and like the mariner after a long voyage in a tempestuous sea, we may now hail the sight of land", *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, p. 217.

[11] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, p. 224.

[12] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, p. 217.

[13] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, p. 218.

[14] This is how Hegel defines idealism: as a direction of thought that "proceeds from

Modern philosophy is haunted by this idealism. After Descartes, Hegel argues, philosophy inevitably has something abstract about it[15]. When spirit is seen as completely free and the world is understood in terms of causal laws, then mind is no longer able to recognize itself in its surroundings[16]. Hence the problem of Cartesianism is the problem of alienation. It is the problem of a mind that no longer belongs in the world, the problem of homelessness.

Now, it is one thing to attribute to modern philosophy – *post festum*, so to speak – the problem of homelessness and alienation. It is something quite different, however, to show that the feeling of alienation gets reflected, on a deeper level, within early modern culture itself. If philosophy, as Hegel argues, is but a conceptual articulation of a pre-conceptual, perhaps even pre-reflective, horizon of practice and understanding, then Hegel's case would be considerably stronger were he able to trace this problem back to Descartes's own time. This is the task that Hegel sets himself in his interpretation of Shakespeare.

3.

Hegel did not lecture extensively on art and aesthetic experience until the 1820s. Shakespeare's work, however, had been with him for almost a lifetime[17]. The 1820 lectures, given at the University of Berlin, address both the comedies and the historical dramas: among them *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Tempest*. Yet one cannot help noticing that it is the great tragedies – *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*

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what is inward; according to it everything is in thought, mind itself is all content", *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, p. 163.

[15]   Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, p. 166.

[16]   In fact, since the human being is not just spirit, but body as well, this is a problem of human self-understanding. Hegel asks how we understand the unity of soul and body when "[t]he former belongs to thought, the latter to extension; and thus because both are substance, neither requires the Notion of the other, and hence soul and body are independent of one another and can exercise no direct influence upon one another", *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. III, pp. 250-51.

[17]   According to Terry Pinkard's biography, Hegel had been given Shakespeare's collected works at the age of eight, and while visiting Paris in 1827 he watched Shakespeare being staged at the English Theatre. See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, vol. V, p. 551.

– that draw most of Hegel's attention. It is here, Hegel seems to imply, that the modernity of Shakespearean drama crystallizes in its clearest and most palpable form.

Because he focuses on Shakespeare's modernity, one would perhaps think that Hegel simply brackets the English playwright's indebtedness to the past. This, however, is not the case. Hegel repeatedly emphasizes how Shakespeare borrows his material from "sagas, old ballads, tales, chronicles"[18]. Shakespeare's modernity does not, in other words, rest with the mere content or material of his theatre, but rather with the way in which this content gets shaped. According to Hegel, it is Shakespeare's accomplishment to change the past tragedy of society and trans-individual world-views into a tragedy of subjectivity itself.

In Hegel's aesthetics, pre-Shakespearean drama is identified predominantly with Greek tragedy, and no Greek tragedy has been subject to closer philosophical examination than Sophocles' *Antigone*. *Antigone*, Hegel claims, presents us with the artistic core of tragedy. Here we face two different views of the world – each one of them perfectly coherent, each one of them perfectly justifiable in its own terms – in unrelenting conflict. Mediation is not an option here; nor is passive co-existence. As represented by Creon, the abstract justice of the gods crudely opposes the ethical message of family, kinship, and care that Antigone brings forth. This is not contingently so. It is a matter of strict necessity. In Hegel's interpretation, the characters of Greek drama personalize an ethical paradigm that is larger than themselves and through which their lives gain meaning and direction. Greek drama is populated by characters who, speculatively speaking, *are* their own absolutes.

This is not so, however, with Shakespeare's characters. Take, for example, the figure of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark. As opposed to Antigone and Creon, Hamlet incarnates no higher principles. Nor do the other characters in the play. Neither does Claudius, the brains behind the murder of the king and the target of Hamlet's fury, emerge as a person of principles. Draped in his new-won regality, Claudius does not, unlike Creon, deserve respect or obedience[19]. In fact, he is not even deserving of a gruesome and well-plotted death, as in the old revenge dramas such as Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* or the epic of *Amleth*. The new

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[18] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 288. See also p. 190.

[19] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1225.

king, whose presence, *via negativa*, determined the older Amleth's actions, is in Shakespeare's play a creature inviting unanimous contempt. In Shakespeare's version, the drama is not really between Hamlet and the new king. It is between Hamlet and Hamlet. This, Hegel argues, is something entirely new.

What kind of explanation does Hegel offer here? How does he account for this turn of Shakespearean drama? Hamlet, Hegel explains, is "full of disgust with the world and life"[20]. Nothing in this world, not even the presence of fair Ophelia, may temper his disgust or subject it to dramatic reparation. Denmark is rotten to the very core. Deprived no less of someone to love than of someone to hate, Hamlet has only himself to lean on. This, one may note, is a condition he shares with the Cartesian philosopher, as Hegel portrays him. Hamlet, however, has no share in the Cartesian confidence. The solid ground of clay and stone that Descartes, turning towards the thinking cogito, claims to have uncovered, is for Hamlet beyond reach. No remedy is powerful enough to put an end to his torturing doubts. Even a message as stark as the one brought forth by his father's ghost appears in a dubious light, and, as if that were not enough, Hamlet is not even convinced that the ghost was really present in the first place[21].

On Hegel's reading, a life of such uncertainties is not a life worth living. Yet it is also a life in which death is deprived of meaning. Antigone could punish Creon by taking her own life. Hamlet is left no such alternative. When death comes to Hamlet, it is stripped of pathos-filled splendor. Death arrives as an accident, a simple, almost trivial mistake (the swapping of swords). This is not the death of a man of honor. It is the death of a man of doubt, a death that provides no consolation, neither to Hamlet nor to us, the spectators and readers of Shakespeare's drama. Hamlet's death solves no problems and promises no future redemption. To a life absorbed in self-ransacking and uncompromising questioning, death comes as the ultimate confirmation of the meaninglessness of it all. But precisely for all his anti-heroic qualities, his despair and exasperation, does Hamlet appear to Hegel as a hero of modern life.

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[20]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1226.

[21]   The complexity of the ghost scene is elaborated in Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, especially chapters 4 and 5.

4.

Two very different personalities – Descartes and Hamlet – mark the beginning of Hegel's reconstruction of spirit's travel through modernity. By the looks of it, these personalities could hardly be more different. On the one hand, Descartes, who, although adopting the idea of a methodological doubt, believes that thought's reflective turn towards itself leads to a certainty so solid as to withstand the pressure of any skeptical objections. On the other, Hamlet, who could not possibly have dug himself deeper into doubt, self-hatred, and merciless agonizing. If Descartes embodies the philosophical nerve and cultural optimism of modernity, Hamlet emerges as the incarnation of dark melancholy and existential gloom.

How, then, can these two images of modernity be brought together? Can they be joined in any way? Or must we speak of two incompatible aspects of the same intellectual era? At least in Hegel's mind, this is not the situation. Rather, he suggests that the character of Hamlet exhibits the existential flipside of the modern (Cartesian) search for freedom and self-determination through a turn towards subjectivity. In modernity, self-determination is not a matter of opinion. It is a condition into which we are born. Even to eschew the path of self-determination is a self-determined choice. In such a predicament, individuals appear almost like "free artists of their own selves"[22]. The modern self does not, like previous Creons and Antigones, possess a set of ethical principles with which it may identify wholeheartedly[23], but appears, rather, as a creation – a work of art, as Hegel puts it[24].

However, in order to be fully self-responsible, spontaneous self-creation is not enough. The individual must also objectify herself, perceive herself from the outside. This generates a split mind, one of the judge and the judged, the reflecting and the reflected. Shakespeare, Hegel claims, presents us with an image of this predicament. He gives us a set of characters who, like Hamlet, are "inwardly divided against themselves"[25]. There are no absolutes in Shakespeare's

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[22] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1228.

[23] Pinkard clarifies this point by contrasting the groundedness of the Greek form of life with the groundlessness of the early modern world, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, p. 188.

[24] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1228.

[25] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1229.

universe, no transcendent God or principles that may, once and for all, put an end to this alienation. Self-determination, he shows us, means a condition in which no peace is on offer, one in which the modern individual is left to "endure the fate of finitude"[26]. This, in turn, means to endure the fact that our death, no less than Hamlet's, will have no greater meaning; it means to endure a condition in which we can find no consolation in the world, yet are deprived of the hope of a world beyond this one. Subjectivity has taken on too many God-like powers, as it were. Hence it must bear responsibilities of God-like proportions: the responsibility of healing alienation and division, the responsibility of finding meaning in life. In this sense, Hamlet's tragedy is the tragedy of a life that is led in the spirit of Cartesian philosophy – a spirit which Hegel, to be sure, felt like celebrating, but which he could still not see as an achievement worth celebrating on its own merits.

5.

However compelling and influential, Hegel's analysis of nihilism and alienation does not conclude his narrative about spirit's passage through modernity. The Cartesian spirit initiates modernity, but does not make up the final chapter of Hegel's retrieval of modern life. Through the movements of progressive history, spirit moves beyond the drama of early modernity. Division and alienation are overcome. Having taken subjectivism to a point at which it has exhausted its uttermost possibilities – where it embodies in its shape "as much of its entire content as that shape was capable of holding"[27] – modern subjectivity no longer has to negotiate the dilemma of values and normativity being *either* bestowed from a trans-subjective beyond *or* being an outcome of its own creation. Intersubjectivity has taken over the perspective of subjective idealism, and the 'I' recognizes itself as situated within a dialectics of mutual recognition. The field of intersubjectivity is the realm of a higher autonomy: through the civic institutions of family, law, and government, the modern self takes on a shared responsibility for its own condition. In ethics, art, and epistemology, the transition from

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[26]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1231.

[27]   Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 17.

subjective idealism to that of intersubjectivity announces the beginning of absolute knowing, the epistemic point of view that, ultimately, constitutes the condition of possibility for Hegel's phenomenological retrieval of the history of spirit.

Absolute knowing, however, demands not only a responsible and secularized conception of who we, as members of a given society, are and want to be, but also a notion of how we have become the ones we are – i.e., a reconstruction of spirit's way through history. In Hegel's opinion, this reconstruction, dialectically teasing out the various conjugations of spirit's development, is, as I have mentioned, a task of unification. The agony, doubt, and existential bewilderment that had been haunting Hamlet (as an emblem of early modern culture) is replaced by the tranquility of a fully perspicuous philosophical overview. Previous suffering – the intrinsic brutality of history – gets justified in light of a larger teleological meaning: the self-identity of absolute spirit.

It is at this point that the young Herder's studies of art and history offer an alternative to the Hegelian narrative, a conception that, many years prior to Hegel's *Phenomenology* and his *Lectures on Fine Art*, questions the idea of an overreaching, continuous reason in history. In Herder's work, the self-responsibility of reason is connected with the challenge of philological rigor and respect for the alterity of cultures that are historically or geographically distant from ours. This becomes particularly clear on comparing Hegel's reading of *Hamlet* with Herder's discussion of Shakespeare's work and literary style – or rather, his defense of the idea that Shakespeare had a literary style worth mentioning in the first place.

6.

In the 1820s, when Hegel first drafted his Berlin lectures, Shakespeare's reputation in Germany had reached almost stellar levels. Shakespeare was seen as the Bard of the North, and since every culture needs a Bard, a life without Shakespeare was, in Goethe's phrasing, barely a life at all[28]. Hegel, in other words, could well afford expounding on

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[28] Goethe quoted in Wolfgang Stellmacher, *Herders Shakespeare-Bild. Shakespeare-Rezeption im Sturm und Drang: dynamisches Weltbild und bürgerliches Nationaldrama*, Berlin, Rütten & Loening, 1978, p. 110.

Shakespeare's philosophical insights, rich and compelling as they were. Herder, addressing Shakespeare's work about sixty years earlier, knew no such luxury. For in order to arrive at a point where such a contemplation was possible, an intellectual atmosphere would have to be created in which Shakespeare's drama could be appreciated as art. That turned out to be easier said than done.

When Herder published his most famous piece on Shakespeare in 1773, the essay had been rewritten twice. The first version of the essay was finished in 1771, the second a year later. These two drafts provide a glimpse into the development of Herder's understanding of Shakespeare – how his perspective changes and how he, year by year, obtains a firmer grasp of the real philosophical problems behind the Shakespeare debate in Germany.

Within the context of German aesthetics, this debate stretched back to 1740, when *Julius Caesar* was made available in C. W. von Borcke's translation. Having spent three years as an ambassador in London, von Borcke thought it was high time the German audience got acquainted with the English poet. Presenting Shakespeare in a free, Shakespearean prose, however, would be going a step too far. Alexandrines it had to be, or nothing at all. In this sense, von Borcke, although appreciative of Shakespearean drama, was still under the sway of classicist aesthetics – which now appears as something of a paradox, considering how the debate that was to follow his translation was driven extensively by classicist worries.

Critical voices emerged as soon as von Borcke's translation was published. Among the most powerful of these was that of Christian Gottsched. Gottsched immediately sensed the threat of Shakespearean drama. This was a kind of drama, he feared, that would bring about a questioning of the ideals that he, as a poet as well as a theoretician, had vindicated with all his strength and energy. Thus he braced himself for a fight. Two arguments fueled Gottsched's crusade against Shakespeare, and one cannot help noticing the obvious tension between the two.

First, Gottsched found it necessary to remind the critical audience that Shakespeare was not German[29]. That, he thought, was a point to

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[29]   Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Beiträge zur critischen Historie der Deutschen Sprache* (1741), in Roy Pascal, *Shakespeare in Germany, 1740-1815*, New York, Octagon, 1971, pp. 38-39.

be used against him. Shakespeare's tradition was different from their own; his way of thinking was not natural to the Germans. This was a playwright who brought the lowly classes to the scene. The characters spoke with unsuitable accents. Princes socialized with peasants and gravediggers. As if that was not enough, Shakespearean tragedy inclined towards the supernatural. Ghosts and witches were not alien to this playwright, nor were fairies, spirits, and sinister elves. This was not the world as Gottsched knew it. And it was not a world that had anything in common with art as he knew it, either.

Art, as Gottsched knew it, was built on the ideals of a past long gone, the golden age of the Greek tragedies, whose aesthetic premises were laid out in Aristotle's *Poetics* and brought to life again in the work of Corneille, Racine, or, in a German context, his own dramatic writings. This gave rise to a second line of criticism. Despite the blatant nationalism that seems to drive his first objection, Gottsched now claimed that Shakespeare had missed out on the rules provided by the French. By these rules, he thought, German art ought to be guided. They were not expressive of a certain view of art, but of art as such. Order was required. There had to be a clear and well-organized plot. A firm and stable unity of time and place was a condition beyond questioning.

Neither of these requirements was heeded by Shakespeare[30]. Worse still, if Shakespeare broke the rules of French classicism, he did not care to do this with the rigor and consistency that ought to characterize the introduction of a new aesthetic regime. Shakespeare went against the rules of French classicism without even trying to offer another, alternative set of guidelines, or at least not anything Gottsched was able to recognize as a normative foundation for the new dramatic arts. Shakespeare was somewhat of an aesthetic anarchist, and from Gottsched's perspective that was an offense beyond redemption.

The second objection carries the burden of Gottsched's attack. For, as it is, Gottsched's nationalism did not go very deep. Neither did he reject the force of French drama, nor was he, generally speaking, opposed to the influence of English culture. He quoted Shaftesbury and Addison and is, indeed, known to have imitated the latter's polemical prose[31]. It is the question of breaking the rules of the classicist dogma

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[30] Gottsched, p. 39.

[31] See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Engl. transl. by Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 334.

in modern theater that emerges as the burning issue for Gottsched, and hence also for the writers rushing to defend Shakespearean drama against his virulent criticism.

Gottsched's writing proves a foil for Herder's essays. But so, one must add, do the texts that came to Shakespeare's aid. Important here is Johann Elias Schlegel's comparison between Shakespeare and Andreas Gryph (1742), but also, later on, essays by Lessing and Mendelssohn. More than anything else, however, it was Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg's *Briefe über Merkwürdigkeiten in der Litteratur* (1766) that would trigger Herder's curiosity and provoke his critical reaction.

Occasioned by Christoph Martin Wieland's Shakespeare translation – by which von Gerstenberg was not visibly impressed[32] – von Gerstenberg's essay voices the growing will to defend Shakespearean drama, although he is by no means ready to go all the way with the English playwright. Shakespeare, von Gerstenberg claims, had so far been judged by the wrong criteria. By and large, he had been judged by the standards of French tragedy. Yet French drama does not exhaust the resources of Greek poetics. Greek art is not just about rule-following and formal constraints, at least not if we follow Aristotle and his emphasis on passion and empathy[33].

If Shakespeare does not follow Aristotle in a way that can be recognized through the optics of a Francophile taste, this does not mean that he does not relate to Aristotle altogether. As opposed to previous drama, Shakespeare creates a new historical plot, von Gerstenberg claims, referring to the Scottish philosopher Henry Home. This turn towards history allows for a certain dramatic beauty, which very well complies with Aristotelian poetics[34]. Keen to defend the originality of Shakespearean drama, ultimately von Gerstenberg sympathizes with the well-known paradigm of the ancient Greeks. This is precisely what worries Herder, and what reading Shakespeare turns out to be his major concern in the first draft of the "Shakespear" essay.

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[32] Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg, *Briefe über Merkwürdigkeiten der Litteratur* (1766), in Pascal, pp. 55-56. Rehearsing the German adoption of Shakespeare, Friedrich Gundolf offers a more positive evaluation of Wieland's translation, Friedrich Gundolf, *Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist*, Berlin, Georg Bondi, 1914, p. 161.

[33] Gerstenberg, p. 56.

[34] Gerstenberg, pp. 65-67.

7.

Herder's first draft is composed as a letter to von Gerstenberg. Starting out in highly appreciative wording, the tone soon takes a more acrimonious twist. Von Gerstenberg, Herder acknowledges, defends Shakespeare by (indirect) reference to Aristotle. Yet the Aristotle to whom von Gerstenberg refers is a philosopher dressed up beyond Herder's recognition[35]. It is an Aristotle who has little in common with the teacher of Alexander the Great, i.e., the Greek philosopher as most of us would know him. Thus, in Herder's view, von Gerstenberg's mistake is twofold. First, von Gerstenberg thinks that Shakespearean drama is defensible only to the extent that it complies with the normative grid of Aristotle's poetics. Second, he stretches the scope of Aristotelian poetics so as to accommodate a drama whose complexity would be way beyond the reach of the ancient Greek imagination.

Shakespeare's theater, Herder argues, could hardly diverge more drastically from the drama that Aristotle had in mind. Take the issue of character. The famous Aristotelian hero was as grand as he was decisive. His fatal flaw – the flaw that would eventually bring him down – was one of which he was unaware and which therefore had the power to determine his actions. Shakespeare generates no heroes of this kind. Drowning in doubt and existential insecurity, Hamlet, for instance, is no man of action. In fact, according to Herder, Hamlet's pensive character makes one ask whether the plot would develop at all without the aid of the king, the queen, Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia[36]. If Hamlet is the main character of Shakespeare's drama, he is, at the same time, a deeply impoverished main character: not a hero who carries the dramatic development on his shoulders, but one who sinks into a potentially un-dramatic agonizing.

Likewise with the question of dramatic genre. With Shakespeare, this problem emerges as much more pressing than in the case of the Sophoclean drama to which Aristotle refers. Drama, Aristotle claimed, is either tragedy or comedy. Yet Shakespearean drama is often difficult to classify. Shakespeare, in fact, makes this an explicit point in *Hamlet*.

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[35]　Johann Gottfried Herder, "Shakespear (Erster Entwurf)", in *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Literatur 1767-1781, Johann Gottfried Herder Werke*, eds Ulrich Gaier *et al.*, Frankfurt, Deutscher Klassiker, 1985, 10 vols., vol. II, p. 523.

[36]　Herder, "Shakespear (Erster Entwurf)", p. 523.

When Hamlet, in Act II, stages the play within the play, we immedi-
ately encounter, along with tragedy, comedy, history, and pastoral, the
register of the pastoral-comical, the historical-pastoral, the tragic-his-
torical, and the tragic-comical-historical- pastoral. Ultimately, Herder
notes, it does not really make sense to speak of genre in a context like
Shakespeare's. Every play will have to give itself its own genre, a name
of its own[37], and in giving itself its own name it also gives itself its own
standard of dramatic imperatives and prohibitions.

To his points about character and genre, Herder now adds a third,
namely the idea that Shakespearean drama is not really drama but, as
he puts it, *Geschichte* (history)[38]. As we have seen, this point, first de-
veloped by Home, had already been explored by von Gerstenberg. Ac-
cording to Herder, however, it was not given the appropriate weight.
In Shakespearean drama, Herder claims, the theatrical simply vanishes
and so do scenery, imitation, and declamation. Shakespeare does not
present us with theatre in the old-fashioned meaning of the term. He
presents us with the world, people, passions, and truth[39].

Herder, in this context, mentions no names, but the argument draws
not only on Home but also on the British poet Edward Young, whose
Conjectures on Original Composition was translated into German in 1760,
just a year after its first appearance in English. Shakespeare, Herder
claims – reciting Young's argument (and completely neglecting the in-
fluence of Shakespeare's contemporaries) – is original. He gives voice
to a natural drive, and does not imitate at all. The French classicists,
by contrast, did precisely that. They looked at previous literature, i.e.,
Greek drama, and held it forth as an aesthetic ideal directly applicable
to their own time. Hence they forgot about the relationship between
art and world. Ultimately, Herder argues, the fact that Shakespeare, in
his originality, produces *Geschichte* rather than drama means that he
needs to be freed from the normative yolk of previous literature and
poetics. Against von Gerstenberg's attempts at defending Shakespeare
with reference to Aristotle, Herder finds Shakespearean drama too dif-
ferent to benefit from such a comparison.

With this argumentative gesture, the critical gist of the German
Shakespeare debate is elevated to a new, philosophical level. It shifts

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[37]   Herder, "Shakespear (Erster Entwurf)", p. 524.

[38]   Herder, "Shakespear (Erster Entwurf)", p. 525.

[39]   Herder, "Shakespear (Erster Entwurf)", p. 526.

from the simple options of pros and cons to a discussion of the validity of ahistorical aesthetic norms in a historically developing art world.

8.

Herder's second draft, written about a year later, carries this train of thought a good step further, but also adds to it in terms of argumentative richness and sophistication. Whereas in the first draft Herder is happy merely to point out the originality of Shakespeare's plays, he now faces the deeper, philosophical conclusions to be drawn from this originality.

If every Shakespeare play is original and unique, Herder argues, then this must be reflected in our conception of art. The uniqueness of a play cannot be justified with reference to universal definitions or criteria. This, in turn, means that in the case of a drama like Shakespeare's, the *work* itself is forced to carry the responsibility of justifying its own existence[40].Without the aid of aesthetic imperatives, every work is required to answer the question as to why it is a work of art – and to do so in an original and non-imitative way. For us, having been through the aesthetic paradigms of romanticism and the avant-gardes of the twentieth century, the idea might be familiar. To Herder's audience, however, it was not.

Eager to explore the implications of Shakespeare's modernity, Herder raises a question that had so far been left out of the debate: could Greek poetics be at all normatively binding for Shakespeare? And, furthermore, can it be at all binding for us?[41] Herder, once more, emphasizes the co-belonging of work and world. History develops continuously. Because history is always underway, so also is art. What Sophocles could take for granted, Shakespeare could not. Sophocles, Herder thought, could write tragedies that were predicated upon an overreaching social unity. His was a relatively homogeneous world[42].

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[40] Herder, "Shakespear (Erster Entwurf)", pp. 533, 535.

[41] Herder, "Shakespear (Erster Entwurf)", p. 545.

[42] This view of Greek society and Greek tragedy, later echoed in Schiller's contrast between naive and sentimental poetry, now seems far too simplistic. For a more nuanced account of Greek tragedy and life, see Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*, Paris, François Maspero, 1972, and *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne deux*, Paris, Editions la Découverte, 1986.

Elizabethan England, by contrast, knew no such homogeneity. Hence, Shakespeare would be unfaithful to his world were he to present it as homogeneous and unified. He simply could not place before us an action that was self-contained in the sense of providing a classic, dramatic unity: one time, one place, and one tragic hero. Instead, he must reflect the world as fragmented and divided. Whereas Sophocles, in making his characters stick unwaveringly to one, and only one, belief-system, writes tragedies that resemble "a beautiful painting", Shakespearean drama is like an entire magic lantern[43]. But precisely in presenting us with the images of a magic lantern, jittery and ephemeral as they are, he also presents us with the unavoidable conditions of our art, of what we, with Hegel, may address as the art of modernity.

In other words, the form of Greek drama was not available to Shakespeare. Nor is it available to us. Modern drama cannot be measured by Aristotelian standards. Shakespeare, to stay with Herder's example, does not need Aristotle. Or rather, as Herder now suggests, if he needs an Aristotle it must be his *own* Aristotle[44]. But this Shakespearean Aristotle must be one who is not geared towards the production of universal aesthetic norms. He must be one who aspires to a skillful reading of the particular works and passages, thus indirectly reminding us that within the area of art and aesthetic expression there is no such thing as a finite set of general rules or criteria.

9.

Transcending the framework of the previous Shakespeare debate – the option of either scorning Shakespeare because he fails to comply with Aristotle, or stretching the boundaries of Aristotle's poetics so as to include Shakespearean drama – Herder, in the second draft, keeps open the possibility that an Aristotle of our time does in fact exist. Not surprisingly, the critic he is thinking of is, again, Home. According to Herder, Home had presented himself as an advocate of cultural diversity and the relativity of taste[45]. Influenced by G. L. L. Buffon's notion

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[43]   Herder, "Shakespear (Zweiter Entwurf)", p. 545.

[44]   Herder, "Shakespear (Zweiter Entwurf)", p. 548.

[45]   See Johann Gottfried Herder, *Kritischen Wälder zur Ästhetik*, especially "Viertes Wäldchen" (1769), in *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Literatur 1767-1781*.

of a natural history (and his understanding of the meaning of species as logical rather than real), he had attempted to ground a science of man in the historical description of various cultures and life-forms[46]. Rather than proposing a set of new normative guidelines in aesthetics, he questioned the relevance of trans-cultural, trans-historical guidelines for our understanding of art and culture.

The third and final version of the Shakespeare essay no longer appears to contain any notion of a Shakespearean Aristotle. It seems that Herder has changed his opinions about the normativity of the Greeks. What he now senses is that as soon as one leaves behind the mindset of French classicism, there is no real contradiction between Aristotle, on the one hand, and the call for a new poetics, on the other. Aristotle, he now finds, does not really speak out against the plea for a pluralistic aesthetics and art criticism. On the contrary, Aristotle's point of view may turn out to support such a position. The argument, one quickly realizes, is a version of that first developed by von Gerstenberg, although in Herder's essay it is given a philosophical emphasis and direction that could not have been envisaged by von Gerstenberg.

Needless to say, the strategy could hardly be slyer. Joining forces with Aristotle, Herder deprives his opponents of their chief witness in the case against Shakespeare and the new, non-classicist art. It is no surprise, then, that the third and final version of the essay sports a tone of triumph and victory.

In the first two drafts, Herder had sought to undermine the case of Shakespeare's critics as well as those who uncritically celebrated his work. Now his confidence has grown and he decides to address an even more comprehensive problem. Although it is not explicitly brought to the fore, the third version of the essay raises a question of the most universal nature: not just what makes Shakespeare's art modern, but what makes art art. What conception of art can we entertain if both Sophocles and Shakespeare lay equally justifiable claims to the terms 'art' and 'literature'?

The classicist paradigm maintained that the qualities of Sophoclean drama may be expressed in the form of aesthetic rules and guidelines, but Herder is not convinced. Is the greatness of Sophocles really to be found in his "rules"? No, he claims, it is not. Modern society with its

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[46]   See John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 234-37.

"[h]istory, traditions, customs, religion, the spirit of the time, of the nation, of emotion, of language – [is] so far from Greece!"[47] Hence Greek sculpture and drama cannot be understood in terms of our point of view. As far as possible, Greek art should be understood in terms of itself. According to Herder, "Anyone who reads [Sophocles] with clear eyes and from the point of view of Sophocles' own time will […] realize that everything he says was virtually the opposite of what modern times have been pleased to make of it"[48]. Sophocles lends voice to his world – the joys of his fellow citizens and the worries that plague them. Hence his genius does not consist in presenting a set of eternal aesthetic norms. Rather, his drama expresses the wider horizon of his culture, the ethical and political parameters of the society to which he belongs.

World and work are related – this, Herder now claims, is the lesson to be learned from the ancient Greeks. Grasping the close-knit relationship between work and world not only changes our approach to Greek tragedy but also our conception of Shakespeare. If Shakespeare is to match the genius of the Greek playwright, he cannot simply imitate the way Sophocles lent voice to his world but must lend voice to his own world, that of Elizabethan England. Only thus may he 'imitate' the spirit which made Sophocles' tragedies the great works they were; only by being distinctly unlike Sophocles may he be his equal. By adopting Sophocles' "rules", Shakespeare would simply miss out on the genius of the ancient tragedian. What we perceive as Sophocles' "rules" were not rules to him, and this applies to the other tragedians as well. "The artificiality of their rules", Herder claims, "was – not artifice at all! It was Nature"[49]. Only to us may these dramas appear as rule-bound, as artifice properly speaking; to the Greeks these "rules" were non-formalized, tacit aspects of tragedy-production and culture at large. In order to do what Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides did, Shakespeare would have to let himself be guided by equally tacit and non-formalized sensibilities. This is the point promoted by the third and argumentatively most mature version of Herder's essay on Shake-

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[47]   Johann Gottfried Herder, "Shakespeare", in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe*, ed. Hugh B. Nisbet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 167.

[48]   Herder, "Shakespeare", p. 164.

[49]   Herder, "Shakespeare", p. 162.

speare: that Shakespeare, as Herder puts it with a phrase he borrows from Young, "is Sophocles' brother, precisely where he seems to be so dissimilar, and inwardly he is wholly like him"[50].

10.

On the very face of it, Herder's idea of Shakespeare being Sophocles' brother despite the obvious differences between the two – or, stronger still, precisely because of the differences between the two, differences which, in turn, point to deeper similarities, namely the capacity to express the spirit of their age – seems like an early version of the idea, later to be associated with Kant and the romantics, that the work of art is by definition the work of genius; that there is, within the realm of art, no room for imitation and that genius speaks with the free and unhampered voice of nature. One can never learn how to be a genius, the romantics had claimed. Genius is a gift, the gift to produce works whose originality is recognized by the community of qualified judges of taste[51].

Such a conception, one may easily object, has little to say about premodern works, which were often produced with reference to traditional knowledge and craftsmanship. However, Herder is not claiming that every work of art is individual in this radical, romantic sense. In his view, such a model would not even provide us with an adequate description of modern art. Modern art is not brought forth in a creative vacuum. It is not the work of an isolated, individual genius. Rather, every work of art lends voice to the pre-reflective horizon that prevails in the community in which it was created. The work may well

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[50]   Herder, "Shakespeare", p. 172.

[51]   Interestingly, Kant's discussion of the misunderstanding of creative genius – as it is represented by the "charlatans" who "speak and decide like a genius even in matters that require most careful rational investigation" – entails a criticism of Herder. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Engl. transl. by Werner S. Pluhar, London, Hackett, 1978, sect. 47, p. 310; and also John H. Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's* Critique of Judgment, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 34. Kant's remarks seem unjustified, however, in particular when taking into account how Herder claims that mixing thinking and aesthetic practice, even within the realm of aesthetics, easily ends in "a monstrosity" in aesthetics ("ein Ungeheuer von Ästhetik"), Herder, *Kritischen Wälder zur Ästhetik*, "Viertes Wäldchen", p. 182. See also Robert E. Norton, *Herder's Aesthetics and the European Enlightenment*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 182.

transcend the aesthetic resources available to this community, but it is not independent of them. An artwork is neither a purely individual expression nor an expression that may be adequately accounted for in terms of the already prevalent symbolic language of a given community. It is between these two extremes – that of individuality and that of shared symbolic resources – that a work of art, like all communication, is positioned. An ancient work may inhabit this field in a way that differs from a modern work. It cannot, however, transcend this area altogether. Nor is this an option open to the modern artistic mind[52]. However, if every work is unique in this way, understanding becomes a problem. This, one would assume, is even more so when relating to works that are historically or culturally distant.

The problems of historiography and understanding constitute a field in which Herder, in the early 1770s, had already been working for some time. In an early version of the *Critical Forests*, the *Older Critical Forestlet* (1767-68), written just three years before his first Shakespeare essay, Herder had been discussing a number of different historical models, but in particular the idea of a continuous, historical narrative or doctrinal structure (*Lehrgebäude*). Johann Joachim Winckelmann – the "best historian of the art of antiquity"[53], as Herder was later to put it in *This Too a Philosophy of History* – had been defending such a model. However, in Herder's opinion, a full teleology or system of history would require the recounting of every stage in history to be "*whole*, exhaust the subject, show it to us from all sides"[54]. If such an account existed, Herder says, he would praise its author as "the first, the greatest"[55]. Yet such an account remains utopian, beyond the reach for "us one-sidedly seeing human beings"[56]. Hence, realizing that the turn towards a systematic account of history is the point where "historical seeing stops and prophecy begins"[57], Herder remarks laconically that

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[52]   According to John H. Zammito, it applies that "[f]or Herder, the uniqueness of an author was always a function of his historical situatedness", *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, p. 340.

[53]   Johann Gottfried Herder, "This Too a Philosophy of History", in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and Engl. transl. by Michael N. Forster, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 283.

[54]   Johann Gottfried Herder, "Older Critical Forestlet", in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 258.

[55]   Herder, "Older Critical Forestlet", p. 258.

[56]   Herder, "Older Critical Forestlet", p. 259.

[57]   Herder, "Older Critical Forestlet", p. 259.

he would "prefer to think"[58], i.e., to turn hermeneutics and the episte-mological problems of history into a subject of philosophical scrutiny and discussion.

As expounded in the Shakespeare essay – both in Herder's hands-on engagement with Shakespeare's work and in his theoretical re-flections on interpretation – the capacity to overcome historical (or cultural) distance is not something that we can take for granted. Rather, it poses a problem for the interpreter. A work of art cannot be understood merely in terms of its effective history, the way in which its meaning gets elaborated through the gradually richer fabric of spirit's self-interpretation. This does not mean that we have no ac-cess to historical texts at all, i.e., that they are bound to remain alien. What it means is that the finely tuned historical mind must be suspi-cious of over-generalized models, and turn, rather, towards philolog-ical work. This is an idea which gradually matures and gets clearer throughout the three editions of Herder's essay on Shakespeare, as it moves from a defense of Shakespeare against those who, with refer-ence to Aristotle, either reject or excuse his work, to a full-fledged discussion of the prejudices with which we perceive Aristotle as well as Shakespeare.

11.

Why, then, does this imply a call for a genuinely modern herme-neutics? In order to see why this is so, it might, again, be useful to turn to Hegel and the way in which his understanding of tradition and history has influenced the direction of later hermeneutics. In this context, one cannot miss noting how Hegel has been particularly im-portant for Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, the work which more or less coined the current use of the term hermeneutics. Hegel, Gadamer claims, came to determine the direction of his attempt to liberate himself from what he, rightly or not, takes to be the sub-jectivist legacy of Friedrich Schleiermacher's and Wilhelm Dilthey's notions of a critical method in understanding. By emphasizing how the past presents itself to us against a background of continuous his-torical mediation, Hegel paves the way for his own conception of the

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[58]   Herder, "Older Critical Forestlet", p. 258.

productivity of tradition[59]. Gadamer, however, does not go all the way with Hegel. In particular, he is worried that Hegel's notion of absolute spirit testifies to a problematic idealism. As far as Gadamer is concerned, there is no end to philosophy, no point at which phenomenology may culminate in the lucidity of a grand logical system[60].

Hegel's idea of reason being able fully to account for its own historical development is, as we have seen, part of his attempt critically to carry on the legacy of early modern philosophy: the turn towards the self-grounding of thought and, furthermore, the connection between the autonomy of reason and its capacity for self-reflection. This is another point at which Gadamer hesitates. In his view, reason is not autonomous in the way the idealist tradition took it to be. Being historically situated, reason is always conditioned by a set of prejudices and assumptions which it cannot scrutinize *in toto*. Through its dialogical interaction with texts and expressions of the past, reason may well expand its horizon, but this, in Gadamer's view, is an ongoing process, not the final outcome of spirit's journey through history. A point of full self-understanding is not within the reach of final reason, not even reason as it develops towards the phases of late modernity.

At this point, Herder offers a third possibility[61]. A modern hermeneutics, he suggests, cannot be grounded in the idea of a continuous, all-embracing tradition. Indeed, in his view, such an idea would

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[59]   See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Engl. transl. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York, Continuum, 1994, pp. 277-85.

[60]   Thus Gadamer, although basically Hegelian in his orientation, sets out "to restore to a place of honor what Hegel had termed 'bad infinity' [*schlechte Unendlichkeit*]", reformulated in terms of the (Platonic) idea of the "unending dialogue of the soul with itself", Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reflections on My Philosophical Journey", Engl. transl. by Richard E. Palmer, in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn, Chicago, Open Court, 1997, p. 37. See also Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 369.

[61]   Indeed, throughout the early 1940s, Gadamer discusses Herder's potential for a contemporary hermeneutics, but, importantly, he does not turn to the young Herder's hermeneutics but to the later Herder's attempt to rescue the notion of *Volk* from its democratic interpretation. Herder, he claims, was the visionary of a new fundamental force in the public sphere; this is the life of the folk. He perceives the reality first in the voice of the people in songs; he recognizes the supportive and nurturing power of the mother tongue, he traces in this the imprinting force of history that fuses with the natural conditions of blood, climate, landscape and so on. Thus, through him, the word "folk [Volk]" achieves in Germany a new depth and a new power entirely remote from that political catchword, a world apart from the political slogans of "democracy". Quoted from Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 71. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Volk und Geschichte in Denken Herders*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1942, pp. 22ff.

not really live up to the challenges of a self-responsive reason. Like Gadamer, Herder is cautious to stress the limitations of historical reason, but unlike Gadamer he finds this incompatible with the idea of an all-encompassing, continuous tradition. History, Herder emphasizes, is marked by "leaps and gaps and sudden transitions"[62]. Within this field, "every *general image*, every *general concept*, is only an *abstraction*"[63]. Hence, what is needed is not an all-encompassing synthesis-formation (in the form of a speculative logic or a continuous *Wirkungsgeschichte* [effective history]) but the willingness to approach historical works on their own terms. Self-authentication, on this model, is precisely not to act on the notion of an unbroken tradition, be it in the Hegelian or the Gadamerian version, but to realize that the historicity of reason compels us to reflect on our own limitations in the encounter with culturally distant life-forms[64].

Admittedly, it would not be right to claim that such an insight is completely absent in the work of Hegel and Gadamer. Still, as I have been trying to show, the concern for the alterity of past cultures, even the cultures of our own tradition, is given a different twist, a much clearer emphasis, in Herder's writings on art and history, and in particular in his work on Shakespeare. According to Herder, however, the limitations of historical reason do not imply that we are boxed within our own culture, but beg the kind of intellectual cosmopolitanism that comes only from the study of other cultures. Hence, what makes Herder's hermeneutics, as it develops throughout his early years, genuinely modern, is the suggestion, to be developed further in works such as *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91), that the historian should not strive towards grand historical syntheses, but rather, taking differences, leaps, and discontinuities into account, plead for tolerance and cultural understanding. This – the idea that a modern hermeneutic mind is in this sense responsible for its own interpretative endeavors – is the hermeneutic challenge that opens up in the wake of Herder's engagement with early modern literature and thinking.

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[62] Johann Gottfried Herder, "Ossian and the Songs of Ancient Peoples", in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism*, p. 160.

[63] Herder, "This Too a Philosophy of History", p. 293.

[64] As John H. Zammito puts it, "[t]he crucial innovation in Herder's hermeneutics is recognizing the openness of the subject, not simply of the object, of interpretation", *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, p. 339.

"The Charm Dissolves Apace": Shakespeare and the Self-Dissolution of Drama

Paul A. Kottman

1.

Everything I will try to say in this essay will, I believe, make a bit more sense if I begin with a few words about G. W. F. Hegel's reflections on the fate of art.

According to Hegel, artistic practices are ways that we try to evaluate and make sense of our lives, of our world, of the claims of nature upon us, and of what we do (or might do) and say with one another. Art is not the only way we do this, of course; there is also mythology, religion, education, science or philosophy. Artistic practices are distinctive, however, in that their sense-making potential is tied to the way they work with and through specific media – stone, paint, sound, or speech – and to the way in which artistic transformations of these media reflect socio-historical transformations in our overall self-understanding.

In Hegel's account, the development of artistic practices – that is, of historically shifting, context-specific needs for different 'arts' (e.g. the need for pyramids in Egypt, for classical sculpture in Greece, or for painting in Christian Europe), as well as internal developments within those arts (from 'symbolic' to 'classical' to 'romantic', for example, or from epic to lyric) – presents an ongoing and increasing de-naturalization or 'spiritualization' of our self-understanding. According to Hegel, the more that we see ourselves as – or teach ourselves that we are – free and self-determining subjects, the less we are dependent upon, or needful of, artistic expressions that work with 'natural' or sensible media in order to understand ourselves, and our world. The twist in Hegel's story is that sensuous, representational artistic practices *are* (or 'were') a primary way we teach ourselves this

lesson – because by transforming natural material in modes that we can regard as 'free' from material or instrumental needs, we express our own liberation and, in this way, *become* free. Art, claims Hegel in a famous passage, allows a free human being to "strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization of himself"[1]. And once this lesson is absorbed – that is, once we see ourselves as liberated from nature, inasmuch as the terms of our self-understanding no longer depend upon, and are no longer limited by, something 'out there' called 'Nature' or 'God' or the 'One' or whatever – we find ourselves less needful of the sensuous representational works by which we 'taught ourselves' this lesson. Coming to understand ourselves as free and self-determining entails (and perhaps even requires) a diminishing need to make sensuous, representational artworks, even as it entails a heightened need for 'philosophical' reflection on our (past) need for sensuous representation. This is what Hegel means when, famously, he claims: "art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past"[2]. (As others have pointed out, Hegel's argument is not that art has come to an end, but rather that we can outlive, culturally, our need for sensuous, representational art as a deeply essential mode of self-understanding[3].)

Furthermore, for Hegel, this ongoing de-naturalization unfolds (or has unfolded) through an increased awareness *within* artistic practices *of* artistic practices as medium-specific. So, for instance, classical

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[1]   Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Engl. transl. by Thomas Malcolm Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, 2 vols, vol. I, p. 31.

[2]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 11.

[3]   So, this is not to say that there are not other ongoing critical 'needs' for sensuous, representational art – only that these needs are now less essential to our deepest efforts at self-understanding, what Hegel calls "the deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit [Geist]", *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 7. For more on this point, see, as a start, the discussions of Hegel – and the debates over this pronouncement – in Dieter Heinrich, "Art and Philosophy of Art Today: Reflections with Reference to Hegel", in *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism*, eds Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange, Engl. transl. by David Henry Wilson *et al.*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, pp. 107-33; Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, especially pp. 81-115; Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel and the 'End' of Art", *Owl of Minerva*, 29:1 (1997), pp. 1-19; Gregg Horowitz, *Sustaining Loss: Art and Mournful Life*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001; Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor After Hegel*, Engl. transl. by James McFarland, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006, especially Chapter 2.

architecture manifests a higher awareness of its own status as archi-
tecture – of itself as a freestanding, artificial, material construction
– than does symbolic architecture. "The peculiarity of Greek archi-
tecture", writes Hegel in a typical formulation, is that by fluting and
other means "it gives shape to […] supporting *as such* and therefore
employs the column as the fundamental element in the purposive-
ness of architecture"[4]. Similarly, as Robert Pippin has convincingly
argued, the deepening self-reflexivity of modernist and abstract
painting – paintings about painting as such – might be understood to
fall within the purview of the overall narrative that Hegel offers[5]. Per-
haps the easiest way to see the point here is to consider how artworks
– once they no longer need to be about this or that content 'out there'
(a material purpose, an animal quarry, a 'god', a bit of shared history)
– are freed up to determine *for themselves* their own content. And this
'freeing up' is perhaps most clearly manifested when artworks start
to be about themselves. Self-reflexive artworks and practices undeni-
ably assert the autonomy of human artistry.

Now – to move closer to our topic here – thinking along these
lines also led Hegel himself, at the end of his *Lectures on Fine Art*,
to consider dramatic poetry as "the highest stage of poetry and of
art generally" because "in contrast to the other perceptible materials,
stone, wood, color and notes, speech is alone the element worthy of
the expression of spirit"[6]. Dramatic poetry is, for Hegel, inherently
more self-reflexive than sculpture, painting or architecture because
its 'medium' – namely, speech – is from the start 'spiritual', human,
de-naturalized. Hence, drama is already freer than the other arts
when it comes to choosing its content.

A quick way of grasping the stakes of Hegel's high regard for dra-
matic poetry is to recall his idiosyncratic (for a German writer of his
period) disinterest in natural beauty, his assertion that "the beauty

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[4] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 666, my emphasis.

[5] I realize, of course, that I am skipping over a number of important questions – for
     example, those having to do with the differences between the fates of classical and
     romantic art in Hegel's account. But I think my overall point about de-naturalization
     as self-reflexivity can stand, for the moment, without tackling those questions. On
     this point, I am following Robert Pippin, "What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point
     of View of Hegel)", *Critical Inquiry*, 29 (August 2002), pp. 1-24.

[6] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Dramatic Poetry", in *Philosophers on Shakespeare*,
     ed. Paul A. Kottman, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 57.

of art is *higher* than nature"[7]. (Recall, for instance, Hegel's blunt declaration that in landscape painting the "work of the spirit acquires a higher rank than the mere natural landscape"; or, similarly, his provocative assertion that Titian, Dürer and others have painted portraits that are "more like the individual than the actual individual himself"[8].) Only in being transformed artistically do natural materials (stone, sound, color and so on) acquire a specific meaning for us[9]. In Hegel's view, nature and natural materials are in and of themselves – as the philosopher of history, Hayden White once quipped to me, as we gazed upon a choice piece of California real estate – boring, lacking a plot[10]. Northrop Frye expressed the same thought about drama when he wrote that dramatic poetry fully "belongs to the world man constructs, not to the [natural] world he sees; to his home, not his environment"[11].

If artistic practices are medium-specific modes of self-understanding, goes the thinking here, then what medium could be more adequate to our reflexive self-understanding than that which, so to speak, we know to be 'ours' from the get-go? Not elements ripped from an indifferent domain of nature (sound, color, hard materials like stone or marble), in other words – but rather what Giambattista Vico described in terms of "poetic wisdom": elements of culture and history, words and deeds, social principles and passionate aims, conflicts between individual characters. Because such elements are the 'stuff' of poetry, and in a special way of dramatic poetry, to work in the dramatic arts entails a degree of self-awareness (as a historical being or 'people') that is probably missing, say, from most symbolic sculpture.

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[7]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 2. On this point see Pippin, "What Was Abstract Art?", p. 9.

[8]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 29; vol. II, pp. 866-67.

[9]   At a minimum, a bit of 'nature-wrought-into-art' expresses the capacity of stone, sound or color to transmit meaning for a particular community and its practices. Art, as Hegel puts it, creates a reality that is "besouled" ["für sich beseelt"] – by which, as Robert Pippin aptly states, Hegel does not mean that human freedom re-enchants the world through artistic means but rather that art "elevates us above the need for [the] enchantment [of the natural world]". See Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 834; and Pippin, "What Was Abstract Art?", p. 8.

[10] Hegel's way of putting it is to say that nature is "spiritless".

[11] Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, Toronto, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1963, p. 8.

Moreover – à propos of our topic here – we will do well to remember not only that Hegel ranks dramatic poetry as the highest (the most prevalently spiritual) artistic practice, but also the fact that he thought among modern dramatists "you will scarcely find any […] who can be compared with Shakespeare"[12].

And so, although Hegel does not say so explicitly, we can nevertheless infer – from the perspective of my highly condensed account here – that Shakespeare's pre-eminence in Hegel's account of the history of human artistic development should have something to do with Shakespeare's heightened degree of self-reflexivity, his dramatic presentation of drama *as such* and of the sort of self-understanding it affords[13]. Or, at least, I want to assert such an inference as my opening gambit in this short essay.

2.

Now, of course self-reflexivity (or self-referential theatricality) abounds in other pre- or non-Shakespearean dramatic works and practices – for example, in the formal composition of Chorus in Greek Tragedy, or the self-referential character of gestures and costumes in Japanese Noh, Kyogen or Kabuki. (Not to mention in the architectonics and choreographic practices of various types of world drama, whether or not such dramas are 'scripted'.) So, too – to scoot closer to Shakespeare's original context – it is by now a scholarly truism to note that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English drama was comprised of a set of highly self-conscious artistic practices, in which a dramatic work's standing as 'theater' was reflexively presented in

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[12]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1228.

[13]   Shakespeare's pre-eminence in Hegel's account – the fact, for instance, that Hegel's discussion of Shakespeare comes at the culmination of his *Lectures on Fine Art* – would, of course, require some qualification. Hegel also seems to claim that Greek art is more fulfilled *as art* than modern art, and his high regard for Sophocles seems of a piece with that view. "There is", as Robert Pippin notes, however, "another sense in which he claims that the ethical life behind Shakespeare's presentation and the kind of self-awareness visible in Hamlet, say, does represent an advance or moment of progress", Robert Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 84, note 12. See, further, the discussion of Hegel and Shakespeare in Henry and Anne Paolucci, *Hegelian Literary Perspectives*, Smyrna, Del., Griffon House, rpt. 2002.

both the composition and performance itself[14]. In light of all this, the highly self-conscious nature of so much Shakespearean drama – the play-within-the play of *Hamlet*, the Chorus of *Henry V*, Rosalind's epilogue in *As You Like It* and so forth – can seem, simply, of a piece with so much self-awareness in the dramatic practices of various periods and regions, above all his own native context.

At the same time, one of the distinguishing features of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European dramatic practices – and, especially, of Shakespeare's work – is a double theatrical self-awareness: namely, a certain *historical* self-awareness of their own presentation of theatrical self-reflexivity as such vis-à-vis earlier self-reflexive dramatic practices, in addition to self-referentiality vis-à-vis their own works.

In other words, early modern European (English but also Spanish, French and Italian) dramatists not only presented and composed dramas that referred back to themselves as such; they also showed a keen awareness of earlier dramatic practices *as having been self-reflexive and self-aware*, as well as of the metaphorical status of theatrical space (especially with regard to the image of the 'world stage' or *theatrum mundi*) in classical antiquity and beyond – and they were, furthermore, particularly adept at invoking an awareness of this history *as* a particular form of self-reflexive theater[15].

When, for example, at the outset of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), Antonio sighs "I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano / A stage, where every man must play a part, / And mine a sad one" (*The Merchant of Venice*, I.i.77-79), he is manifesting not only an immediate reflection on the 'present' context of the utterance, but also a refined self-awareness of a long and varied history of comparing the world to the stage.

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[14]   The scholarship that treats this topic is extensive. A particularly astute, philosophically informed place to start is Anne Barton's classic study, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, New York, Greenwood, rpt. 1977. Barton, illustratively, points out that, with very few exceptions, the discursive comparison of the world with the stage is not uttered in what we might call an explicitly dramatic context until the middle of the sixteenth century, when the theater began to acquire its modern, secularized form in London. She lists moments from Greek New Comedy and the Roman comedies of Plautus, which were among the first to be rediscovered by the early English dramatists, as exceptions to this. See pp. 60-61.

[15]   There would be much more to say about Spanish, Italian or French dramas in this regard. See, as only a start, Louise George Clubb's study of theatregrams in *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989.

Elsewhere, I have argued that what distinguishes the early modern English theater (and above all Shakespeare) in this regard is the way in which Shakespearean drama erodes the representational difference between 'world' and 'stage', purposefully accomplishing a 'literalization' of what had been an ancient, philosophical metaphor[16].

Here, however, I would like to take a different approach by suggesting that the self-reflexivity of Shakespearean drama manifests a lessening need for the material-site-specific context of the playhouse, for the concrete practice of what we now call 'theatricality' – to the point of accomplishing a self-dissolution of drama as a sensuous, material representational practice[17]. By using scare quotes, I mean to leave open the possibility that what I am about to say does not pertain exclusively to Shakespeare – that it expresses something about modernist drama since, at least, the early modern period – though I will try to say why I think it does pertain to Shakespeare in a special way.

Such a claim is bound to raise the hackles of (or, more likely these days, to simply be ignored by) cultural-materialist scholars of early modern drama – not to mention those invested in the ongoing practical work of staging Shakespeare's plays. Which is to say, also, that this claim will need further explaining and defending. But, before I begin the explanation and defense, let me once again try to state the thesis in the plainest terms possible: the self-reflexive character of Shakespearean drama – both its manifest awareness of past, self-reflective dramatic practices *and* its own self-referential character (the so-called 'meta-theatricality' of Shakespeare) – portends the historical self-dissolution of drama as a sensuous, representational artistic practice.

Even more plainly: Shakespeare – perhaps the world's pre-eminent dramatist – stages, from within his drama, the self-dissolution of our *need* for the sensuous, material representation of human actions

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[16]   See the "Epilogue: The World Stage" of Paul A. Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008.

[17]   By 'theatricality' I mean what Henry Turner has described as "the clusters of techniques, objects, bodies, conventions, signs, and other significant elements that characterized early modern performance and that extended beyond the public theaters to public entertainments and spectacles of all types, from the Tudor period to the Restoration". I am citing from his remarks on the occasion of a conference held at Rutgers University in December 2011 entitled "Early Modern Theatricality in the 21st Century"; see http://earlymoderntheatricality.com.

in order to understand ourselves as actors, as free self-determining agents in the world[18].

Put yet another way: the depiction of our lessening need for sensuous representational drama becomes, itself, a primary task of Shakespearean drama – as if being a dramatist, for Shakespeare, means making the historical disappearance of the conditions under which traditional (sensuous, representational) forms of drama matter into the very stuff of a dramatic work.

Moreover, *this* kind of dramatic self-reflexivity demands something not required, I think, of analogous modernist movements in the other arts – the abstract expressionism of Pollock, say, or the music of John Cage – inasmuch as the Shakespearean self-dissolution of drama cannot 'fall back' on its own sensuous medium (paint, canvas, instrument) in order to thematize its own expressive material capacities. Because speaking and doing – the 'material' of drama – is already de-naturalized, Shakespeare cannot expose the expressive capacities of speech and action in the same way that Pollack can drip paint, or that Cage can pluck a piano string. Part of my effort here, then, is also to suggest that Shakespearean drama offers an alternative future for modernism to the one presented in recent philosophical work on modernist painting[19]. Precisely because Shakespeare's artistic hori-

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[18]   Again, this does not mean that we now have no need for drama, Shakespearean or other – just that this need is no longer deeply essential to our own self-understanding as free and self-determining. I would even suggest that Shakespeare's pre-eminence among modern dramatists – for Hegel, for German philosophy and for most of us – is connected to his 'modernist' reflexivity as an artist, to the force of artistic response to the challenge of making art after its 'highest' vocation has ended. I realize, of course, that stating matters thus might seem anachronistic – given that Hegel's pronouncement postdates Shakespeare by more than two centuries. But given the extent to which Hegel himself grappled with what he himself called Shakespeare's modernity, from his earliest writings to his Berlin lectures on art, there is certainly a basis for considering Shakespeare as a necessary touchstone for later developments in Hegel's aesthetic philosophy. (Incidentally, by 'earliest writings', I mean not only the remarks on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* from Hegel's "Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" but also the very earliest document of Hegel's to have come down to us – a 'rewriting' of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, composed when Hegel was a teenager.)

[19]   I am thinking of accounts of modernist painting that, albeit in different and even diverging ways, defend a future for modernist painting on the basis of art's reflection on its material medium. See, as two different instances of this, the defenses of painting and modernist art given by Yves-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990, especially pp. 229-44; and Jay M. Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006.

zons are less limited than other modernist movements – his dramatic work is not nearly as restricted (not nearly as precious, some might say) as Cage's or Pollock's – it is to Shakespeare's radical modernism that we might turn to find a more capacious future for art (and, hence, for philosophical reflection on art) beyond both its sensuous and its representational form.

These are, at any rate, my primary arguments here.

3.

Let me now proceed, first, by discussing the dissolution of sensuousness in drama – the materiality of its being performed for eyes and ears – before turning, second, to the dissolution of its representational, mimetic character in Shakespeare.

Perhaps the simplest way to begin defending my claim with regard to the self-dissolution of sensuous materiality in drama is by noting that, since at least Aristotle's *Poetics*, dramatic works have been understood to be graspable apart from – at a minimum – the sensuousness of their material performance. Here we can recall, for instance, Aristotle's well-known assertion that plot (*mythos*), rather than diction or spectacle (*opsis*), is the soul of tragedy – and that, furthermore, "the plot [of a tragedy] should be so structured that, even without seeing it performed, the person […] experiences horror and pity at what comes about"[20]. For Aristotle, tragedies are gripping quite apart from their reliance on sensuous representation – indeed, for the author of the *Poetics*, it is enough to recall to mind a tragic *mythos* in order to be moved by it.

If the thought that dramas matter – grip us, move us, offer an occasion for self-understanding and reflection – independent of their material performance is not new, then of course we still need to consider *why*, after all, Greek tragedies were performed in such a highly ritualized, formalized, choreographed manner in such precise, concrete, specially constructed settings. Aristotle may have thought the performance relatively unnecessary with respect to the plot Sophocles composed; but, obviously, Sophocles himself had written for the

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Greek stage and its peculiar material conventions. And if the fifth-century BCE Athenians felt a *need* for the sensuous representation of tragedies (masks, choruses, ritualized festivals and so on) then this deep need still requires explaining in the context of my claim about Shakespeare – if, that is, we are going to understand what it means that Shakespeare stages the self-dissolution of our 'highest need' for the sensuous representation of human actions.

At the risk of oversimplification – and just for the sake of generating the discussion – my rough and ready understanding of the deep Athenian need for the sensuous representation of tragedies goes like this. Unlike epic, which offered occasions for self-understanding (of human life, of our place with respect to nature, of our natality and mortality and so forth) through idealized uttered representations of *past* actions – hence, the central role famously played by Mnemosyne and her daughters the Muses in the performance of Homeric epic – tragedy expanded occasions for self-understanding by bringing us 'into the presence' of these same idealized representations, so that we might watch the protagonists suffer before our eyes (not just our ears) in the theater. Hence, these heroes, legends or divinities had to appear not only in the material form of the audible 'once upon a time' as in Homer, but also in the flesh, 'here and now', before us: history made sensuously present because both audible and visible.

Of course, that we are still dealing with a historical world that could understand itself only in heroic terms is manifest in the idealized aesthetic portrayal of the tragic mask, not to mention in the ritualized structure of the tragic festival itself. In other words, because the tragic hero 'represented' shared concerns and occasioned new collective self-understandings on the part of the Athenians (as Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet have so elegantly demonstrated), an idealized material representation of the hero on stage was both possible and required. This social-historical need for the particular formal innovations of classical drama at the sensuous, material level can thus be explained by a continued dependence on normative idealized representations of human life (namely, 'tragic-heroic figures') coupled with the expansion of that representation from the imagistic and narrative into the 'here and now' of the stage and its scenic, spatial-temporal representation of actions.

But – and this is the turn that leads to Aristotle's insight – once dramas were actually performed in Athens, *once tragedy became a self-*

consciously ritual activity, it became clear that what was being sensuously represented were not only the idealized representations of human life (characters like Oedipus, say, to stick with Aristotle's favorite example) but the *actions themselves* of these figures – their words, their gestures, their individual deeds. And furthermore, once it became clear that tragedies represented human *actions* – that tragedies were sensuous representations *of* an action and its consequences for the agent and his world (*mimeseos praxis* to use Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy)[21] – then the specific power of drama with respect to the other arts (image, narrative, dance) was seen to lie, significantly, *not* in its status as sensuous performance (*mousike*) but rather in its capacity to yield understanding about what it is for human beings to act, a philosophical understanding in light of which the poetic mimesis of action becomes philosophically defensible, as in Aristotle's own account. (That tragic drama – as the representation of action – yields a special understanding not available elsewhere was, of course, central to Aristotle's defense of tragedy in the face of Plato's criticism of tragic drama. Note: Aristotle did not defend tragedy as sensuous presentation – *mousike* – against Plato's attack; his defense of tragedy lay in his view of tragedy as yielding an understanding of an action in light of its unintended consequences.)

And once it was recognized that the chief accomplishment of the sensuous performance was, at bottom, a new understanding of human *praxis* through its mimetic representation, the tragic drama ended up *by means of its ritualized sensuous performance* obviating – in Aristotle's own view – the need for that very sensuous performance. That this obviation was not only Aristotle's idiosyncratic opinion is, of course, borne out by the historical fact that performances of tragic dramas were well on the wane in Athens by the time Aristotle composed the *Poetics*.

In light of all this, it could be said that the self-dissolution of the *sensuous* material performance of drama belongs, already, to its classical milieu as a formal artistic practice.

Classical drama *lends itself to this self-dissolution* inasmuch as it succeeds in bringing what it represents – human actions – to the understanding. The understanding, as it were, takes over for our eyes

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[21]   *Mimeseos* is the genitive of *mimesis*, indicating that the representation 'belongs' to the action, not the reverse.

and ears – hence, again, Aristotle's claims about the ability of a tragic *mythos* to move us independent of its sensuous performance.

The same self-dissolution does not, I would argue, apply to the other arts in their classical forms: epic narrative still requires the spoken word if it is to represent *the past* (that is, the temporal distance between the speaker and that of which he speaks) – so the fate of epic narration is, as Walter Benjamin aptly suggested, tied to a tradition in which the physical act of speaking is capable of transmitting historical experience[22]. Similarly, the performance of music obviously requires the hearing of sound; images require light and surfaces[23]. Drama alone among the classical fine arts emerges as a practice that tends toward self-dissolution because the medium of its artifice – the 'here and now' performance of human words and deeds – invariably evacuates the 'here and now', leaving behind only an *ex post facto* practical understanding of the deeds that have been represented[24]. (It would be important to consider drama's special significance for Greek philosophy's own self-authorization in light of drama's distinctiveness in this regard.)

So, by sensuously representing human beings in action, drama obviates the need for the sensuousness of that very representation. *This obviation is nothing less than the temporality of the performance of drama itself* – its resistance to sensuous reification, its dependence on a shared 'here and now' context, its inevitable vanishing at the 'end' of the play, its iterability, its retrospective fulfillment in the understanding or collective judgment (*phronesis*) that the performance occasions[25]. Drama is intrinsically self-dissolving as a sensuous practice

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[22]   Cf. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller", in *Selected Writings*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2002, vol. III.

[23]   Unless, of course, one sees in the Pythagorean (or Platonic) conception of music as an invisible *harmonia* (a 'harmony of the spheres') a similar 'philosophical' self-dissolution of the sensuousness of music. See the discussion in Adriana Cavarero, "The Harmony of the Spheres", in *For More than One Voice*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005. But here philosophy would silence music from the outside, in mute opposition to its sonority – whereas I am arguing, pace Aristotle, that drama is self-dissolving and this historical self-dissolution is noted by, but not enacted by, philosophy.

[24]   Although I do not have the space to defend the exclusion of dance in this context, I am agreeing with Hegel, and more or less for the reasons he provides in the *Lectures on Fine Art*, that dance does not rise to the same level as music and drama among the so-called performing arts.

[25]   It is this last element, especially, that distinguishes the performance of spoken drama from the acoustics of music in classical accounts like Aristotle's.

– both as a historical-artistic practice and at the level of each individual performance.

4.

The first remnant of this dissolution of the sensuous performance of drama would seem to be the stand-alone dramatic 'work' or poetic product that survives – that has a life beyond – its individual performances. In the ancient world, we need only think of the way in which Aristotle's notion of a poetic product – namely, the *mythos* that the poet fabricates – became the locus of interest, exerting an immense influence over literary history and the treatment of uniquely literary works. For modern Shakespeareans, this remnant is most obviously the 'script' or literary text that stands at the center of the English canon – although corollary remnants can be found in the way that certain performances, once recorded or otherwise reified, can come to stand as 'artworks' in their own right.

So, at first blush, it would appear that the self-dissolution of the sensuous performance does not necessarily entail the dissolution of the dramatic work as *representation* – as belonging, say, to an aesthetic domain of art-objects set apart from the 'real life' of subjects. (Indeed, for Aristotle, the *mythos* – the imitation of a significant action – was more fundamentally mimetic than was the sensuousness of the optics or the diction. And, working under the long shadow cast by Aristotle, scholars in Literature departments have long been studying the texts of Shakespeare's plays as aesthetic, textual artifacts, free from their sensuous performance as drama.) In short, it would appear that the representational character of drama has proven more durable and essential than its sensuousness as visible or audible performance – and, more importantly, has proven that drama can survive as poetic *representation* without needing its sensuous context in dramatic practices.

On closer inspection, however, we should see that the mimetic-representational or aesthetic status of the dramatic-poetic work is tightly bound up with the 'distance' between spectacle and spectator that belongs to the sensuous performance of representational works of drama – whether of Attic tragedy or Shakespeare or other dramatists. The sensuous character of the performance – hearing and seeing of actors in a 'here and now' context – corresponds to the way

the dramatic work comes to be perceived as a mimetic or aesthetic work. I sensuously perceive the performer and the role *as performer and role* – I sensuously experience the drama *as dramatic art*, in other words – inasmuch as I also recognize *through the sensuous perform-ance* that I am watching a mimetic performance (a performer's repre-sentation of Hamlet the aesthetic creation, not Hamlet himself[26]). In short, it turns out not to be so clear that a dramatic work (as distinct, say, from a novelistic or lyric or narrative work) would ever have been grasped as mimetic (as aesthetic) were it not sensuously per-formed – even as, at the same time, the 'literary-mimestic-aesthetic' status of the dramatic work (as plot, as script, as text) springs from the perception of its having an existence *apart from* its sensuous pres-entation before an audience.

So we are left with a kind of chiasmus with respect to the sensu-ous, representational status of drama – such that the sensuous per-formance of a dramatic work continues, even after the classical era, to be bound up with its status as a mimetic artwork, and vice-versa. If the dramatic work were not reifiable as a representational artwork (a plot, a story, a script) – as belonging to the domain of aesthetics – then nothing would assure us that what we watch is 'just a fiction' and not really history itself unfolding before our eyes. At the same time, without the sensuous experience of watching something we take to be somehow unreal, we would probably have no concept of a reified dramatic artwork[27].

Here, then, we trip upon the traditional (and thorny) question of what we are doing when we ritually enact a dramatic work as *rep-resentational*, as an aesthetic object, that stands apart from our own actions and lives. (Remember, for instance, Plato's worry – in the

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[26] Recall that, for Aristotle, the sensuous perception of a mimetic work *as mimetic* requires and entails perceiving the sensuous material as something more than sensuous material; namely, perceiving that it is mimetic. Hence, the 'pleasure' af-forded in understanding that a given sensuous presentation is mimetic is different from the pleasure taken in the mere sensuousness itself (pretty colors or sounds). Think of the pleasure taken by very young children in 'seeing' that yellow and brown combine to represent a giraffe, rather than present just the prettiness of yel-low and brown.

[27] We might still, of course, have the concept of a literary or poetic document or text, or of some other aesthetic reification – but it would not be a work of *drama*, a spe-cifically *dramatic* artwork. For a fuller discussion of this same problem, see chapter 6, "Memory, Mimesis, Tragedy: The Scene Before Philosophy", of my *A Politics of the Scene*.

tenth book of the *Republic* – that tragedies are not so distant from us after all, that they affectively worm their way into our psychic and somatic lives[28]. Plato had a point, after all: if we were to go through life weeping and grieving the way we do when we watch tragedies, then our capacity to carry out ordinary, desirable lives would be diminished. It was in part to respond to Plato's worry that Aristotle insisted on the significance of tragic drama as *mimetic* – inasmuch as tragedy might thereby afford an experience that in 'real life' would be impossible and hence provide a necessary outlet for feelings and affects that cannot be, and ought not be, felt in the same way in 'real life'[29].) Aristotle's answer to this question, at any rate, is well known: because we *need* feelings of fear and pity in order to understand our social or existential predicament we need a 'safe place' (the theater) to experience these feelings without having to 'really' go through the predicaments themselves. The relief of *catharsis* is feeling fear and pity without having to suffer their empirical consequences, and without having to feel 'real' shame for feeling the way we do.

All of these familiar Aristotelian thoughts can also be gathered up as follows: the sensuous performance of a representational work before an audience – spectators watching or hearing actors perform a drama on stage (or screen) – is precisely what *assures* us of the 'safe' distance between the representation and what is represented. Inasmuch as we see and hear actors act a drama, to invoke Stanley Cavell's framing of the same problem, we feel free not to intervene – we feel assured that what we are seeing and watching is not the thing itself, and therefore requires no active participation on our part[30].

So, our sensuous perception of the drama as drama goes hand in hand with our grasp of the drama as *mimetic* or *representational*. It turns out that the two cannot be separated. Hence, the sensuous self-dissolution of the theater – to which, as I have already suggest-

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[28]   Remember that Plato's real concern with tragedy was not just part of his general worry about mimetic artists, but a specific concern about tragedy's capacity to exacerbate grief, psychic pain and its attendant displays.

[29]   I am thinking, for instance, of Aristotle's famous observation that we take pleasure in seeing represented in tragedies that which would cause pain were it seen in real life.

[30]   See Cavell's discussion of Aristotle as offering a theory of tragedy that establishes the aesthetic domain as "a context in which I am to do nothing", Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love", in *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* [1987], Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 91.

ed, Aristotle and the classical theater already pointed – necessarily begs as well the question of the fate of drama as representational or aesthetic.

5.

This brings me to the problem that will occupy me through the rest of this essay. If, as I am arguing, the fate of drama as *sensuous perform-ance* is necessarily tied to the fate of drama as *mimetic* – that is, to the representation of actions that are safely at a distance from the rest of us – then the self-dissolution of drama as sensuous performance (which I described in section 3 above) ought to entail, or come to be seen as, a self-dissolution of drama as mimetic.

I want to propose that we regard Shakespeare's drama as bearing out this inevitability.

Before defending this proposition, a few clarifications must be made to avoid confusion. First, let me make clear that I am discussing the fate of *drama* as it appears in Shakespeare. (Inasmuch as Shake-speare's plays are understood to constitute a *literary-aesthetic* artifact – poetry or narrative, say – the question of Shakespeare's relation to the fate of dramatic practices simply gets shoved to the side, or begged, without being adequately addressed. As if Shakespeare's status as literary-aesthetic artifact secretly required, as its disavowed precondition, that Shakespeare's role in the fate of dramatic practices not be seen as mattering to the achievement of that status[31].)

Second, and to repeat a point I made earlier, I am not suggest-ing that we no longer (or no longer should) engage in the sensuous representation of dramatic works after Shakespeare. Rather, I am suggesting that Shakespeare's drama reveals – that Shakespeare de-picts, from within the practice of dramatic art – our diminishing need for the sensuous, representational practice of drama as an essential mode of our collective self-understanding. (Clearly, we still 'need' to perform Shakespeare for other perfectly valid educational, cultur-

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[31]   This disavowal has been the topic of probing work done by William B. Worthen in *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002; *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006; and *Drama Between Poetry and Performance*, New York, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

al, economic, personal or professional reasons, and I do not wish to claim otherwise[32].)

Let me now build outward from this last point. I argued at the outset that we might understand Shakespeare's place in the history of dramatic practices – and in the history of artistic practices generally – in light of the self-reflexive character of his drama: both Shakespeare's historical reflection on prior dramatic practices (including, perhaps especially, his own) and the self-referential character of his individual works, with respect to their own portrayal of themselves as 'dramatic'. I now want to try to explain both why and how the special self-reflexive character of Shakespearean drama shows – from inside its own dramatic practices – the dissolution of our need for sensuous, representational drama.

First, the 'why'. And here I need to simply to make an assertion: drama becomes more self-reflexive the more it realizes that it cannot adequately capture or express an idealized picture of any particular aspect of human-historical experience (let alone of our existence as a whole).

The less that the ambition of furnishing an idealized representation of some feature of human existence is felt to drive the making of a drama, the more that drama is able to – the more it *must* (however inadequately) – reflect on its own status as a dramatic work, in light of those diminished idealizing ambitions. Conversely, the more that a dramatic practice understands itself to aspire to the idealized representation of some fundamental aspect of human experience – the way, say, that death is represented in *Oedipus at Colonus*, or sexual obsession in *Antony and Cleopatra* – the less that drama will be able to reflect explicitly on its own status as drama, on its own idealizing ambitions. In short: *if no idealized dramatic representation can capture or express a shared feature of human existence, then the task of drama must involve expressively reflecting on its failure to offer such an idealized representation.*

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[32]   For instance, I think we continue to 'need' Shakespeare (or the theater generally) to do important work for, and by, the imagination (what the Chorus in *Henry V* calls our "imaginary forces"). I am thinking, especially, of the way in which reading or performing Shakespeare can, from a young age, 'educate the imagination' (to use Northrop Frye's felicitous phrase) or cultivate emotional sensibility to, and practical judgments about, intractably difficult human predicaments. This is a deeply important cultural need, surely, and one that Shakespeare and great literature meet better, probably, than any other human product.

Corollary to this suggestion is the following: self-reflexivity in drama (and in artistic practices generally) is a reflection on the prior ambition of art to furnish an adequate or idealized picture of some aspect of human life; self-reflexive art thus presupposes that prior ambition – and the failure to achieve it – as critical to its own capacity for self-reflection, and not just as a mistake to be disowned. (Hence: Shakespeare's own attempts at representing something fundamental in human existence – for instance, over-riding passions, like murderousness in *Othello*, sexual obsession in *Antony and Cleopatra*, ambition in *Macbeth* – are part and parcel of what I am calling his self-reflexive dramatic practice; even though, by the same token, these idealizing plays or moments are among his least self-reflexively dramatic.)

A simpler way of putting all this is to note that modern drama knows, less and less, just what exactly it is supposed to depict or represent, and why. If Aeschylus and Sophocles had, at least, some sense of what the appropriate purview of tragedy was – the relation between family life and city life, or the struggle between ancient religious beliefs and (then) contemporary political values – then Shakespeare and modern dramatists have far fewer productive limitations. So, even though Shakespeare of course continued to represent historically significant figures (Princes, Kings, Generals) as well as apparently 'universal' concerns (death, family life, sexual desire) he nevertheless leaves us with no sense that he knew, finally, just what exactly he was supposed to show us about any of these things. And this is why, after all, we see Shakespeare as possessed (as *needing* to be possessed) of far more imaginative energy than, say, Sophocles. Indeed, Shakespeare continually expands his dramatic vision to include whores, merchants, beggars, children, spirits and so on in a seemingly infinite variety of worldly contexts – to the point that we (modern directors and actors) must also imaginatively *choose* how, where and in what way to perform multifarious 'Shakespearean' works which seem suitable to so many domains and, hence, representative of no single, particular viewpoint on human life.

All of which is to say that Shakespeare did not regard being a dramatist as an activity that could be fixed or governed by taking for granted what a drama should do, should depict, should accomplish. Instead, he seemed to regard the task of drama – as Johann Gottfried Herder observed about Shakespeare over two hundred years ago – to involve figuring out what, exactly, drama should or could do. Hence,

the sense of ongoing revisions in Shakespeare – the feeling that *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* re-visit *Othello* and *King Lear*; that each new comedy is a self-critical vision of its predecessor. Think, too, of the way that Hamlet's inability to furnish an answer to his own rhetorical question – "What is Hecuba to him, or he to her, / That he should weep for her?" (II.ii.494-95) – necessitates and prompts Hamlet's reflection not on his or our connection to the events of the *Iliad*, but on the dramatically self-reflexive question of whether the sensuous performance of a mimetic action can (still) grip an audience in a meaningful way. In sum: Shakespeare challenges us to understand drama – *his* drama – not as responding to given facts of human existence (desire, or mortality) or to a historical situation (Henry V's invasion of France, or the fate of the Roman republic), but as responding to the fact that *there are no givens that govern our dramatic activity, and hence the task of drama must be in part to come to terms with our self-determination, with our relative freedom from given authorities that might determine or make sense of what we do and say with one another.*

The special self-reflexivity of Shakespearean drama is, under this light, an expression of the self-determining, self-authorizing character of our experience as subjects – as human beings who feel 'freed' from the determinacy of nature and history. If we sense that Shakespeare represents us, then, it is because he does not simply 'represent' our lives; he refuses to capture or offer an idealized version of (modern) human beings. He presents us to ourselves – our self-determination as actors in the world – through the erosion of a mediating representational distance between the play and that which it depicts[33].

6.

How, then, does the special self-reflexive character of Shakespearean drama show – from inside its own dramatic practices – the dissolution of our need for sensuous, representational drama?

Here one could continue to invoke a great many moments from the Shakespearean corpus. But because its conclusion now seems to

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[33]   For more on the dissolution of mimetic distance in Shakespeare, see my *Tragic Conditions in Shakespeare: Disinheriting the Globe*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, especially pp. 18-20.

us indicative of Shakespeare's (the artist's) own self-reflexive 'leave-taking' of drama – let me close with a few words about *The Tempest* (1610-11), in light of what I have said in the previous five sections of this essay. (By 'leave-taking' I do not at all mean to imply that Shakespeare-the-artist meant to leave drama or art *behind*; rather, as I hope I have been making clear throughout, I see a self-dissolution of drama that is accomplished from *within* and *by* Shakespearean drama. I see this self-dissolution at work in virtually the entire Shakespearean corpus, and so I see *The Tempest* not as closing or transcending drama, but as a culminating achievement of Shakespeare's dramatic self-reflexivity – his drama's attempt at self-transcendence from within its own sphere, to borrow Hegel's turn of phrase[34].)

In the first section, recall, I invoked Hegel's claim about the way in which the history of art presents an ongoing and increasing de-naturalization or 'spiritualization' of our self-understanding. If Hegel is right, then we are less and less dependent upon – less needful of – artistic expressions that work with the given-ness of 'natural' or sensible media in order to understand ourselves, and our world. Does not Prospero's 'art' – not simply as a fictional device (since, I want to claim, Prospero is not simply a fictional character) but also as a reflective presentation of the dramatic arts – express this de-naturalization, the denial of nature's claims upon us? And does not the tempest itself depict this humanization or 'spiritualization' (to use Hegel's parlance) of the seeming indifference of nature's elements – wind, water and air? Recall Prospero's own words:

> I have bedimm'd
> The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
> And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
> Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
> Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
> With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory
> Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
> The pine and cedar: graves at my command
> Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd forth, and let 'em forth
> By my so potent Art. (*The Tempest*, V.i.41-50)

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[34] Hegel predicted that post-Romantic art would entail "the self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself", *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 80 (cited in Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, p. 306). As I indicated in note 18 above, I see Shakespeare as post-Romantic in Hegel's sense – and I tend to think that Hegel himself saw Shakespeare as his contemporary, too.

Moreover, Shakespeare's dramatic interest – I mean, his interest in Prospero's 'art' and in the achievement of our de-naturalization as a dramatically motivational predicament – lies in the manifestly social-historical (human) consequences of this 'art', in the 'spiritual' stakes of our de-naturalization. As if the very experience of natural elements – the storm, the waves – was to be regarded as an artistic accomplishment.

At any rate, the significance of Prospero's art is obviously not to be found in the frothy waves he whips up but – as Miranda, and the rest of us find out – in the stirring social consequences that follow upon the roaring storm. Indeed, even those on the ship feel that their fate lies not in the sublime indifference of the roaring waves to the King's command, but in the autonomous capacities of their own hands – inebriated as they are ("We are merely cheated of our lives by drunkards", I.i.55).

Second, the unraveling of art's purpose requires, from Prospero, a highly self-aware choreography of happenings on the island: individuals are brought into carefully arranged contact, as if on cue (Miranda and Ferdinand); the most refined spectacular techniques of the era (masques and so forth) are pressed into the service of filling the island with sights and sounds – spirits, trances, somnolence, charms – so that we might see others in the grip of the same sensuous display that commands our attention.

Why this exhibition of sensuousness 'theatricality'? It is difficult not to see these displays as self-reflexively presenting the sensuous capacities of drama in order to show – importantly – the relative freedom of drama with respect to other material media. Drama can *contain* music without being reducible to a musical performance, can *contain* dance without being confused with an occasion to move one's body about, can *contain* spectacles of all sorts without being thereby reducible to mere show. Moreover, drama can purposefully *show* this containment – and, hence, supersession – of other media as essential to its *own* specifically expressive power. Which is, of course, just what Prospero demonstrates. And all of this – whatever else it might mean in the context of *The Tempest* (and it is not at all clear what *else* the demonstrations from Act IV, scene i are 'about') – can be taken as a self-conscious presentation of various components of dramatic practices that would normally escape our special attention, that we might otherwise pass over as simply part

of the proceedings at a playhouse. Prospero, however, does not let us pass over these elements un-attentively – "No tongue! all eyes! be silent" (IV.i.59).

To what 'end' are we asked to be thus attentive to the elements of drama, its constitutive de-naturalization? Simply so that we might perceive the special sensuous power of the theater – its *containment* and *supersession* of other arts, its "spell" as Prospero calls it – and its eventual self-dissolution at Prospero's own command: "Well done! avoid; no more!" (IV.i.142).

Were this all, however, we would not be sure that Prospero himself sees matters as we do – we would not be sure that the self-dissolution of the drama were his (or the play's) *purpose*. So, as if to erase all doubts, Shakespeare has Prospero address his own activity, in order to under-score that the fulfillment of his drama lies in its foretold dissolution:

> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air. (IV.i.148-50)

I cannot be the first to hear in Prospero's lines not only a descrip-tion of the limits of dramatic revels, but also a *reflective stance* on the significance of those limits. Ferdinand and Miranda themselves give voice to this same perception: "This is strange: your father's in some passion / That works him strongly" (IV.i.143-44). At any rate, Pros-pero leaves no doubt about his reflective stance on the revels' end when he continues:

> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. (IV.i.151-56)

And once this *reflective* stance – if revels end it is because *we* end – comes into view, we see that our condition was not fully captured or represented by the spatial-temporal limitations of drama. Rather, by virtue of the self-reflexive presentation of drama's sensuous-repre-sentational *limitations* – and by virtue of our reflective stance on these limitations – we gain a perspective on what we were struggling all along to see more clearly: ourselves.

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.156-58)

If "we are such stuff as dreams are made on" (and we can think here, too, of Puck's address at the close of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) then is it not because our imaginative capacities as free self-determining beings refuse the limitations of sensuous, material representation?

At the same time, if the sensuousness of the representation is to be truly *self-dissolving* – and not just a further display of aesthetic autonomy (of Prospero's artistic power) – then this self-dissolution cannot itself be aesthetically accomplished, cannot be merely offered as the self-conscious 'representation' of a play coming to its close. Shakespeare is not just rehearsing, in other words, the standard Elizabethan-Jacobean 'epilogue' about a play's ending.

Instead, sensuous representational artistry as such must be disavowed, revels ended – first of all by the artist, who drowns his book and staff: "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, / And what strength I have's mine own" (Epilogue.1-2). Thus, the challenge is: how is artistry to be dissolved *by the artist himself*? How can drama transcend itself, from within its own sphere?

To address this challenge, several moments seem to be required[35]. First, the artist must risk appearing otherwise than as an artist. It is not (yet) a matter of the artist's disappearance, pure and simple, but rather of a risk that the artist takes – namely, appearing otherwise than as an artist. Certain trappings have to be jettisoned:

> I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book. (V.i.54-57)

This is not only a matter of trading one guise for another, nor is it merely that the artist is undergoing a shift within himself. Rather, and this is the second requirement, it must be seen that the risk he has taken, in appearing otherwise than as an artist, *also* means that

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[35]   Here I am echoing the conclusion offered in the final pages of my *Tragic Conditions in Shakespeare*.

the way things stand for others, too, changes. It would not be enough for the artist to appear as otherwise than an artist if everyone persisted in their assumption or belief or stupor – if everyone were still held, as it were, by the enduring effects of art's spell. The spell also must dissolve – so that we, too, might see how things between us really stand now:

> The charm dissolves apace;
> And as the morning steals upon the night,
> Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
> Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
> Their clearer reason. (V.i.64-68)

Third, to truly risk appearing to others as otherwise than an artist – if it is to be a risk and not merely a further demonstration of artistry – requires the recognition that letting go of art (if it is a real 'letting go') cannot itself be artfully accomplished. To appear as otherwise than an artist therefore could not be accomplished by an artist – lest that 'appearance' be taken for another demonstration of artistry. Only a human being could appear as otherwise than as an artist.

And so, finally – as if Shakespeare's drama, *as if all of drama*, had been a preparation for this moment – a human being stands forth, and steps away from the 'art' he made and from what that art itself wrought:

> Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
> And what strength I have's mine own,
> Which is most faint. (Epilogue.1-3)

But even at this point, another moment is still required. The sensuous-mimetic distance between what we see and our own lives must dissolve. *We* must acknowledge that Prospero is not just a 'fictional character', that is the 'island' is not a safely distant aesthetic domain…

> I must be here confin'd by you
> […] Let me not
> […] dwell
> In this bare island by your spell;
> But release me from my bands
> With the help of your good hands. (Epilogue.4-10)

… hence, that we are no longer acquitted from the obligation to intervene.

Nothing is sacred in Shakespeare's drama – not even its own status as dramatic art.

Drama as sensuous representation dissolves the moment that it wants something other than passivity from *us* – when it asks us not to represent ourselves, but to become ourselves.

Nietzsche's Shakespeare: Musicality and Historicity in *The Birth of Tragedy*

Katie Brennan

Nietzsche's interest in Shakespeare began long before he started his career as a philosopher. In 1860, when Nietzsche was sixteen, he wrote his mother asking for an edition of Shakespeare's writings as a Christmas gift[1]. The largest cluster of Nietzsche's comments on Shakespeare appears during his preparations for *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1870-71. In the final version of the book, Nietzsche mentions Shakespeare four times, but does not offer any substantial discussion of the author. His preparatory notes, however, clearly indicate that throughout the planning stages of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had intended to devote an entire chapter to Shakespeare, in which Shakespeare was to serve as a bridge between the spirit of the great ancient Greek playwrights and Wagner[2]. Curiously, however, this chapter never made it into the final version of *The Birth of Tragedy*[3].

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[1]   Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life*, London, Quartet, 1981, p. 43.

[2]   See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, eds Raymond Geuss and Alexander Nehamas, Engl. transl. by Ladislaus Löb, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 51; and Duncan Large, "Nietzsche's Shakespearean Figures", in *Why Nietzsche Still?*, ed. Alan D. Schrift, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000, pp. 45-65; pp. 47-51.

[3]   In his article "Nietzsche's Shakespearean Figures" Duncan Large argues that Nietzsche's relationship to Shakespeare changes, just as Nietzsche's theories change, over the course of his philosophical career. Thus, understanding the relationship that Nietzsche has with Shakespeare is not a simple task. Nietzsche's understanding of Shakespeare the person as well as Shakespeare's plays is one that is constantly reconfigured and recontextualized throughout Nietzsche's career. An understanding of Nietzsche's relationship to Shakespeare is relevant to his writings in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but extends throughout all of Nietzsche's writings. Comments about Shakespeare appear in *The Gay Science*, *Ecce Homo*, *Human, All-Too-Human*, and *Beyond Good and Evil*. Nietzsche also engaged in the debate over the true author of Shakespeare's plays. Nietzsche argues, in *Ecce Homo* and other

In this paper I discuss why Shakespeare, despite the absence of a detailed account of his work, is nonetheless essential to Nietzsche's theory of tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In section 1, I argue that Nietzsche's nearly exclusive focus on ancient Greek tragedy and Wagner should not overshadow the importance of Shakespeare to *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche's discussion of *Hamlet* illustrates that *The Birth of Tragedy* is not just a meditation on ancient Greek tragedy, but also a meditation on the possibility of the rebirth of great tragedy in the modern age. In section 2, I analyze the systematic importance of Shakespeare to Nietzsche's theory of tragedy. I ask whether, for Nietzsche, there can be tragedy without music. Finally, in section 3, I ask why Nietzsche did not include a more extended discussion of Shakespeare in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

1. Historical considerations

In turning to Nietzsche's analysis of Shakespeare, I would like to begin by discussing Silk and Stern's claim that Nietzsche's philosophy of art as developed in *The Birth of Tragedy* is saturated by categories that are "inescapably Greek"[4]. In *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, Silk and Stern argue that Nietzsche "devised a construct so inescapably Greek that detailed discussion of other drama in its terms seems, to say the least, unreal. In colouring as well as intensity, his categories belong to the world of Greek tragedy"[5]. In their view, the Greek construct of Nietzsche's theory makes discussion of other dramas, even Wagner's musical dramas, "distractingly alien"[6]. Because of this, they argue that "Nietzsche's categories have no temporal connection with the world of Shakespeare or with any tragic

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notebooks, that "Shakespeare, like Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, was actually a nobleman […] for over the course of the 1880s, concurrently with his rehabilitation of Shakespeare, he gradually convinces himself that 'Shakespeare' was but a pseudonym for his Elizabethan contemporary Lord Verulam, Francis Bacon" (p. 55).

[4]   M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 280.

[5]   Silk and Stern, p. 280.

[6]   Silk and Stern, p. 280.

world except the Greek […]. His thoughts on other drama, all in all, are perfunctory"[7]. In this section, I would like to question Silk and Stern's claim that Nietzsche's thoughts on Shakespeare's drama are merely perfunctory.

Nietzsche's discussion of Shakespeare focuses on the character of Hamlet. The discussion of Hamlet, in turn, clarifies two points. It offers (a) a key example of how a tragedy that lacks choral or Wagnerian music can present Dionysian aspects of the tragedy and (b) an illustration of how a modern audience could possibly relate to a tragic protagonist in the same way that the ancient Greeks connected to the tragic chorus[8]. I will say a bit more about each of these points.

(a) Nietzsche's discussion of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* offers an example of a modern artist who successfully synthesizes the Apolline and Dionysian artistic forces in a non-musical artwork. In Nietzsche's theory of art, the Dionysian is typically presented through the medium of music: the Dionysian is made present in ancient Greek tragedy by the musical chorus and in Wagnerian opera by the musical overtures[9]. The Dionysian is one of the two fundamental forces that Nietzsche views as the basis of art, the other being the Apolline. For Nietzsche, the Apolline represents the drive towards individuality,

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[7]   Silk and Stern, p. 280.

[8]   I will use the term 'modern' in this paper in the same way that Nietzsche does throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*. When Nietzsche describes art or audiences as 'modern' he is describing people of his own time. When Nietzsche first mentions Shakespeare in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he claims: "Given the incredibly definite and assured ability of their [the ancient Greeks'] eye to see things in a plastic way, together with their pure and honest delight in colour, one is bound to assume, to the shame of all those born after them, that their dreams, too, had that logical causality of line and outline, colour and grouping, and a sequence of scenes resembling their best bas-reliefs, so that the perfection of their dreams would certainly justify us, if comparison were possible, in describing the dreaming Greeks as Homers and Homer as a dreaming Greek – and in a more profound sense than if a modern dared were to compare his dreaming with that of Shakespeare". Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, ed. Raymond Geuss, Engl. transl. by Ronald Speirs, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 19-20. (All subsequent references to *The Birth of Tragedy* will appear as BT followed by page number.) Nietzsche's use of the word 'modern' here simply refers to the time that Nietzsche was living in, not a period of 'modernity'. *The Birth of Tragedy* was published in 1872.

[9]   Nietzsche explicitly identifies music with the Dionysian and sculpture with the Apolline at the beginning of his book: "Their [The Greeks'] two deities of art, Apollo and Dionysos, provide the starting-point for our recognition that there exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous opposition, both in origin and goals, between the Apolline art of the image-maker or Sculptor and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos" (BT, p. 14).

distinction, and order, while the Dionysian represents the loss of the individual, intoxication, and the forgetting of the self[10]. Sculpture and epic poetry (like that of Homer) are the purest forms of Apolline art[11]. Music is the purest form of Dionysian art[12]. Nietzsche believes that a successful tragedy combines the Apolline and Dionysian forces in a harmonious union. For Nietzsche, the chorus is typically responsible for presenting the Dionysian aspects of the tragedy. However, in Section 10 he claims that all the tragic heroes of the ancient Greek stage are actually Dionysus in disguise; the specific characteristics of each of these tragic heroes, Oedipus, Prometheus, etc., are simply masks for their true identity, which is Dionysus. This is an important change of argument. Nietzsche here leaves open the possibility that non-musical tragedies have a place in his theory by allowing for the Dionysian to present itself not just through music, but also through

[10]   Nietzsche describes the difference between the Dionysian and the Apolline as follows: "In order to gain a closer understanding of these two drives, let us think of them in the first place as separate art-worlds of *dream* and *intoxication*. Between these two physiological phenomena an opposition can be observed which corresponds to that between the Apolline and the Dionysiac" (BT, pp. 14-15).

[11]   In Sections 3 and 4, Nietzsche identifies Homer as the paradigmatic naive, Apolline artist: "Homeric 'naiveté' can be understood only as the complete victory of Apolline illusion; it is an illusion of the kind so frequently employed by nature to achieve its aims. The true goal is obscured by a deluding image; we stretch out our hands toward the image, and nature achieves its goal by means of this deception" (BT, p. 25). Homer is paradigmatically naive because his characters illustrate the desire to evade the wisdom of suffering by hiding behind deluding images.

[12]   At the very beginning of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes the Dionysian as "the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos" (BT, p. 14, cf. note 9 above). As he develops his theory, Nietzsche argues that "tragedy arose from the tragic chorus and was originally chorus and nothing but chorus" (BT, p. 36). Nietzsche cites the musical, Dionysian chorus as being the origin of tragedy. Nietzsche notes that "[t]he fact that tragedy begins with the satyr, and that the Dionysiac wisdom of tragedy speaks out of him, is something which now surprises us just as much as the fact that tragedy originated in the chorus" (BT, p. 39). Tragedy originated out of this spirit of Dionysus, who was originally represented in the form of a musical satyr: "The metaphysical solace which, I wish to suggest, we derive from every true tragedy, the solace that in the ground of things, and despite all changing appearances, life is indestructible, mighty and pleasurable, this solace appears with palpable clarity in the chorus of satyrs, a chorus of natural beings whose life goes on ineradicably behind and beyond all civilization" (BT, p. 39). Nietzsche views the music of the chorus of satyrs as having the unique power to reveal the Dionysian truth that life is indestructibly mighty and pleasurable. Thus, music, for Nietzsche, has the unique ability to reveal the Dionysian. As Nietzsche says: "it was the Herculean strength of music which, having attained its supreme manifestation in tragedy, is able to interpret myth in a new and most profoundly significant way" (BT, p. 53).

a tragic hero, who is really a reincarnation of Dionysus. However, he does not provide a concrete example of how the tragic hero can present Dionysian artistic forces in ancient Greek tragedy; he does not explain how the typically *unindividuated* surge of Dionysian energy can present itself in an *individual* suffering from tragic circumstances. In the remainder of this section, I suggest that Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet explains how Dionysus can appear in the guise of a clear, definite, individual character.

In Section 10, Nietzsche introduces the possibility for the Dionysian to present itself in tragedy in a way other than through the musical chorus. Here, Nietzsche claims that "it is a matter of indisputable historical record that the only subject-matter of Greek tragedy, in its earliest form, was the sufferings of Dionysos, and that for a long time the only hero present on stage was, accordingly, Dionysos" (BT, p. 51). It is commonly agreed that ancient Greek tragedy evolved from being comprised of a chorus only, to having a multitude of characters and tragic heroes. As Nietzsche says, "tragedy arose from the tragic chorus and was originally chorus and nothing but chorus" (BT, p. 36). Nietzsche claims that not only was Greek tragedy originally made up solely of the chorus, but also that the only subject matter of this choral tragedy were the sufferings of Dionysus. Nietzsche argues that as Greek tragedy developed and gained more characters, "Dionysos never ceased to be the tragic hero, and that all the famous figures of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus etc., are merely masks of that original hero, Dionysos" (BT, p. 51). For Nietzsche, the main character of a Greek tragedy represents the suffering of Dionysus, who, according to some myths, was torn apart and then reassembled by the Titans when he was a boy. His being torn apart represents, for Nietzsche, the dissolution of the principle of individuation and the merging of the individual with nature. While Nietzsche's discussion of the tragic hero in Section 10 opens the door for non-musical tragedy to present the Dionysian, he does not provide an example of how the tragic hero could become the mask of Dionysus[13].

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[13]   Martha Nussbaum provides a different reading of this passage. For Nussbaum, the Dionysian forces of a tragedy do not typically come from the musical chorus, but through the "process of sympathetic identification with the hero". The chorus is not responsible for bringing out the depths of Dionysian misery. Instead the musical chorus, for Nussbaum, is an example of order asserted in the face of disorder – of artistic creation, which Nussbaum believes is an essential aspect of Nietzsche's

Only Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet provides a specific example of how Dionysian forces can present themselves through the tragic hero. Nietzsche compares Hamlet to a man who has experienced a pure Dionysian state and has returned to the real world:

> In this sense Dionysiac man is similar to Hamlet: both have gazed into the true essence of things, they have *acquired knowledge* and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion – this is the lesson of Hamlet, not a cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he reflects too much, out of an excess of possibilities, as it were. No, it is not reflection, it is true knowledge, insight into a terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action, both in the case of Hamlet and in that of Dionysiac man. (BT, p. 40)

Both Hamlet and the "Dionysiac man" have acquired knowledge that makes action difficult. This difficulty in acting is not the result of too much reflection, but of having too much *knowledge* – knowledge that makes one realize that individual actions are futile[14]. The knowledge that Hamlet has too much of is not just any type of knowledge, but knowledge of the Dionysian truths of nature. What Hamlet and a Dionysian man share is the knowledge that none of their actions can make any difference on the "eternal essence of things" (BT, p. 40). Hamlet's impotence in the face of his circumstances is caused by his knowledge that the world is full of Dionysian misery and de-

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notion of the Dionysian. Martha Nussbaum, "The Transfiguration of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus", in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*, vol. I, eds Daniel W. Conway and Peter S. Groff, New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 352.

[14] Nietzsche's interpretation of Hamlet may appear unusual. For example, Hegel's interpretation of Hamlet conflicts with Nietzsche's. Unlike Nietzsche, Hegel views Hamlet's predicament as the result of too much reflection. Hegel sees Hamlet's plight not as the result of too much knowledge, but as the result of spending too much time procrastinating on the knowledge that he already has (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Engl. transl. by Thomas Malcolm Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 231). Nietzsche, however, is not alone. Literary critic Harold Bloom argues that "Nietzsche memorably got Hamlet right, seeing him not as the man who thinks too much but rather as the man who thinks too well" (Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, New York, Riverhead, 1998, p. 393). Though, it must be noted that Bloom changed his mind about Nietzsche's interpretation of Shakespeare in *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*, New York, Riverhead, 2003, p. 96.

struction; he has glimpsed the ugly hidden underbelly of existence[15]. What Hamlet is fighting against is the metaphysical construction of the world, the eternal nature of existence. Pure Dionysian knowledge thwarts action because, as Nietzsche claims, "action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of [Apolline] illusion" (BT, p. 40).

Nietzsche's discussion of *Hamlet* illustrates how the protagonist of a tragedy can connect to the spirit of Dionysus. Hamlet is able to illustrate the tearing apart of the *principium individuationis*[16]. While tragic characters typically present Apolline individuation and clarity, in his discussion of Hamlet, Nietzsche provides an example of how a tragic hero also presents the breaking down of individuality through Dionysian suffering. Hamlet's knowledge of the futility of his actions breaks down the individual will and forces a recognition that the rest of the world is wrapped in a veil of Apolline illusion. Nietzsche's use of Hamlet as an example of someone who knows too much, who

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[15]   Martha Nussbaum comments on just this point: "For the hero embodies in his person the inexorable clash between human aspirations and their natural/divine limits (§ 9): his demand for justice in an unjust universe entails terrible suffering". Nussbaum, "The Transfiguration of Intoxication", p. 352.

[16]   Nietzsche borrows Schopenhauer's notions of the "principle of individuation" and "the Will" in *The Birth of Tragedy*. For Nietzsche, the *principium individuationis* is related to the rational and beautifying force of Apollo. The principle of individuation is responsible for shielding us from understanding the primordial unity of existence, which for Schopenhauer is the Will. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche equates the Schopenhauerian will with the spirit of Dionysus. In Nietzsche's words: "Schopenhauer has described for us the enormous *horror* which seizes people when they suddenly become confused and lose faith in the cognitive forms of the phenomenal world because the principle of sufficient reason, in one or other of its modes, appears to sustain an exception. If we add to this horror the blissful ecstasy which arises from the innermost ground of man, indeed of nature itself, whenever this breakdown of the *principium individuationis* occurs, we catch a glimpse of the essence of the Dionysiac" (BT, p. 17). Schopenhauer cites Hamlet as the type of character who "after a long struggle and much suffering […] renounce forever the goals they had, up to that point, pursued so intensely as well as renouncing all the pleasures of life, or even willingly and joyfully giving them up" (Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, ed. and Engl. transl. by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman and Christopher Janaway, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 280). For Schopenhauer, the highest artistic achievements are capable of portraying the conflict of the will with itself. Hamlet is an example of a character whose experiences of suffering have lifted the veil of *maya*. "It sees through the form of appearance, the *principium individuationis*, and the egoism that rests on this principle slowly dies away, so that motives that had previously been so violent lose their power, and in their place, complete cognition of the essence of the world acts as a tranquilizer of the will and leads to resignation, the abandonment not only of life, but of the whole will to life" (p. 280).

has seen to the depths of Dionysian misery, illustrates that what traditional tragic heroes like Oedipus or Antigone were fighting was not the Gods or their fate, but the unchanging and eternal Dionysian truths. Therefore, Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet provides a key example for understanding how a tragic hero can be Apolline and Dionysian.

Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet also explains how the Dionysian can be incorporated into a non-musical drama. While Nietzsche typically argues that the Apolline aspects of a tragedy are manifested in its words and characters and the Dionysian in music, his argument in Section 10 illustrates that *some* characters, namely tragic heroes, can present the Dionysian aspects of the tragedy. Nietzsche's discussion of how the tragic hero can be a mask for Dionysus offers a possible explanation of how Shakespeare's non-musical tragedies could be said to embody both the Apolline and Dionysian aspects of a tragedy. While, in Nietzsche's theory, the musical chorus typically adds the Dionysian elements to the tragedy, Nietzsche also provides another, non-musical avenue for the Dionysian to present itself. Nietzsche's discussion of *Hamlet* is a concrete example, which is not offered in Nietzsche's discussion of ancient Greek tragedy, of how a tragic hero can come to present the Dionysian. The character Hamlet not only manifests the "simple, transparent, beautiful" (BT, p. 46) Apolline qualities of tragedy, but also the unsettling truths of the Dionysian. As a tragic character, Hamlet manifests both Dionysian and Apolline forces.

(b) Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet also helps us understand how modern, non-Wagnerian tragedy can be accommodated into his theory of art. Nietzsche's comments about Hamlet occur in the midst of his discussion of the differences between ancient and modern audiences. Understanding the differences between Aeschylus or Sophocles and Shakespeare bridges the gap between ancient Greek tragedy and Wagner and explains how modern artists can be incorporated into Nietzsche's system. Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet illustrates, in particular, the differences in the relationships between the spectator and the characters in ancient and modern tragedy. Nietzsche's comments on Hamlet enable us to understand how modern drama can engage its audience in a way that is similar to ancient Greek tragedy. *Hamlet* represents the tragic predicament in the modern era.

According to Nietzsche, in ancient Greek tragedy the spectator imagines himself to be a member of the chorus. The spectators of ancient Greek tragedies identified with the chorus and felt as if they

were the actors on the stage. For Nietzsche, this intimate relationship of spectator and character is not found in modern theaters, in which spectators are explicitly aware of the difference between themselves and what is going on onstage. The audience of modern theater appreciates theater in a vastly different manner than does the Greek audience. According to Nietzsche, the spectator of modern theater maintains at all times the knowledge that the play on stage is not real, but is in fact a work of art. As Nietzsche says: "We [modern audiences] had always believed that a proper spectator, whoever he might be, always had to remain conscious of the fact that what he saw before him was a work of art and not empirical reality" (BT, p. 37). The ancient Greek audience, on the other hand, does not observe this distinction between art and reality. Instead, the audience, who becomes part of the tragedy by becoming one with the chorus, must believe that the figures on stage are real, physically present beings[17].

Nietzsche's discussion of *Hamlet* in Section 7 indicates how modern theater can provide, despite the differences outlined above, a connection between spectator and theatrical truth similar to that found in ancient Greek tragedy. It helps us understand how modern theater can be incorporated into Nietzsche's theory. For Nietzsche, Hamlet is an archetype for how the ancient Greek audience would feel if they were confronted with Dionysian insight. The revulsion that Hamlet feels after meeting with the ghost of his father is similar to the revulsion that the audience of a Greek tragedy might feel if they were confronted only with the Dionysian aspects of the tragedy, which, for Nietzsche, are typically presented by the chorus. In Nietzsche's words: "But as soon as daily reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion" (BT, p. 40). According to Nietzsche, the ancient Greek spectator "has gazed with keen eye into the midst of the fearful, destructive havoc of so-called world history, and has seen the cruelty of nature, and is in danger of longing to deny the will as the Buddhist does" (BT, p. 40). The spectator, in this scenario, in no way identifies the action on the stage as separate from himself. Instead, the spectator responds to the Dionysian truths being presented to him through the chorus and is unsettled by be-

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[17]   Of the ancient Greeks' relationship to theater, Nietzsche states: "The tragic chorus [and by proxy the ancient Greek spectator] of the Greeks is required to see in the figures on stage real, physically present, living beings" (BT, p. 37).

ing reminded of the necessities of everyday existence. For Nietzsche, the chorus goes beyond politics, social convention and everyday life – it uncovers the scary and unsettling truth that reveals the "inner, terrible depths of nature" (BT, p. 46). In Nietzsche's theory, tragedy has two dynamically related parts: the Dionysian and the Apolline. Tragedy takes its audience to the edge of the Dionysian abyss and, just before falling irrevocably into its depths, is saved by the soothing veil of Apollo. Hamlet, for Nietzsche, has had the same experience as the audience of Greek tragedy that is dangling on the edge of the Dionysian abyss.

Given the differences between ancient and modern tragedy, how are modern audiences supposed to connect and become one with the characters onstage? How can modern drama entrance audiences in the same way as ancient Greek tragedy? My suggestion is that, unlike ancient Greek spectators who connect to the Dionysian only through the mediation of the chorus, the modern spectator has no need for the tragic chorus and connects directly with Hamlet, who is ultimately Dionysus is disguise. Instead of becoming one with the chorus, the modern spectator – who, as Nietzsche asserts, is used to a comfortable separation between spectator and character – becomes one with Hamlet and gets in touch with the Dionysian spirit through empathizing with Hamlet's plight. Modern audiences cannot get in touch with the Dionysian through the chorus because they do not have the same sense of shared culture as the ancient Greeks and thus cannot participate in a chorus in the same way. Instead, they must do so through identification with a tragic hero who himself embodies the tearing apart of the *principium individuationis* and the communion with the Dionysian unity.

Thus, Silk and Stern's argument that Nietzsche's philosophy of art is based almost solely on ancient Greek concepts does not lead directly to the conclusion that all of Nietzsche's comments about Shakespeare are merely "perfunctory". Instead, Nietzsche's comments on Shakespeare help to flesh out a plausible account of how his theory can be applied to modern, non-Greek tragedy. In the next section, I address another key difference between Shakespeare and Greek tragedy: that Shakespeare's plays have no music or musical origin. I argue that the lack of music in Shakespeare's plays does not preclude them from being able to tap into the Dionysian and Apolline forces of nature.

2. Systematic considerations

One problem with Nietzsche's theory of tragedy is that it seems to privilege music over all other forms of art. As Julian Young asks: "Why, for instance, assuming Verdi's *Otello* to be a fine opera as operas go and Shakespeare's *Othello* a fine play as plays go, should Verdi's be a greater work of art merely because Shakespeare was not a composer?"[18] Young notes that Nietzsche's commitment to music as the sole means of expressing the Dionysian creates an unwarranted bias against non-musical art. The presence of Shakespeare in *The Birth of Tragedy* is essential for understanding that Nietzsche should not be taken literally when he claims that music is the sole vehicle through which the Dionysian can express itself in tragedy.

Nietzsche's inclusion of Shakespeare as a respected artist makes it impossible to assert that Dionysian forces are limited to the musical elements of tragedies or dramas. Shakespeare's inclusion forces us to look for other ways that the Dionysian can be incorporated in non-musical drama.

One of the consequences of the discussion in the previous section was that Nietzsche's analysis of Hamlet illustrates that the tragic hero is actually a mask for Dionysus, thus providing one way that non-musical tragedy can present not just Apolline illusion, but also Dionysian truth. Nietzsche's introduction of the concept of "musical mood" offers an additional explanation of how a non-musical drama, like Shakespeare's, can achieve a balance between the Apolline and Dionysian, which Nietzsche insists characterizes Greek art[19].

In his comparison of lyric and epic poetry, Nietzsche introduces a distinction between music and "musical mood" that can be used to understand how a non-musical tragedy can come to bear the spirit of Dionysus. In his discussion of the lyric poetry of Archilochus, Nietzsche introduces the concept of musical mood, borrowed from Schiller, to explain how lyric poetry is born out of the spirit of music and thus manifests the Dionysian forces of nature:

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[18]   Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 35.

[19]   Julian Young suggests this concept of musical mood as a solution to Nietzsche's problem of non-musical artworks on p. 35.

> Schiller has thrown some light for us on the process of poetic composi-
> tion, as it affected him, in a psychological observation which seemed
> inexplicable but which did not worry him; he confesses that, in the state
> of mind preparatory to the act of writing poetry, what he had before
> and within him was not, say, a series of images, with his thoughts or-
> dered in causal sequence, but rather a *musical mood*. ("In my case the
> feeling is initially without a definite and clear object; this does not take
> shape until later. It is preceded by a certain musical mood, which is fol-
> lowed in my case by the poetic idea.") (BT, p. 29)

Nietzsche's invocation of Schiller gives an example of how non-
musical poetry can be generated out of, as the original title of *The Birth
of Tragedy* states, "the spirit of music"[20]. Nietzsche views Schiller's ex-
perience of poetic creation as parallel to the experience of Archilochus,
a lyric poet, who Nietzsche describes as a Dionysian artist. This lyric
poet, in the process of creating an artwork, assumes the spirit of music
and becomes one with the primordial unity of Dionysus. It is through
this spirit of music that the lyric poet is able to transmit his oneness
with the primordial unity into the images of a poem. In Nietzsche's
words: "The lyric genius feels a world of images and symbols growing
out of the mystical state of self-abandonment and one-ness, a world
which has a quite different colouring, causality, and tempo from that
of the sculptor and epic poet" (BT, pp. 30-31).

The lyric poet is fundamentally different from the epic poet, who
stays safely within the realm of Apolline dream images[21]. The lyric poet
and the epic poet both generate images. However, while the epic poet
generates beautiful representations of the world around him, the lyric
poet generates images that reflect his own immersion in the Dionysian
spirit. His images do not dwell in the mere contemplation of things,
but reflect the oneness that he feels with the primordial unity. Thus,
the lyric poet, who deals in words and images instead of music, is not
condemned to be a merely Apolline artist. While ancient lyric poetry
was traditionally related to music, and was meant to be sung instead
of read, Nietzsche's discussion here illustrates that it is not the music

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[20]   See BT, p. viii.

[21]   In his comparison of the lyric and the epic poet, Nietzsche states: "Both the sculptor
and his relative, the epic poet, are lost in the pure contemplation of images. The Diony-
sian musician, with no image at all, is nothing but primal pain and the primal echo of
it" (BT, p. 30).

that was responsible for representing the Dionysian in lyric poetry, but the musical mood that accompanied the creation of the poet's words and images.

Nietzsche's discussion of the creation of poetry out of musical mood illustrates a clear way of understanding how Shakespeare could be an artist who successfully incorporates both Apolline and Dionysian elements into his art. Unlike purely Apolline artists like Homer, Shakespeare generates his tragedies through the spirit of Dionysus. This theory is supported by the fact that Nietzsche describes Shakespeare as a Dionysian artist throughout the course of *The Birth of Tragedy*. As we have seen, Nietzsche compares Hamlet to a Dionysian man. In other places, Nietzsche hints that Shakespeare's plays are similar to Greek tragedies and implies that Shakespeare is an artist who escapes the trappings of the majority of modern art and who succeeds in tapping into the Apolline and the Dionysian forces of nature[22]; Nietzsche compares Shakespeare to Beethoven, a Dionysian artist[23]. It is only in Section 2 that Nietzsche's reference to Shakespeare *might* be construed as painting him as a purely Apolline artist[24]. However, given that Nietzsche refers to Shakespeare as a Dionysian artist in the rest of the book, a more plausible reading would argue that Nietzsche's comments in Section 2 simply illustrate that he took Shakespeare to be a well-rounded artist who is capable of conjuring the spirit of *both* Apollo *and* Dionysus.

Nietzsche's discussion of lyric poetry illustrates how non-musical artworks can be generated out of the spirit of music. Nietzsche's equation of Shakespeare with the spirit of Dionysus throughout *The Birth of Tragedy* illustrates that he believes that Shakespeare is an author who is also capable of generating a work of art through the spirit of music. While limited in scope, Nietzsche's discussion of Shakespeare is nonetheless essential for understanding how non-musical artworks can be successful. Shakespeare illustrates a key way that non-musical drama can be as powerfully Dionysian as a Greek tragedy or Wagnerian opera. Through

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[22]   Nietzsche mentions Shakespeare four times in *The Birth of Tragedy*: in Sections 2, 7, 17 and 22. His discussion of *Hamlet* occurs in Section 7.

[23]   See BT, p. xii.

[24]   Nietzsche's use of Shakespeare in Section 2 is complicated and could be construed in a number of different ways. His discussion here leaves open to interpretation what precise role Shakespeare might have for Nietzsche. Cf. BT, pp. 19-20, and the passage quoted above in note 8.

Shakespeare, we see that Nietzsche's claim that music is essential to evoking the Dionysian in art should not be taken literally. Instead, we should understand his discussion of music as a metaphor for engaging with the Dionysian spirit of oneness with the primordial unity.

3. *Metaphysical commitments: why did Nietzsche leave Shakespeare out?*

Despite this evidence for the importance of Shakespeare to Nietzsche's theory of tragedy, we are left with the lingering question of why Nietzsche decided to leave Shakespeare out of *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this final section, I argue that Nietzsche's commitment to Wagner is responsible for his assertions, throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*, that music is the sole vehicle through which the Dionysian can be presented. This commitment to Wagner offers a possible explanation for why Nietzsche decided to remove a comprehensive treatment of Shakespeare from his book[25].

Furthermore, even though Shakespeare and other non-musical tragedy can be seen as having a place in Nietzsche's theory (as I have argued above) his discussion of the manifestation of the Apolline and Dionysian in Wagner in the second half of *The Birth of Tragedy* leaves little room for non-musical drama; in this second half of the book, Nietzsche views music as the sole vehicle through which the Dionysian can be expressed. In the first half of *The Birth of Tragedy* (Sections 1-15), in which Nietzsche discusses ancient Greek tragedy and Socratism, there is room for Shakespeare in his theory of tragedy. But this is not true of the second half of the book (Sections 16-25), in which Nietzsche discusses Wagner and the rebirth of tragedy. This dispar-

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[25]   That Nietzsche's theory of tragedy is made inconsistent by his dogmatic love for Wagner is also noticed by Julian Young. Young asserts that there is a distinction in *The Birth of Tragedy* between Nietzsche as a Wagner propagandist and Nietzsche as a philosopher of art. Young believes that, as a Wagner propagandist, Nietzsche is happy to relegate all non-musical artworks to a level of achievement far below that of ancient Greek tragedians and Wagner. However, as a serious philosopher and aesthetician, Nietzsche was sensitive to the fact that artists like Shakespeare and Goethe presented great examples of non-musical artwork. "In line with this, we find that his more considered discussions moderate the demand that great art should be literally musical to the requirement that it should be generated out of 'musical mood' (BT, p. 5); that is, in the words of the original title of the book, 'the spirit of music'" (Young, p. 36).

ity between the first and second half of *The Birth of Tragedy* provides a method for understanding its troubled metaphysics. Nietzsche scholars have spent a lot of energy trying to understand or make consistent the metaphysical commitments in *The Birth of Tragedy*. One line of argument asks whether or not Nietzsche is committed to a Schopenhauerian metaphysics[26]. Another line of argument asks whether or not the metaphysics of *The Birth of Tragedy* is internally consistent[27], with some commentators insisting that Nietzsche must not have been serious about the book's metaphysics and instead suggesting that the book should be viewed as myth[28]. One form of the latter is taken up by Aaron Ridley and Henry Staten. Ridley argues, against Staten, that there is no reason to assume what he calls a "bipartite reading" of the text. Unlike Staten, who argues that the first (Sections 1-15) and second (Sections 16-25) halves of the book have different metaphysical commitments, Ridley argues that, while *The Birth of Tragedy*'s metaphysics are indeed slippery, there is not sufficient evidence to separate the two parts of the book on metaphysical grounds[29]. I argue that the presence of Shakespeare sheds light on this debate and illustrates that understanding Nietzsche's aesthetic commitments is useful to understand his metaphysical ones.

Ridley is the first to refer to the division of Sections 1-15 and 16-25 as a "bipartite reading". In his book *Nietzsche on Art*, he attacks the argument of Staten, who claims that "Nietzsche apparently tried to write the metaphysical will out of *The Birth of Tragedy* but found, on

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[26] See Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*; Beatrice Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*", *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14 (2006), pp. 373-403; Nussbaum, "The Transfiguration of Intoxication".

[27] See Henry Staten, *Nietzsche's Voice*, Cornell, Cornell University Press, 1990; Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche on Art*, New York, Routledge, 2007; Paul de Man, "Genesis and Genealogy (Nietzsche)", in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 70-102; and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Le Détour", *Poetique*, 5 (1971), pp. 53-76.

[28] Peter Poellner, "Myth, Art and Illusion in Nietzsche", in *Myth and the Making of Modernity: The Problem of Grounding in Early Twentieth-Century Literature*, eds Michael Bell and Peter Poellner, Amsterdam-Atlanta, Rodopi, 1998; de Man, *Allegories of Reading*; James Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on* The Birth of Tragedy, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000.

[29] Aaron Ridley argues against Staten's bipartite reading: "My own view, then, is that there is no reason to accept a bipartite reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*. The Wagner sections clearly presuppose (at least) the weak version of the metaphysical thesis, and there are no obvious grounds to think that the first fifteen sections are any different" (Ridley, p. 30).

arriving at Section 16, that he could not do it"[30]. Ridley argues that
Staten's reading separates the book into parts that, on metaphysi-
cal grounds, glorify Wagner and parts that do not. Both Ridley and
Staten acknowledge the important confluence of the metaphysics
of Schopenhauer and the art and theory of Wagner. Both Wagner
and Schopenhauer privilege music over other art forms. For Scho-
penhauer, our everyday lives are nothing more than an illusion that
distracts us from the innermost nature of the world, which he calls
the will. This will consists of a meaningless striving and insatiable
desiring. Schopenhauer views music as being uniquely capable of re-
fracting the *will* in a form that human beings can comprehend. Thus,
Nietzsche's commitment to Wagner's music as the paradigmatic form
of modern art is intimately tied to his, and Wagner's, early interest
in Schopenhauer, who claims that music is key to transcending the
limits of everyday experience. It is beyond doubt that Nietzsche in-
corporated elements of Schopenhauer's philosophy in *The Birth of
Tragedy*[31]. The argument that Staten is making (and that Ridley is re-
futing) is that Schopenhauer's metaphysics is absent from the first
half of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but has crept into the second half. Staten
argues that "before the long quotation from Schopenhauer in Sec-
tion 16, Nietzsche avoids using the term 'will' in its metaphysical
sense"[32]. Ridley, on the other hand, believes that metaphysical uses
of the will also appear in the first half of *The Birth of Tragedy*. While,
Ridley claims, Nietzsche does not adopt a fully Schopenhauerian or
a fully consistent metaphysics throughout the book, he does argue
for a 'weak' metaphysics that runs throughout the entire book[33]. This
weak metaphysics lies somewhere between a full adoption of Scho-
penhauer's metaphysics and a psychological thesis, which would
presuppose no metaphysical commitments. I argue that the different

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[30]   Staten, p. 192.

[31]   Nietzsche provides direct references to Schopenhauer throughout *The Birth of Trag-
edy*. In the very first section, Nietzsche mentions Schopenhauer multiple times, quot-
ing directly from *The World as Will and Representation* in his description of Apollo
and Dionysus (BT, pp. 14-18). In his description of the Dionysian, Nietzsche states:
"In the same passage Schopenhauer has described for us the enormous *horror* which
seizes people when they suddenly become confused and lose faith in the cognitive
forms of the phenomenal world because the principle of sufficient reason, in one or
other of its modes, appears to sustain an exception" (BT, p. 17).

[32]   Staten, p. 192.

[33]   Ridley, p. 23

roles that music plays in the first and second halves of the book supports a variety of the bipartite reading.

In the second half of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche places more emphasis on the close relationship between music and the Dionysian than he does in the first half. He makes it clear that the Dionysian is more important than the Apolline because of the ultimate importance of music for tragedy. This does not mean, however, that he finds no place for the Apolline. He argues that Wagner's operas, devoid of their characters, would be too painful to listen to[34]. It is the presence of Apollo that allows us to tolerate the Dionysian power of Wagner's music. The Apolline provides a deceptive shield against the Dionysian forces of the music and offers images and concepts that allow one to connect to the world of the drama.

While the Apolline is essential to Wagner's operas, the Dionysian still maintains the "upper hand" (BT, p. 103). Nietzsche argues that the Dionysian "produces, taken as a whole, an effect which goes beyond all the effects of Apolline art" (BT, p. 103):

> In the total effect of tragedy the Dionysiac gains the upper hand once more; it closes with a sound which could never issue from the realm of Apolline art. Thereby Apolline deception is revealed for what it is: a persistent veiling, for the duration of the tragedy, of the true Dionysiac effect, an effect so powerful, however, that it finally drives the Apolline drama itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysiac wisdom and where it negates itself and its Apolline visibility. (BT, pp. 103-4)

In Nietzsche's discussion of Wagner, music, and the Dionysian spirit that it embodies, takes on a greater level of importance than it did in his discussion of ancient Greek tragedy. Nietzsche emphasizes that "[t]hanks to the pre-established harmony which exists between fully realized drama and its music, drama achieves a supreme degree of visual intensity which is unattainable by spoken drama" (BT,

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[34]   It is interesting to note that in Nietzsche's later writing *The Case of Wagner*, he calls Wagner the "scientist par excellence" and that he "vastly increased the linguistic capacity of music". Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, eds Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, Engl. transl. by Judith Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 247. While Nietzsche originally emphasized the power of Wagner's music to present the Dionysian in his operas, he eventually abandons his faith in Wagner's music and classifies Wagner as a Socratic or scientific artist.

p. 102). Nietzsche claims that music helps us to see more intensely the world of the stage. Music helps us *internalize* what is going on on stage, so that the spectator sees the play not only with his or her eyes, but with his or her imagination and spirit. Here, Nietzsche's language becomes highly metaphorical. He uses the image of weaving delicate fabrics to illustrate that music simplifies the actions on the stage, so that they can be internalized as what they really are: an expression of Dionysus. In one metaphor, Nietzsche compares the effect of music to a delicate tissue: "music forces us to see more, and in a more inward fashion than usual, and to see the events on stage spread out before us like some delicate tissue" (BT, p. 102). In a related metaphor, Nietzsche compares the effects of music to a loom: "If drama, with the help of music, spreads out all its movements and figures before us and with such inwardly illuminated clarity, as if we were seeing a tissue being woven on a rising and falling loom, it also produces an effect which goes beyond all the effects of Apolline art" (BT, p. 103). Music, in this case, is responsible for clarifying and illuminating the events on the stage, allowing the audience to "gaze into the interior of things". The combination of music and drama exceeds spoken dramas because music allows the viewer to experience the depths of Dionysian wisdom. As Nietzsche puts it: "What could the poet of the world hope to offer that is analogous to this, as he strives vainly, with the much more imperfect mechanism of word and concept, to achieve that inward enlargement of the visible world of the stage and its illumination from within?" (BT, p. 102)

Nietzsche's emphasis on music as integral to tragedy contradicts his suggestion that the Dionysian can be embodied in the tragic hero or be generated by a musical mood. In his discussion of Wagner, he explicitly cites music as the source of the Dionysian and does not leave open the possibility for the characters or words of a drama to embody the spirit of Dionysus. Instead, he cites the words and characters as the source of the Apolline in Wagner. It seems that, with regard to Wagner, the characters are not themselves masks for Dionysus, but are instead the pure manifestation of Apollo. Nietzsche specifically states that the characters of *Tristan and Isolde* bring forth compassion, light and a mask that covers over the dark truth presented in Wagner's musical scores (BT, pp. 101-2). The only function of the characters and their words is to present the Apolline aspects of the tragedy, which make it possible for us to tolerate the unsettling

Dionysian truths presented in Wagner's music. The characters are a mere lens through which we can safely view the Dionysian aspects of the opera.

Nietzsche's discussion of how the Apolline and Dionysian are manifested in Wagner is different from his discussion of how the Apolline and Dionysian are manifested in ancient Greek tragedy. While Wagner is, for Nietzsche, a modern instantiation of a lost form of art, his characters play a different role in the Apolline/Dionysian relationship than in ancient Greek tragedy. The characters in Wagner's operas are not capable of manifesting or revealing any type of Dionysian truth, but instead provide only an Apolline mask for the musical-Dionysian aspects of the drama. This strict assignment of the Apolline to words and characters and the Dionysian to music makes it impossible to understand how Shakespeare's music-less plays could manifest the Dionysian spirit. While Nietzsche provides a way for characters like Hamlet to present the Dionysian spirit in his discussion of Greek tragedy, he offers no such allowance in his discussion of Wagner. Shakespeare appears to be more compatible with ancient Greek tragedy than he is with other modern artists, like Wagner. This discrepancy may simply reveal a difference in the art of ancient Greece and Wagner. More seriously, I believe it reveals a deeper inconsistency in Nietzsche's theory of tragedy: one that divides the first half of the book from the second.

Since music is the gateway to the Dionysian in Nietzsche's theory and the Dionysian is the force that most resembles Schopenhauer's metaphysical concept of the will, it is clear that Nietzsche's thoughts on music are not irrelevant to the discussion surrounding the metaphysical commitments of *The Birth of Tragedy*. I want to suggest that Nietzsche's inflexible attitude towards music in the second half of the book reflects not only a stronger commitment to Wagner as an artist he idolizes, but also, and relatedly, a stronger commitment to Schopenhauer's metaphysics. Thus, Nietzsche's attitudes towards music should not be ignored in a discussion about the metaphysical commitments of the book.

4. Conclusion

Nietzsche's relationship to Shakespeare is not a simple one.

It is clear, from his preparatory notes, that Shakespeare was important to Nietzsche. His preparatory notes, however, also reveal

that Nietzsche was conflicted about the position that the author should play in his theory of tragedy. This conflict is, I believe, the result of his commitment to Wagner as the modern instantiation of ancient Greek tragedy. Nietzsche's commitment to the musicality of Wagner's operas as the key to its successfully manifesting both the Apolline and Dionysian forced him to remove a systematic treatment of an artist who he clearly cherished: Shakespeare.

This conflict between Nietzsche's commitment to Wagner and his interest in Shakespeare, however, does not ultimately negate the importance of Shakespeare for Nietzsche's theory of tragedy. Instead, the references to Shakespeare that Nietzsche failed to purge from *The Birth of Tragedy* prove to be essential to filling the gaps that Nietzsche's commitment to Wagner left in his theory. Nietzsche's discussion of Shakespeare helps us to see how modern, non-musical drama can be incorporated to Nietzsche's system. Furthermore, it can help readers to understand that, despite the differences between ancient Greek and modern culture, modern audiences can still experience a unifying connection to the spirit of Dionysus. Shakespeare ultimately illustrates that the Apolline and Dionysian have not been lying dormant, but have reemerged in the guise of non-musical Shakespearian drama.

Considerazioni 'impolitiche' sul *Re Lear*

Massimo Cacciari

(to my kind sister)

1.

Il mondo è malato: "it smells of mortality" (IV.vi.129[1]). Puzza nella sua stessa carne: una malattia il figlio per il padre. Impossibile l'intesa – ogni 'patto' violato. Le connessioni tra gli elementi, la *philia* elementare che li collega si sono spezzate (I.ii.144ss). Sono *anomia* e *apoleia* a regnare. La crisi di ogni ordine assume un timbro esplicitamente apocalittico. Ma è apocalisse *radicitus* desacralizzata. La "ben fondata" Terra ha fatto *cracque* (Pascal), e nessun Cielo più l'assiste. Anzi, il Cielo riflette cosmicamente la *tempestas* che regna in terra, nella carne, nella mente e nel cuore degli umani. È solo un fulminare e un sabba di dèmoni – quelli che Edgar dipinge fingendosi pazzo. Il tempo appare, sì, contratto in uno spasmo violento, ma tale spasmo non promette alcuna *Parousia*, alcun Giorno del Signore. Tutto precipita; ogni potenza in grado di contenere la frenesia, la "hideous rashness" (I.i.152), che sembra tutto e tutti afferrare perché si acceleri la fine, viene tolta di mezzo. Ma tale impazienza non ha termine che con la morte.

Un tempo apocalittico 'disperato' intorno al proprio senso ultimo si trasforma necessariamente in una *maschera* di apocalisse. L'apocalisse assume così l'aspetto di un incontenibile, quasi selvaggio *carnevale*. È il Fool a rappresentare questa profonda coscienza del passaggio dall'*ordine* della tragedia all'*assoluto grottesco* (Hegel). Ogni segno di questo dramma può essere letto in tale prospettiva. Ogni atto, ogni compor-

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[1]   Tutte le citazioni sono tratte da William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Reginald A. Foakes, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Thomson Learning, 1997.

tamento, proprio nella straordinarietà del *pathos* che esprimono, assumono un carattere grottesco. E non può che avvenire così, quando la sofferenza viene prodotta senza ragione e ad essa sembra impossibile conferire alcun significato. Grottesco per eccellenza è voler spiare nelle stelle il proprio destino allorché l'universale carnevale ha coinvolto, nella grande tempesta, lo stesso Cielo. Le stelle *errano* in Cielo come quaggiù i mortali. Il rovesciamento di ogni *consuetudo*, l'inversione folle dei ruoli non sono ora immagini che di un *eccesso*, che nulla annuncia, che si esaurisce in sé, che brucia senza dar luce. Neppure carnevale, dunque, propriamente, poiché il carnevale si coniuga al Nuovo Anno – a meno di fraintendere (lo vedremo) la conclusione del dramma come nuovo inizio. Qui il carnevale divora le sue maschere. E tutte le sue maschere, sulla scena di questo mondo, non rappresentano, nella sostanza, che la potenza accecante, e grottesca a un tempo (come in certe figure di Bacon), dell'eccesso.

Proprio quella di Lear lo è al massimo grado. L'eccesso è anzitutto eccedere nel contraddirsi, eccedere nel *non* saper temperare le passioni dell'anima. In Lear è la contraddizione insanabile tra desiderio di essere amato e *libido dominandi*, nel senso della *pura auctoritas.* Questa contraddizione produce la sua *hysterica passio* (II.ii.247), che tutti, amici e nemici, bene conoscono. Non certo frutto soltanto della "infirmity of his age" (I.i.294). Anche i suoi anni migliori sono stati dominati dalla stessa furiosa impazienza (I.i.296-97), ignara di sé, di cui dà prova in ogni momento del dramma. E in ogni momento egli invoca quella pazienza ("patience I need!", II.ii.460) che *ontologicamente* gli manca. Vede il bene e opera a rovescio. Male radicale della sua natura. E di quella degli altri: alla *hysterica passio* con cui Lear prima caccia Cordelia e più tardi maledice le figlie traditrici, risponde il 'troppo' di odio nei confronti del padre, che il comportamento di queste ultime manifesta, appena mascherato da una patina 'machiavellica'. La stessa di cui fa sfoggio Edmund. Nessun carattere autenticamente machiavellico punterebbe, infatti, per affermarsi, sul *rimbecillimento del mondo* e sulla passione erotica, come uniche carte per conseguire i propri fini. Dissimulazione e inganno sono armi solo occasionali, mai strategiche, mai capaci da sole di conquistare il comando e meno ancora di stabilire un effettuale governo. Edmund lo riconosce soltanto quando per lui tutto è finito. Il suo 'eccedere', come per Lear, come per Goneril e Regan, non ha altro limite che la morte – fino a questo *eschaton* la loro natura *deve* de-lirare.

Eccesso è anche la credulità con cui il superstizioso Gloucester accoglie le rivelazioni e le messe in scena del figlio traditore. Come potrebbe un simile "credulous father" (I.ii.177) tornare utile a un Regno? Altrettanto poco dell'*isteria* dello stesso Re. Ma la colpevole credulità di questo padre, pronto ad arrendersi quasi senza resistenza all'ipocrisia del 'bastardo', dimostrando la radicale debolezza e vanità del suo amore, non può andare disgiunta dalla "foolish honesty" (I.ii.179) del fratello 'buono', che fugge dalla prova, che neppure pensa a sfidare il *wit* di Edmund faccia a faccia col padre. Come potrà un simile eccesso di 'onestà', che si è manifestata in tutta la sua impotenza, ereditare il potere? L'esercizio del potere è altrettanto lontano dal demonico *non* machiavellico di Edmund, che dalla impotente onestà di Edgar. E ancor più lontano da quell'altra forma di 'onestà' che Albany rappresenta: incerta, pallida, tardiva. Di non essere in grado di "sanare le piaghe dello Stato" (V.iii.319), egli è ben consapevole e lo dichiara alla fine. Ma come potrà esserlo il più giovane, Edgar, dopo la rinuncia anche di Kent? Per lui il Regno è soltanto un peso, imposto dalla presente miseria del mondo, dal disordine in cui esso è piombato. Tocca ora ai giovani sopportarlo, come ai vecchi l'uscire dalla vita. Il tempo è maturo per una tale vicissitudine. Nessuna volontà di potenza, nessuna *decisione* assunta responsabilmente, a proprio nome in tali parole. Saprà difendere lo Stato più efficacemente di come ha difeso se stesso dalle roboanti, straordinarie, eccessive calunnie del fratello? Tutto conduce a dubitarlo radicalmente – come è inevitabile dubitare intorno alla 'felicità' del futuro regno dei *pueri* alla fine de *La Tempesta*.

De-liranti incomprensioni e fraintendimenti, de-lirante concatenarsi di azioni e reazioni, che nessuno riesce a frenare. "All this done / Upon the gad" (I.ii.25-26): spasmo del tempo che non ammette riflessione. Atti che si susseguono come in un istante, l'uno specchio deformato dell'altro, dominati tutti dalla ferrea legge dell'eterogenesi dei fini. Continuamente si invoca pazienza e continuamente si è travolti dall'ira, dall'inganno, dall'invidia e dalla libido di dominio, ma da una libido cieca, incapace di 'stato'. È il mondo, per un verso, delle immediate *decisioni* – ma delle decisioni *infondate*. È Edmund che invoca il *kairòs* (V.iii.31-35), la potenza dell'istante che decide del senso di una vita; è lui ad avere le parole che sembrano deliberatamente colpire quel pallido pensiero che blocca la risoluzione, di cui fa esperienza il principe Amleto – ma tutti sono presi nel vortice di decisioni

che *precipitano*, che non possono dar vita ad alcun 'ordine nuovo'. Anche la 'buona' Cordelia, che si fa vanto addirittura di fare ciò che intende ancora prima di dirlo (I.i.228). Sono decisioni che 'esplodono' dalla natura dei protagonisti, quasi dal loro corpo, prima che dalla loro mente. Natura è la suprema dea che accomuna i contendenti stessi; la Natura invocano sia Edmund che Lear (I.ii.1; I.iv.267).

Vi è qualcuno che possa non essere considerato *reo*, e cioè partecipe di tale trama? Certamente non Cordelia, abbracciata nella comune *apoleia* al padre e alle sorelle. *Menadi* del potere quest'ultime, 'incantate' all'idea che si dia pura *potestas*, spoglia di ogni *auctoritas*. Ma non è, di fatto, Cordelia *in lotta* con loro, proprio nel suo rifiuto di ogni confronto? Occorre ascoltare in tutta la sua tremenda pregnanza la risposta che ella dà alla folle domanda di Lear: "Nothing, my lord" (I.i.87). Non trova altro modo di *distinguersi* dalla ipocrisia delle sorelle – ma ciò significa volontà incoercibile di emergere, di *eccedere*. Il suo amore è reale, ma perfettamente inutile, nulla salva, come nulla salvano le 'fami' delle sorelle e di Edmund. Neppure ella prova ad aprire gli occhi a Lear, come fosse a priori disperata sulla possibilità di farlo rinsavire; amore che nulla dice e nulla opera; il suo "nothing" profetizza così il destino di tutta la sua schiatta. Di più: esso profetizza la *kenosi* dello stesso Re, il suo diventare uno spettro (I.iv.222), un *cane* (IV.vi.154). Il padre la chiama a partecipare al regno ed ella risponde mostrando assoluta incapacità di *fingere*, anche là dove si tratta di salvare il bene *comune*. Valore supremo per lei è la manifestazione della *purezza* della propria indole. Che nulla ne violi l'immagine. Si scatenino pure le forze demoniache, purché *io* non ne venga contaminata. Impraticabile utopia. In modo esattamente analogo il padre, che non a caso la ama come la *sua* prediletta, altro non sa che manifestarsi per ciò che è; la loro natura è *incontenibile*, non ammette maschera o freno. Superbia, *hybris*? "Plainness" o impiegabile "pride" esibisce Cordelia (I.i.130)?

Una 'virtù' intrattabile, comunque, la sua, come quella del padre, confitta come quella nell'essenza del loro esserci, contro il cui richiamo nulla possono. Quel tremendo "nothing" indica anche questa interiore impotenza, che necessariamente conduce a rovina chi è destinato a regnare. Volto opposto e complementare allo pseudo-machiavellismo *sine virtute* di Edmund: incapaci di *fare-Stato* sia l'eccesso di inganno e menzogna, sia l'eccesso di orgogliosa 'sincerità', cieca di fronte alle drammatiche conseguenze del proprio 'sublime'

affermarsi. Ma chi *vede* su "questo enorme palcoscenico di folli" (IV. vi.179)? Solo a tentoni qualcosa si scorge – e questo qualcosa è una realtà a brandelli, fatta di frammenti corrosi (IV.vi.145).

Una sola potenza, certo, qui non conosce eccessi: quella di amare. Nessuna 'follia' d'amore. Cordelia e Ofelia sono figure spiritualmente antitetiche. Nessuna gratuità nel *dono*: Cordelia lo subordina alla dimostrazione del proprio valore, che non tollera di essere paragonato a quello delle sorelle – di più, non tollera di essere giudicato; per Lear esso non esiste che in ragione dell'essere riconosciuto ed esaltato. L'amore, realtà o finzione che sia, sta qui sempre nella rete della reciprocità e dello scambio. È sempre *misurabile*; il *ragionamento* di Cordelia sull'amore *dovuto* è esemplare, e così il modo in cui, senza tradire passione alcuna, ella segue il Re di Francia. Amore umano – troppo umano sempre, proprio dell'umana *natura*. E perciò, quando si sente tradito, sempre propenso a correre alla *vendetta*. Vendetta è la parola di Lear. Vendetta meditano reciprocamente le sorelle, sentendosi derubate del *possesso* di Edmund ("eppure ero amato", V.iii.238, egli dice: possedere e essere-posseduto è l'unica forma di amore che egli conosce). La *secessio* radicale dall'idea di *agape* è forse il tratto più apocalittico del *Lear*.

2.

Ma una diversa *secessio* costituisce il nocciolo problematico fondamentale di questo dramma. È quella di Lear stesso dal proprio essere-re. È questa il suo "darker purpose" (I.i.35), non solo riposto intendimento, ma davvero la mira più oscura, quella di cui in nessun modo ha inteso il significato, quella che giace nell'oscurità che non è giunto a conoscere della propria anima. Il peso della regalità gli era già divenuto insopportabile? Forse perché già aveva avvertito che le potenze che la minano non sono più contenibili, che l'epoca è saltata via dai suoi antichi cardini? La malinconica rassegnazione con cui Edgar, alla fine, accoglie l''incarico' non esprime che la nostalgia ancora inespressa o inconsapevole di Lear all'inizio? Un cerchio si forma tra la conclusione del dramma e il suo *antefatto* nell'anima di Lear ("the wheel is come full circle", V.iii.172)? È Lear a dirlo: egli non desidera che "to shake all cares and business from our age" (I.i.38); non può essere solo la stanchezza dell'età. È dell'*ingombro* dell''affare

politico' che occorre sbarazzarsi. Egli lo sentiva come un giogo da prima; si era forse mai dato cura dei poveri, nudi, miserabili? dei suoi sudditi vittime della *tempestas* (III.iv.28ss)? L'anelito alla *se-curitas* cela un'essenziale im-politicità della sua natura. Una apocalittica crisi della 'vocazione' politica. Da un lato, il regno che se-cede da se stesso; dall'altro, a pretenderne l'eredità, si fa innanzi una *libido dominandi* incapace di *stato*.

Allorché il Re se-cede, nulla più trattiene l'*anomia*. Ma la forma concreta in cui tale *secessio* appare è quella della rottura del nesso tra *potestas* e *auctoritas*. Qui il peccato mortale che Lear, l'im-politico Lear, commette: egli pensa *da folle* che l'*auctoritas* possa valere per sé, sia tutt'uno con la propria persona, incarnata in essa. È per lui 'naturale' che il corpo del Re continui a essere sacro, anche nel momento che, spogliandosi dell'esercizio del potere, cessi di esercitare la sua legittima violenza.

A Lear manca perciò il presupposto stesso del Politico: la conoscenza disincantata della realtà effettuale. E questa dice che la sacralità del corpo del Re è tramontata per sempre. Come un don Chisciotte – ma un don Chisciotte ignaro della sovra-umana bontà dell'hidalgo castigliano – egli combatte impotente le potenze dell'epoca. Ma è in questa sua impotenza che esse si riflettono manifestando il proprio lato più oscuro: il regnare si è fatto funzione amministrativa *pro tempore*; vale soltanto la positività della legge, finché esiste la forza in grado di farla valere; allorché questa venga meno, nulla più tiene in forma, a nulla più si deve obbedienza; in sé la legge non è che convenzione, un patto che dura finché esiste una convenienza dei 'sudditi' a rispettarlo.

La follia di Lear, che per primo (I.i.147) dichiara apertamente, è Kent a vederla; il solo che continui a *vederla* (I.iv.30). Malgrado tutto, Kent resta fedele all'*auctoritas* del corpo del Re – e proprio perché consapevole del tramonto della sua 'idea', nel 'lutto generale' se ne va, alla fine, lungo il cammino che il suo Signore terreno ha appena percorso, verso il vero Signore che non è di questo mondo. Questa follia consiste, dunque, nell'immaginare un'autorità spirituale, e tuttavia a un tempo temporalmente incarnata, autonoma rispetto all'esercizio del potere, assunto anche, com'è necessario, nella sua dimensione demonica. Ma la rottura del nesso non sembra salvare la forma del potere effettuale. La scena del potere, tramontata l'aura dell'*auctoritas*, si fa puramente luttuosa. Se il Re

cessa dall'essere *rappresentante* di un 'bene' che trascende la trama delle cure e degli affari (sempre affrontati da Lear con impaziente insofferenza), il regno diviene la scena della lotta tra i suoi *figli*. Il fratricidio è la situazione-limite, l'*eschaton*, di un regno in cui tutto si risolve nella trama, nel *polemos*, dei diversi interessi che vi abitano. Il regno diviene la *preda* che nella loro lotta i figli vogliono conquistare. È il fratricidio – ma non quello *fondativo*, Abele-Caino, Romolo-Remo – il grande tema del *Lear*, non il parricidio. I vecchi, se-cedendo, danno luogo al suo scatenarsi. Accecati prima ancora che la cecità fisica sia loro procurata, come Gloucester, non hanno saputo costruire una diversa 'armonia' tra *auctoritas* e *potestas*, illudendosi semplicemente di poterle 'autonomizzare'. La loro impotenza si trasforma nel potere *sine auctoritate* dei figli. Questi sanno la loro natura e sembrano andarne fieri (tutti, anche e soprattutto Cordelia) – ma è natura rovinosa, fratricida: si ammazzano le sorelle, si ammazzano i fratelli. Nessuna *auctoritas* può risorgere da una simile lotta, e nessuno mostra di saperlo più amaramente del 'vincitore', Edgar.

Così essenzialmente cieca s'è fatta questa figura di Re, che essa non solo *ab-dica*, non solo, cioè, cessa di *dettare* la legge, pretendendo di essere ancora venerato come il suo *Auctor*, ma conduce la sua folle idea di secessione fino a *dividere* lo stesso regno, a spartirlo come una torta, dice Auden! Lear non solo divide potere e autorità, ma il potere stesso, e lo divide fisicamente, in tutti i sensi. Egli è così il responsabile primo della guerra fratricida, la evoca, la rende quasi inevitabile. Il carattere degli altri, i loro 'eccessi' possono esprimersi soltanto perché la decisione di Lear, follemente infondata, ha maturato in sé *il loro* tempo, li ha collocati nel loro sciagurato *kairòs*. L'*anomia* è già immanente nel gesto del Re. Egli l'ha in-detta ab-dicando dalla propria funzione essenziale: quella di *regere* appunto, di sostenere il peso delle contraddizioni e riportarle a unità. Qui il Re, all'opposto, conferisce a ognuna di esse potere, illudendosi che basti ancora la nuda esistenza, la *parousia* del suo corpo a garantire armonia. Mentre il senso e il valore del moderno Principe consistono nel saper conservare integro il potere anche *sine auctoritate*, qui si pretenderebbe di mantenere un'effettuale *auctoritas*, anche *sine potestate*. Rovesciamento di ogni reale rapporto. Grottesco carnevale; la maschera di un'autorità disarmata che esala all'istante. E che tramontando questo solo produce: guerra civile.

Rex destruens – ecco la persona di Lear. Ab-dicando e disunendo il regno e il potere, facendoli a pezzi, egli distrugge il nesso potere-autorità insieme alla forma del regno. La sovranità risulta allora divisa e non più 'territorializzabile'. Il conflitto divampa all'interno e si generalizza a un tempo: la *stasis* interiore 'reclama' l'intervento straniero (III.i.22-23[2]); come nell'*Amleto*. La scena si trasforma in una sarabanda di eserciti e figure, di volontà e deliri, di lingue e costumi. Ciascuno vuole autonomamente rappresentarsi, imporre agli altri la propria rappresentazione di sé – ed è inevitabile che così accada là dove *nothing* ne trascenda la naturale tendenza all''eccesso'. Ma il profondo realismo della psicologia shakespeariana va oltre: forse che non è immanente alla figura del Re il delirio che si manifesta in Lear? Non anela, nei suoi intenti più oscuri, nelle sue idee più confuse e profonde, ogni Re a valere 'in forza' della propria sola *auctoritas*, a essere obbedito perché 'convince' la sua pura presenza? Solo un tale potere avrebbe il diritto di chiamarsi autenticamente *sacro*… E, ad un tempo, non si agita sempre nel cuore del Re la nostalgia di abbandonare il crudo esercizio della sovranità? Non è tale esercizio sempre anche un opprimente dovere? Chi non desidera il potere, costui deve reggere lo Stato, afferma la *politeia* platonica. Lear mette inconsciamente alla prova entrambe le 'pulsioni' – e sperimenta così che esse conducono al naufragio, 'certificato' a priori dalla disperata saggezza del Fool, straordinario *Coro* del dramma.

3.

Ma il grande dramma intorno al potere si staglia sullo sfondo di un conflitto che assume una portata apocalittica ancora più evidente. La scena dei folli è anche quella dell'inesorabile tramonto del *pater-potens*. Un maschio Dio tremendo, impotentemente alla ricerca di vendetta, tradito, abbandonato e incapace di misericordia, tuona per l'ultima volta negli 'eccessi' di Lear. Non è soltanto la fine della sacralità regale, è la morte del Padre-Re, della signoria paterna, della *patria potestas* – e della teologia politica che intorno alla sua figura si è potuta incardinare.

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[2]   Per questi versi, presenti solo nel primo in-quarto del *King Lear*, si vedano la nota al testo (p. 260) e la Appendix 1 (pp. 393-402) dell'edizione Arden.

A decretarne la fine non sono *gli eredi*, ma *le eredi*. Sono le figlie, non importa se con mezzi anche opposti (o senza averne in alcun modo consapevolezza, come Cordelia) a provocarne l'estremo delirio, a gettare, cioè, il Padre oltre il limite della sua sovranità. Le figlie insieme al bastardo conducono il gioco luttuoso. *Quis heres*? 'Legittimo' erede poteva essere detto soltanto colui che riconoscesse in sé, come costitutivo del proprio esserci, la relazione col padre. *Nuovo*, invece, vuole essere Edmund – *nuove* le figlie (anche Cordelia). Gli *homines novi* non ereditano, conquistano. Ogni tradizionale nesso ereditario è spezzato. E tale stra-ordinaria situazione spiega la paradossale 'procedura' con cui Lear intende trasmettere il potere. Egli non ha eredi, l'erede *maschio* ormai manca. Il padre è *orfano* dell'erede 'naturale'. Alle *figlie* può unirsi solo per amore. Il Padre-Re giunto alla sua ultima giornata intuisce oscuramente che la linea patriarcale del potere si è lacerata, che la relazione tra generazioni e generi deve avvenire in forme radicalmente nuove. Ma non può farsi di quella parola 'amore' altra idea, se non quella di cui abbiamo parlato; il Padre-Re conosce solo la parola del comando, anche quando non si ritenga *legibus solutus*; e dunque non può che *comandare* amore, 'peccando' così a un tempo contro l'arte politica e il significato essenziale del termine. Non potrebbe ormai avere eredi che per amore, ma nulla *ontologicamente* può comprendere di cosa sia dono e *per-dono*. Solo un amore *materno* lo potrebbe – ma Lear appartiene integralmente al linguaggio della *patria potestas*, sotto la cui sovranità solo la madre può donare amore; Lear rimane costretto a esigerlo, e su nessun'altra base che il suo essere *genitor*.

Per fondare una relazione con le figlie, che permetta la trasmissione a esse del potere, il Padre è impotente; tutta la sua storia l'ha reso tale. E *figli eredi* non esistono più – o, se esistono, il Padre non sa riconoscerli, ne ignora *radicitus* la natura, come nel caso di Gloucester (e quale pallido, spettrale erede è ormai un Edgar!). Possono far altro le figlie che ribellarsi? Ma, appena la loro ribellione si fa odio a chi le ha generate, ecco che riprecipitano nella catena di omicidio e vendetta che ha marcato il potere dei genitori. Le figlie non diventano *madri* e alla follia dell'ultimo corpo del Re che chiede amore, rispondono inseguendo con ogni mezzo quello stesso potere che vedono franare col Padre. Anche Cordelia? Cordelia è chi più drasticamente si ribella al Padre che insiste nel sopravvivere oltre il proprio termine. Le altre sorelle stanno, infatti, al suo antico e crudele gioco del

potere. Cordelia, invece, è testimone che, nella catastrofe apocalittica che travolge ogni relazione, nessuna astuzia può più reggere, nessun compromesso dar frutto. È Cordelia a imporre l'aut-aut: vuoi amore? Allora non voler potere. Se vuoi che ti ami, non voler potere su me. Vuoi, invece, continuare a manifestarti come *pater-potens*? Anzi, vuoi mettere alla suprema prova la tua *patria potestas* pretendendo di conservarla anche quando secedi dall'esercizio del potere? Alla tua pretesa posso rispondere soltanto così: essa è *nulla*. Nulla è il tuo desiderio di "assoluto potere sugli altri e assoluto amore dagli altri, in una misura illimitata" (Auden). Cordelia denuncia l'antinomia distruttiva che conduce a rovina il carattere-dèmone di Lear. È suo il silenzio-discorso che non dà scampo al Re. La figlia prediletta è la negazione stessa dell'erede.

Eredi loro malgrado si affacciano a conflitti futuri che non sapranno reggere; le figlie vivono nella loro stessa carne la morte del Padre, ma non sanno generare in quell'amore che pure presagiscono. Certo è soltanto il timbro della fine. Nessuna fede fonda qui la speranza che ad essa segua un giorno del Signore.

Il testo dell'altro. Derrida *dentro* Shakespeare

Silvano Facioni

> Hang up philosophy!
> *Romeo and Juliet*, III.iii.57

Verità, mezza verità, verità e mezza

1986, Teatro Gérard-Philippe di Saint-Denis: Daniel Mesguich, che ha assunto in gennaio la direzione del teatro, mette in scena *Roméo et Juliette* seguendo l'adattamento che ne ha fatto Gervais Robin e che, come la stampa non farà a meno di sottolineare[1], recita in cartellone "*Roméo et Juliette* d'après William Shakespeare": nel 'd'après' che accompagna lo spettatore che entra a teatro condensano e precipitano ipotesi, curiosità, forse timori, sicuramente attese, che investono non soltanto l'adattamento teatrale (regia, costumi, scene) ma, più in profondità, il testo di Shakespeare, la sua traduzione, il passaggio linguistico e testuale che sospende l'idea stessa di un *Urtext* ideale alle versioni che nel corso del tempo ne hanno scandito la vita e che per questo, prima di essere versioni 'teatrali' sono versioni di scrittura, di testo, di parola.

C'è, dunque, un 'd'après' che, come un meccanismo invisibile ma non per questo meno potente, orienta, regola, governa e, in un certo senso, pre-determina l'opera offerta al pubblico: 'd'après' che, nella lingua francese, si configura come locuzione con valore avverbiale, indica una trasposizione (temporale, spaziale, logica) sempre riferita a una posterità, un 'dopo', un 'accanto', un – come peraltro l'etimo latino suggerisce – 'appresso' (*ad-pressum*) che istituisce coordinate, traiettorie, tragitti, linee, percorsi che non sopraggiungono a quanto

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[1] Cfr. Michel Vittoz, "Le texte d'après", in *Roméo et Juliette. Gervais Robin* d'après *William Shakespeare*, Paris, Papiers, 1986, pp. 107-12, dove viene presentata la rassegna dei commenti che apparvero sui principali quotidiani francesi dopo la prima.

è già situato, ma situano essi stessi i luoghi e i tempi, i gesti e coloro che li compiono. Arrischiando ulteriormente l'accidentato terreno etimologico, si potrebbe persino dire che il 'premere' (da cui il participio passato *pressum*) sia l'elemento strutturalmente costitutivo di ogni movimento spaziale o temporale e, più ancora, del portare alla luce: ci sarebbero dunque, nel plesso semantico che il 'premere' proietta fuori di sé, una 'op-pressione' e una 'es-pressione' che nel mutuo riverberarsi e richiamarsi smarginano i confini semantici che le determinano. Sempre 'appresso', come in rincorsa del suo stesso ritardo, inquietata dall'impossibilità di coincidere con sé, l'espressione patisce l'oppressione della resa insufficiente, della traduzione malcerta, dell'incalzare di un'urgenza che spezza, interrompe il tempo disteso dell'argomentazione, l'orbita regolare del pensiero, il passo sicuro dell'affondo critico.

Come assecondare, allora, l'intermittenza? Come accompagnare il 'd'après' che accompagna la messa in scena che accompagna Shakespeare che accompagna *Roméo et Juliette*?

Partendo dall'assunto che "s'il n'y a pas de théâtre sans qu'il y ait eu livre, il n'y a pas de livre sans scène de la lecture, il n'y a pas de livre sans théâtre"[2], Daniel Mesguich chiese ad alcuni studiosi e scrittori di scrivere qualcosa su *Romeo and Juliet* di Shakespeare. Ne scaturì una singolare raccolta in cui ritroviamo, tra altri, interventi di Hélène Cixous, Daniel Sibony, Jean-Paul Manganaro e Jacques Derrida[3]. L'aggettivo 'singolare' è qui deliberatamente utilizzato: si tratta, infatti, di una raccolta in cui non sono presenti studiosi di Shakespeare o contributi di tipo storico-critico sull'opera, ma letture o scritture che, appunto, inseguono solo ed esclusivamente il passo della loro singolarità, l'irrimpiazzabile unicità di una 'controfirma', un 'd'après' in cui l'opera di Shakespeare e i suoi commenti si raddoppiano in maniera virtualmente illimitata e, dunque, ogni volta unica.

Il principio che governa i testi commissionati da Mesguich consiste in un gioco di 'controfirme' che potrà fare a meno, nel suo prodursi, dei pur fondamentali apparati che regolano gli studi critici o, secondo

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2   Daniel Mesguich, "La mise en scène ou le double jeu", in *Roméo et Juliette. Gervais Robin* d'après *William Shakespeare*, cit., p. 19.

3   Nel volume, oltre ai contributi degli autori sopra menzionati, sono presenti testi di Jean-Paul Dufiet, Clarisse Nicoïdski, Yannic Mancel, una corrispondenza di Frédéric Klepper (assistente di Mesguich), due brevi testi di Hector Berlioz e Bertolt Brecht e la traduzione francese di *Romeo and Juliet* di Gervais Robin.

l'efficace formula di Giorgio Melchiori, della "primacy of philology" che dovrebbe limitare le numerose "*mis*readings" che affollano la ricezione dell'opera di Shakespeare, e che talvolta si direbbero ignorare il principio secondo cui "no critical approach to a text, Shakespearean or otherwise, is valid unless founded on a sound philological basis"[4]: i testi raccolti dal regista, infatti, non intendono esautorare il conflitto tra filologia e filosofia, ma pur non ignorando la necessità del loro implicarsi disgiuntivamente, tentano un approccio, una lettura (o anche una *misreading*[5]) che punta al cuore del testo senza ulteriori mediazioni.

Il contributo di Jacques Derrida nel volume curato da Daniel Mesguich è costituito da trentanove aforismi in cui non possiamo non sentir risuonare la pleiade di domande che Nicholas Royle ha efficacemente sintetizzato nella sua introduzione a un recente numero dell'*Oxford Literary Review* interamente dedicato a Shakespeare e Derrida:

> How has Derrida's work affected and even transformed the ways in which Shakespeare is read? What are the continuing ramifications and effects of deconstructive thinking for Shakespeare Studies? Conversely, how might the writings of Shakespeare help us to read Derrida – for example, with regard to questions of language, dramatic form, writing, voice, signature, politics and ethics, history and the present, nature, mercy, cruelty, love, desire, sexual difference, irony, shame, dignity, laughter, animals, spectrality, mourning, friendship and so on?[6]

Domande, queste, che si affacciano in maniera discreta negli aforismi dedicati a *Romeo and Juliet*, e che meriterebbero un'attenzione

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[4]   Giorgio Melchiori, "The Primacy of Philology" [1984], rpt., in *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 8 *On Authorship*, eds Rosy Colombo and Daniela Gardamagna (2012), pp. 119-31; p. 119.

[5]   In un senso sicuramente diverso da quanto sostiene Melchiori, è possibile richiamare alcune importanti parole di Harold Bloom: "Strong poets *must* be mis-read; there are no *generous* errors to be made in apprehending them, any more than their own errors of reading are ever generous. Every strong poet caricatures tradition and every strong poet is then necessarily mis-read by the tradition that he fosters". Harlod Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* [1975], New York, Continuum, 2005, p. 54 (corsivi dell'autore).

[6]   Nicholas Royle, "Prologue", *Oxford Literary Review*, 34:1 (2012), pp. v-vi; p. v (osserviamo tra parentesi che nessuno dei sette articoli presenti nella rivista si occupa della raccolta di aforismi di Derrida dedicata a *Romeo and Juliet*).

specifica che però dilaterebbe a dismisura le dimensioni di qualunque contributo critico. Meglio allora cominciare da una centrale affermazione di Jacques Derrida che, sollecitato a intervenire dopo qualche anno su quanto aveva scritto a proposito della tragedia dei due amanti di Verona, dopo aver richiamato in termini teorici il problema della struttura di un testo in rapporto alla storia, dichiara di trovare in Shakespeare il "magnifico" esempio della tradizione di lettura di un'opera:

> L'exemple de Shakespeare est ici magnifique. Qui démontre mieux que des textes pleinement conditionnés par leur histoire, chargés d'histoire, et à thématique historique, se donnent si bien à lire dans des contextes historiques très éloignés de leurs temps et lieu d'origine?[7]

Il conflitto tra filologia e filosofia, dunque, precipita di fronte all'idea stessa di 'lettura' che è un gesto (e non una pratica) in cui le estasi temporali che scandiscono lo scorrere del tempo implodono per dare luogo a una temporalità che è quella costituita dal testo stesso: il testo infatti, nell'aporetica simultaneità della sua legge, afferma il tempo a partire dalle letture che se ne compiono, ma, in un certo senso, abolisce il tempo, perché rimane uguale a se stesso[8]. È in questo duplice, ancorché simultaneo, movimento, che si costituisce la temporalità 'propria' del testo, il suo disporsi lungo coordinate temporali che, pur assecondando l'ordinaria, comune scansione, invitano il lettore a riconfigurar(si) secondo la letterale 'crono-logia' istituita dal dettato testuale: l'intreccio delle letture scardina e sopra-

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[7]   Jacques Derrida et Derek Attridge, "Cette étrange institution qu'on appelle la littérature", in Thomas Dutoit et Philippe Romanski (éd.), *Derrida d'ici, Derrida de là*, Paris, Galilée, 2009, p. 282.

[8]   Nel caso dell'opera di Shakespeare, parlare di una 'immobilità' del testo o di *Urtext* può sembrare decisamente improprio e fuori luogo, considerata la travagliata e inconclusa storia delle versioni dei testi, ma è forse possibile considerare proprio l'indiavolata storia che vede fronteggiarsi *bad quartos* e *first drafts*, *private transcripts* e *foul papers*, come l'indice di una necessità e insieme di una impossibilità: la presunta abolizione del tempo dichiarata dall'inseguito, desiderato *Urtext* sempre uguale a se stesso e, per questo, considerato come condizione necessaria per l'esercizio critico, confligge con l'idea stessa di interpretazione che, se non vuole limitarsi a essere mera ripetizione del medesimo, deve poter generare un 'altro' testo o, meglio, deve poter riconoscere di avere di fronte a sé un testo 'altro' (il testo dell'altro?). Sul problema delle differenti versioni di *Romeo and Juliet*, cfr. Silvia Bigliazzi, "*Romeo and Juliet*: una croce testuale fra Q2 e Q1", *Memoria di Shakespeare*, 8 (2012), pp. 203-28.

vanza epoche, metodi, statuti disciplinari e, come afferma Terry
Eagleton:

> Though conclusive evidence is hard to come by, it is difficult to read
> Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with
> the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Der-
> rida. Perhaps this is simply to say that though there are many ways
> in which we have thankfully left this conservative patriarch behind,
> there are other ways in which we have yet to catch up with him[9].

Nel caso di *Romeo and Juliet*, poi, la questione del tempo si intra-
ma fittamente con quella delle fonti (*crux* di ogni autentica filolo-
gia): dove si origina la vicenda che Shakespeare rimodellerà nella
sua tragedia? Dal *Novellino* di Masuccio salernitano, attraverso Luigi
da Porto che, a sua volta, si direbbe ispirato da una manciata di versi
danteschi, ma non anche dalla traduzione/versione come quella
francese di Pierre Boaistuau o quelle inglesi di Arthur Brooke e di
William Painter? Quante storie accadono dentro la tragedia shake-
speariana? Quale filo le connette, considerata la distanza nel tempo
e nello spazio che le separa le une dalle altre? Se la critica testuale
non può fare a meno di costruire ipotesi che restituiscano all'ope-
ra la sua consistenza materica (più e prima ancora che materiale),
l'interrogazione filosofica, a sua volta, non potrà che assumere il
'dato' testuale (ancorché incerto o ipotetico) per interrogarlo come
si offre agli occhi del lettore. Sarà, dunque, la 'singolarità' e, più
ancora, la singolarità 'esposta' (qui di *Romeo and Juliet*) che verrà
offerta, senza tema di violenze o distorsioni e, anzi, integrando la
possibilità di una violenza ermeneutica che esprime, è opportuno
non dimenticarlo, l'irriducibile 'vitalità' dell'opera (di ogni opera)
sempre più grande e altra rispetto alle reti semantiche in cui si vor-
rebbe catturarla.

La catena della tradizione testuale, le influenze e i testi-matrice, in
una parola l'intera storia della tragedia di Shakespeare, permettono
il dispiegarsi di un paradosso abissale e fecondo, perché è solo nella
pleiade di quanto *precede* che si afferma la piena, *ab-soluta* singolari-
tà dell'opera: *unica* e *singolare* proprio perché preparata, preceduta,
annunciata da altre opere che, a loro volta, sono *uniche* e *singolari* alla

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9   Cfr. Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 9-10.

luce di quanto le seguirà e le modificherà, come peraltro proprio la regia di Daniel Mesguich si direbbe aver colto.

Secondo le cronache[10], la scenografia che accompagna la tragedia è rappresentata da una grande, antica biblioteca le cui scaffalature si perdono verso l'alto e verso il fondo e che è invasa dalla sabbia, mentre gli attori talvolta estraggono un libro dagli scaffali e declamano qualche verso di opere antiche (*Le Cid*, Cervantes, le pagine strappate di una Bibbia e avidamente lette dal Friar, ecc.). Anche la scena del ballo in casa Capulet viene trasformato da Mesguich nella memoria di libri e storie: i personaggi sono mascherati e 'recitano' il ballo interpretando figure che appartengono ad altre storie, ad altri drammi (Néron e Junie dal *Britannicus* di Racine, Hamlet e sua madre, Nina e Treplev da *Il gabbiano* di Cechov, Richard III e Lady Anne, Lucidor e Angélique da *L'Épreuve* di Marivaux), lungo una catena in cui le tragedie amorose precipitano nel tempo 'presente' rimanendo dentro il loro proprio tempo, oppure lungo una sorta di catena 'seriale' che è, a un tempo, l'apertura di quello spazio in cui *Romeo and Juliet* (si) ritaglia la propria singolarità e la possibilità, per tale spazio, di rappresentarsi, mettersi in scena, ripetersi all'infinito. Mai uguale a se stesso, sempre unico e, insieme, ripetuto (e ripetibile) all'infinito.

Come svolgere la legge della singolarità all'opera (anche) in *Romeo and Juliet*?

Jacques Derrida, che si è rivolto a Shakespeare in più di un'occasione[11], inanella, schidiona, arricciola, incunea (la catena verbale potrebbe proseguire senza requie, perché una delle poste in gioco è, in fondo, la recita di un impossibile *requiem* del nome, dell'amore, della singolarità, della sopravvivenza) trentanove aforismi che

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10   Evelyne Ertel, "Roméo et Juliette. Compte rendu", *Jeu. Revue de théâtre*, 39 (1986), pp. 122-26. Non è forse secondario ricordare che il legame tra Daniel Mesguich e Jacques Derrida è testimoniato anche dal testo di quest'ultimo, intitolato "Le Sacrifice", che è stato pubblicato nel 2006 come postfazione al libro di Mesguich *L'éternel éphémère*, Paris, Verdier, 2006 (il testo di Derrida è alle pp. 141-54).

11   Ognuna delle occasioni in cui Jacques Derrida si è, per così dire, cimentato con Shakespeare (e mai 'su' Shakespeare) meriterebbe un'attenzione specifica. Oltre al commento 'aforistico' di *Romeo and Juliet*, ricordiamo l'*Hamlet* che, 'spettro' *par excellence*, infesta *Spectres de Marx* (Paris, Galilée, 1993), e *The Merchant of Venice* in cui, a partire dalla traduzione, forse impossibile, di due affermazioni di Portia ("Then must the Jew be merciful" e "When mercy seasons justice", IV.i.172 e 186), Jacques Derrida, in una conferenza che, nel 1998, aprì le "Quinzièmes Assises de la Traduction Littéraire" ad Arles, prova a interrogarsi sul senso della traduzione ("Qu'est-ce qu'une traduction 'relevante'?", in *Cahier de l'Herne - Derrida*, Paris, L'Herne, 2004, pp. 561-76).

rimbalzano 'dentro' *Romeo and Juliet* come ciottoli su uno specchio
d'acqua, e che si direbbero trasportati da una forza che pure rimane
invisibile[12]. C'è, indubbiamente, un sottile, pressoché invisibile filo
che lega gli aforismi, nonostante lo stesso Derrida, in un'altra raccol-
ta di aforismi (dedicata all'architettura, dominio notoriamente legato
al teatro), abbia scritto che "[u]n aforisma autentico non deve mai
rinviare a un altro. È sufficiente a se stesso, mondo o monade"[13], e
tale invisibile filo intese e intreccia tra di loro le questioni del tempo,
del nome, del "contrattempo" (sempre *controtempo*) e dell'anacronia,
vale a dire proprio le questioni che mettono in discussione qualsiasi
idea di intreccio e di legame: la catena, la serie aforistica afferma e
nega se stessa, costringendo a pensare alla possibilità di un 'altro'
legame o intreccio, perché, ed è sempre Derrida a parlare, e proprio
in relazione a *Romeo and Juliet*, "nonostante le apparenze, un afori-
sma non capita da sé. Appartiene a una logica seriale"[14], e dunque
la stessa 'forma' aforistica deve essere indagata quanto a moventi e
direzioni. Perché l'aforisma? Perché l'aforisma per *Romeo and Juliet*?
Inutile cercare una risposta diretta a tali domande: rispondere in
termini icasticamente esplicativi equivarrebbe a tradire l'aforisma
che, come dice Derrida, "ci abbandona senza difesa all'esperienza
stessa del contrattempo"[15]. Si dovrà dunque, in primo luogo, abban-
donare l'idea che l'aforisma sia soltanto un espediente retorico che
conferisce una forma a un contenuto che potrebbe essere espresso
anche altrimenti, con altre forme retoriche. La scelta di un commen-
to in forma di aforismi pertiene già alla tragedia di Shakespeare:
l'esperienza del contrattempo, infatti, che è l'esperienza del mancato
incontro tra Romeo e Juliet, può 'esprimersi' attraverso la forma
contratta di una catena di aforismi che aggrovigliano quelle estasi
temporali (e le loro *Stimmungen*) che in *Romeo and Juliet* si ritrovano
sdipanate lungo lo svolgimento della storia, nell'entrata e nell'uscita
di scena dei personaggi, nella speciale, particolarissima 'presenza'

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[12] Jacques Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", in Id., *Psyché. Inventions de l'autre*, Pa-
ris, Galilée, 1987, pp. 519-33 (il testo era comunque già apparso nel già citato volume
Roméo et Juliette. Gervais Robin d'après *William Shakespeare*, pp. 24-39). Quando non
diversamente segnalato, le traduzioni dei passaggi derridiani sono mie.

[13] Jacques Derrida, "Cinquante-deux aphorismes pour un avant-propos", in Id., *Psy-
ché. Inventions de l'autre*, cit., p. 513 (af. 24).

[14] Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 520 (af. 6).

[15] *Ibid.* (af. 8).

in cui confliggono il tempo narrativo e quello dell'evento, il tempo dell'evento e quello dell'effetto che produce, il tempo dell'effetto e quello delle 'cause' che lo hanno provocato[16]. Un principio di indiscernibilità (con)fonde forma e contenuto, retorica e materia, tema e stile, nel tentativo di superare o scavalcare il dualismo, la binarietà sempre troppo metafisica tra *inventio* e *dispositio* che rischia di mancare quanto, invece, ne costituisce il presupposto e la condizione di possibilità. Destino del contrattempo: genitivo oggettivo e soggettivo di una storia in cui, come il Prologo si premura di anticipare (*Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue.1-14[17]), ne va degli "star-cross'd lovers" e del loro "death-mark'd love", nell'intrico di "ancient grudge" e "new mutiny" che travolge gli eventi o, meglio, il "two hours' traffic" che sulla scena si svolge.

Il controcanto del contrattempo

Sia dunque l'aforisma derridiano:

> Romeo e Juliet *sono* aforismi, e per prima cosa nel nome che non sono ("Juliet: Tis but thy name that is my enemy [...] Romeo: My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself, / Because it is an enemy to thee. / Had I it written, I would tear the word"), e infatti non c'è aforisma senza linguaggio, senza nominazione, senza appellativo, senza lettera, pur se da stracciare[18].

Il nome e l'aforisma trovano nel linguaggio la loro prima incontestabile solidarietà tutta intrinseca al rapporto tra il carattere di iscrizione proprio della lingua e la possibilità/impossibilità di un'aderenza tra quanto iscritto e quanto denotato: "Had I it written", dice Romeo,

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[16]   Vale forse la pena ricordare, riprendendo quanto scrive Giorgio Melchiori nell'Introduzione all'edizione italiana della tragedia di Shakespeare (William Shakespeare, *Teatro completo*, a cura di Giorgio Melchiori, I Meridiani, Milano, Mondadori, 1976-1991, 9 voll., vol. IV), che l'azione di *Romeo and Juliet* si svolge in cinque giorni "e si dispone in quattro sequenze all'interno di ciascuna delle quali, senza alcuna soluzione di continuità nella presentazione scenica, sono concentrate azioni che – in una resa naturalistica – occuperebbero molte ore" (pp. 9-10).

[17]   Il testo inglese di *Romeo and Juliet* qui utilizzato è ripreso dall'edizione citata nella nota precedente.

[18]   Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 520 (af. 9). I versi di *Romeo and Juliet* citati sono: II.ii.38; 56-58. Il corsivo è dell'autore.

quasi a sottolineare non tanto il dramma della nominazione, ma
la tragedia dell'iscrizione, che è come dire la tragedia di quanto
permane, si ripete, si reitera sempre uguale a sé nel mobile, fluido,
inanticipabile trascolorare del tempo. Se Juliet, infatti, con le paro-
le che rivolge all'assente (non sa ancora che Romeo, nascosto, sta
ascoltando le sue parole), "turba la conoscenza del mondo, in bilico
tra la presenza tangibile delle cose e lo statuto convenzionale della
loro nominazione"[19], e dichiara, in questo modo, la fine di tutte le
gerarchizzazioni metafisiche che discenderebbero dalla corrispon-
denza tra parola e mondo[20] o, in altri termini, la fine del principio
giustinianeo ripreso da Dante nella *Vita Nova* secondo cui "nomina
sunt consequentia rerum"[21], Romeo spinge ancora più a fondo tale
rottura perché la riconduce a una sorta di originaria faglia – quella
tra l'appellativo e la scrittura – in cui lo strappo del proprio nome
(del proprio nome proprio) fa segno verso quanto Derrida chiamerà
altrove 'glossopoiesi', e che

> non è un linguaggio imitativo né una creazione di nomi, ci riconduce
> *lungo il bordo* del momento in cui la parola non è ancora nata, quando
> l'articolazione non è già più il grido ma non è ancora il discorso, quan-
> do la ripetizione è *quasi* impossibile, e con essa la lingua in generale: la
> separazione del concetto e del suono, del significato e del significante,
> del pneumatico e del grammatico, della libertà della traduzione e della
> tradizione, il movimento dell'interpretazione, la differenza tra anima e
> corpo, signore e servo, Dio e uomo, autore e attore. È la vigilia dell'ori-
> gine delle lingue e di quel dialogo tra la teologia e l'umanesimo che

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[19] Romana Rutelli, Romeo e Giulietta. *L'effabile. Analisi di una riflessione sul linguaggio*,
Napoli, Liguori, 1985, p. 80.

[20] Secondo Luigi Sasso le parole di Juliet – che spezzano l'ordine tra il simbolo e la
natura – siglano l'uscita dal Medioevo, e dunque "la fine di Romeo e Giulietta è la
conseguenza non solo della mancata accettazione del mondo medievale, con i suoi
codici e i suoi valori, ma anche della scoperta del venir meno di quei codici e di quei
valori, e che dunque quell'armonia, fino ad allora indiscussa, ormai non c'è più".
Luigi Sasso, *Nomi di cenere. Percorsi di onomastica letteraria tra Ottocento e Novecento*,
Pisa, ETS, 2003, p. 29.

[21] Ancora un rimando al Medioevo e al congedo shakespeariano da tale mondo: un
congedo tanto più significativo quanto più si tiene presente, come accennato più
sopra, la questione delle 'fonti' novellistiche di Shakespeare che sono comunque
di epoca medievale. Sulla polarizzazione dell'onomastica letteraria che da Dante
conduce direttamente al *Romeo and Juliet* di Shakespeare, sono importanti le pagi-
ne di Michelangelo Picone, "Onomastica e tradizione letteraria: il caso di *Romeo
e Giulietta*", *Il nome nel testo. Rivista internazionale di onomastica letteraria*, 1 (1999),
pp. 87-94.

la metafisica del teatro occidentale non ha mai fatto altro che ripetere all'infinito[22].

Il desiderio dei due amanti è, dunque, desiderio di una "vigilia dell'origine delle lingue" che, lungi dal vagheggiare una sorta di condizione pre-babelica del linguaggio, si incunea piuttosto nel momento del "momento", nel tempo che fa sorgere il desiderio stesso prima ancora del suo correlativo intenzionale (memoria, forse, dell'*amare amabam* di Agostino) o, in una parola, nel tempo del desiderio del tempo: alla domanda di Romeo sul desiderio di riprendersi l'amore dato e promesso, promesso come dato e dato come promesso – "Wouldst thou withdraw it? For what purpose, love?" (II.ii.130) –, Juliet risponde invocando la ripetizione – "But to be frank and give it thee again" (II.ii.131) –, vale a dire invocando la possibilità che il tempo possa essere uno con il desiderio, che possa, in una qualche misura, essere il desiderio stesso. Il dialogo tra Romeo e Juliet può essere considerato a tutti gli effetti "glossopoietico": nel gioco di una ripetizione "quasi impossibile" (come dice Derrida sottolineando il 'quasi') si compie il destino del desiderio che, prima ancora che essere consegnato al destino dell'impossibilità, è fatalmente agganciato alla tragedia del 'quasi', del 'quam si', del 'come se'. Un 'come se' che restituisce al desiderio la sua strutturale teatralità, il suo dispiegarsi su una scena, "lungo il bordo" di una lingua che è a un tempo la lingua dell'impossibile reale e quella del proscenio: lingua sempre fantasmatica o, meglio, sopravvissuta all'illusione di una sincronia dialogica, alla possibilità di una comunicazione con l'altro. Lingua che, inevitabilmente, si concepisce in una notte che è "cloak" per Romeo (II.ii.75) e "mask" per Juliet (II.ii.85), e che, per questo, porta con sé il pericolo della deriva del desiderio, del possibile naufragio, del sogno ("Romeo: O blessèd, blessèd night! I am afeard, / Being in night, all this is but a dream, / Too flattering-sweet to be substantial", II.ii.139-41): lingua, ancora una volta, catturata nella binarietà metafisica che vuole contrapposti "dream" e "substance", ma che pure dentro questa dualità, dentro la notte che infiltra il dialogo tra i due amanti, intuisce la possibilità di un nuovo inizio, l'oriente di una lingua che non è più 'vigilia' ma, ancorché ignota, nascente realtà ("Romeo: The grey-ey'd

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22   Jacques Derrida, "Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation", in Id., *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris, Seuil, 1967, p. 352.

morn smiles on the frowning night, / Check'ring the Eastern clouds with streaks of light", II.ii.188-89[23]) e che, presto (perché da subito, da sempre) si rivelerà non come lingua di un nuovo inizio, ma come sentenza di morte ("Romeo: More light and light: more dark and dark our woes!", III.v.36). Notte della lingua, che impedisce allo sguardo di proiettarsi nell'occhio dell'altro e che consegna le parole al segreto di un nascondimento che impregna di avvenire la promessa ma che, nello stesso tempo, si espone al rischio che la promessa (ogni promessa) porta con sé: il rischio dello scacco, dello spergiuro, il rischio che l'avvenire non permetta il congiungimento, come dirà Juliet nel tragico monologo (definito da Agostino Lombardo "un brano di metateatro che è tra i più straordinari di Shakespeare"[24]) che accompagna l'ingestione del narcotico, "My dismal scene I needs must act alone" (IV.iii.19). Se Lombardo parla qui di "metateatro", Derrida, pur non riferendosi direttamente al monologo di Juliet, parla invece di "teatro dell'impossibile":

> [I]l teatro dell'impossibile: due esseri sopravvivono entrambi uno all'altro. La certezza assoluta che regna sul *duello/duale* (*Romeo and Juliet* è la messa in scena di tutti i *duelli/duali*) è il fatto che uno deve morire prima dell'altro. Uno deve veder morire l'altro. A chiunque devo poter dire: poiché siamo due, sappiamo in modo assolutamente ineluttabile che uno di noi morirà prima dell'altro. Uno di noi vedrà l'altro morire, uno di noi sopravvivrà, foss'anche un istante. Uno di noi, uno di noi soltanto, porterà la morte dell'altro – e il lutto per lui. È impossibile che sopravviviamo entrambi l'uno all'altro. Ecco il duale/duello, l'assiomatica di ogni duale/duello, la scena più comune e la meno detta – o la più interdetta – del nostro rapporto all'altro. Ebbene, *l'impossibile ha luogo*, non nella "realtà obiettiva" che qui non ha la parola, ma nell'esperienza di Romeo e Juliet. E sotto la legge del giuramento, quella che presiede a ogni parola data. Vivono *a turno* la morte dell'altro, per un certo tempo, il contrattempo della loro morte. Portano entrambi il lutto – e vegliano entrambi sulla morte dell'altro, alla morte dell'altro. Doppia sentenza/sospensione di morte. Romeo

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[23] In Q2 questi versi sono pronunciati da Romeo e poi ripetuti da Friar Laurence nella scena immediatamente successiva. Le edizioni moderne li attribuiscono a volte a Romeo, a volte al frate; nell'edizione curata da Melchiori sono assegnati al frate (II.iii.1-2).

[24] Agostino Lombardo, "Il tempo della tragedia: *Romeo e Giulietta*", in *Storia, filosofia e letteratura. Studi in onore di Gennaro Sasso*, a cura di Marta Herling e Mario Reale, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1999, p. 283.

muore prima di Juliet che ha veduto morta. Vivono, sopra-vivono entrambi la morte dell'altro[25].

L'aver luogo dell'impossibile corrisponde alla paradossale esperienza della sopravvivenza, vale a dire alla possibilità di inscrivere il lutto, il lutto dell'altro, come struttura dell'individualità vivente, come marca della singolarità: l'essere Romeo di Romeo (al di là o prima del nome: "Juliet: Thou art thyself, though not a Montague", II.ii.39) è nel lutto di Juliet che, essendo impossibile, conduce alla morte (una morte, sia detto tra parentesi, senza spargimento di sangue, una morte tutta 'interna', letteralmente avvelenata), esattamente come l'essere Juliet di Juliet ("Romeo: She speaks. Yet she says nothing. What of that?", II.ii.15) è nel sopravvivere alla morte di Romeo e nel suo morire per non poter portare il lutto (e la morte, in questo caso, avviene con spargimento di sangue, rivolta verso il fuori, l'esterno). Una morte e un lutto che, nel movimento interno/esterno del veleno e del pugnale, riflettono il gioco del nome proprio, sempre 'improprio', che si voleva cancellare perché un altro inizio avesse luogo. Il duale/duello a cui si riferisce Derrida, in realtà, è presente già nelle parole del Coro che, all'inizio della tragedia, introducono la storia senza motivare la discordia che ha reso nemiche le due famiglie: "two households" che scontano la dualità, che duellano perché incapaci di accogliere il duale, che spingono Romeo e Juliet a immaginare addirittura un altro nome, cioè un altro tempo[26]. Il nome, infatti, dà origine al tempo, perché non si dà nome proprio che non sia appello, chiamata, dunque non si dà nome proprio che non sia da subito, da sempre, preso nell'ordine della risposta: qui lo squarcio, il contrattempo dell'esistenza a cui viene ingiunto di farsi, letteralmente, 'in-audita', come in-audito è il nome che non può che scaturire nella notte, durante il dialogo tra i due amanti presenti/assenti che parlano, si badi bene, quando le rispettive famiglie dormono o, come ha scritto Daniel Sibony, "nel sonno dei nomi"[27].

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[25]   Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 524 (af. 16). In francese il termine 'duel' indica sia il 'duello', sia il 'duale'.

[26]   Cfr. Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare on Love and Lust*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999: "What we have to fall back on is the fact that love in itself does not produce the tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*. The protagonists are always represented as pure and innocent and devoted to each other. They are clearly victims of the feud between the houses. This explanation is explicitly set forth in the Prologue" (p. 87).

[27]   Daniel Sibony, "L'amour à mort. Autour de Roméo et Juliette", in *Roméo et Juliette. Gervais Robin* d'après *William Shakespeare*, cit., p. 51.

La congiunzione del desiderio dei protagonisti, la congiunzione di Romeo *e* Juliet, produce il contrattempo che scioglie la congiunzione nel momento stesso in cui la produce, e la simultaneità di questo gesto paradossale e contraddittorio diviene la marca di una sorta di destinalità propria del desiderio: l'apparente accidentalità del contrattempo, il suo sopraggiungere imprevisto e inatteso, scrive Derrida, "viene a illustrare una possibilità essenziale. Esso sconcerta una certa logica filosofica che vorrebbe che gli accidenti restassero quel che sono, accidentali", perché, prosegue sempre Derrida, "ciò che succede a Romeo e Juliet, e che rimane effettivamente un incidente la cui apparenza aleatoria e imprevedibile è possibile cancellare, […] può essere quello che è, accidentale, soltanto nella misura in cui è *già* accaduto, per essenza, prima di accadere"[28].

L'incidente può accadere solo dentro un sistema, un orizzonte, una sorta di griglia che, nel momento in cui gli permette di accadere (condizione di possibilità dell'esperienza dell'incidente), manda all'aria, sconvolge e destruttura il sistema stesso che lo ha reso possibile: da una parte, allora, nell'incidente è presente una non-accidentalità che gli proviene dal suo verificarsi dentro un sistema, dal suo essere, per così dire, autorizzato, previsto dal sistema nella forma dell'imprevisto, mentre, dall'altra, l'incidente mantiene (o mostra) il suo carattere di accidentale imprevedibilità, il suo irrompere nel sistema per farlo volare in pezzi, il suo bilicare sull'ancipite bordo o luogo (è forse qui la possibilità della rappresentazione teatrale che è come dire la rappresentazione *tout court*?) che lo rende universale e singolare, unico.

Sarebbe facile, giunti a questo punto, richiamare un qualche movimento dialettico del desiderio, o comunque ricorrere a una formalità astratta in cui il gioco del singolare e dell'universale potrebbe insediarsi senza resti, senza urti, ma il carattere proprio di *Romeo and Juliet*, secondo la lettura derridiana, è proprio quello di mettere in pista un movimento che non può essere ri(con)dotto alla logica dialettica, perché lo scarto temporale che separa/unisce le due singolarità o, meglio, lo scarto del loro desiderio impedisce qualunque appropriazione, fosse pure l'appropriazione della promessa ("Juliet: Th'exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine", II.ii.127), e la impedisce perché è il desiderio come tale a sospendere o neutralizzare l'istituirsi di un 'proprio', a farne la letterale 'discordanza' (la

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28 Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 522 (af. 12).

'distanza del cuore') prima ancora che con l'altro, con il 'proprio' sé, vale a dire con

> La singolarità di un'imminenza la cui "punta acuminata" pungola il desiderio nella sua nascita – la nascita stessa del desiderio. Amo perché l'altro è l'altro, perché il suo tempo non sarà mai il mio. La durata vivente, la presenza stessa del suo amore rimane infinitamente distante dalla mia, distante da se stessa in ciò che la fa tendere verso la mia, perfino in ciò che si vorrebbe descrivere come l'euforia amorosa, la comunione estatica, l'intuizione mistica[29].

"Distante da se stessa", scrive Derrida, quasi a dire che la "presenza stessa dell'amore", la sua "durata vivente" si produce nella mancata coincidenza, nell'impossibilità del ritorno, nella non presenza e nella non durata: l'interruzione aforistica incarnata da Romeo e Juliet è presente nella non presenza di ciascuno a sé (prima e più ancora che all'altro), nel "contrattempo" che costituisce la singolarità non dialettizzabile dei personaggi, cioè del loro desiderio, cioè del desiderio che, secondo etimi non verificabili ma non per questo impossibili, deriverebbe da quello stesso richiamo all'astro (*de-sidus*) che ritroviamo nel disastro (*dis-astrum*). Nel contrattempo che struttura la tragedia di Shakespeare è all'opera il disastro del desiderio che dell'amore non è, contro ogni apparenza, dis-grazia o accidente, ma *chance*, *coup de dés*, possibilità e, forse, sopravvivenza.

Il contrattempo del controcanto

'Sopravvivenza' è un termine chiave del lessico derridiano[30] che compendia la "punta acuminata" della singolarità a cui si è appena fatto riferimento: nella 'sopravvivenza' si dice, infatti, sia la traccia, il graffio, l'incisione di quanto si destina a sopravvivere (il nome che Romeo vorrebbe strappare, ma che pure persisterebbe come strappato), sia la morte che del sopravvivere è condizione, ed è in questo duplice infeudarsi che vita e morte si rilanciano ben al di là (o al di

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[29]   Ivi, p. 43.

[30]   Cfr. la voce "Sopravvivenza" curata da Francesco Vitale in Silvano Facioni, Simone Regazzoni, Francesco Vitale, *Derridario. Lessico della decostruzione*, Genova, il melangolo, 2012, pp. 174-86.

qua) del loro empirico, storico separarsi, per ritrovare, nell'oscillazione che precede e consente il loro determinarsi, una struttura pre-metafisica irriducibile: l'aforisma (e non si deve dimenticare che Romeo e Juliet, nella lettura derridiana, *sono* aforismi)

> poiché traccia, *sopravvive*, vive più a lungo del suo presente e vive più della vita. Sentenza/sospensione di morte. Esso dà e porta la morte ma, per assumere in questo modo la decisione di una sentenza, la sospende, l'arresta nuovamente[31].

La lettera del Friar che, nell'economia della tragedia, organizza il contrattempo, vorrebbe sospendere la morte, la sentenza di morte che pure pronuncia: è questa lettera, vera e propria *purloined letter* presente *in absentia* nell'ultima parte della tragedia, a rappresentare il contrattempo, ma tale rappresentazione non si affida a un contenuto, perché nonostante le spiegazioni, il testo che la compone non viene mai dichiarato. E la ragione è essenziale: si tratta di una sentenza/sospensione che, proprio perché sentenzia/sospende sia la vita sia la morte, non si lascia ridurre a una qualche marca empirica, ma si costituisce come possibilità di "spaziamento marcato, con le sue convenzioni sociali e la storia dei suoi codici, con le sue finzioni e i suoi simulacri, con le sue date. Con i cosiddetti nomi propri"[32]. La morte, in altri termini, è presente *insieme* alla vita così come la vita è presente *insieme* alla morte: come ha notato, tra gli altri, Agostino Lombardo, la morte di Mercutio (che rappresenterebbe "la 'cifra', la chiave del dramma"),

> è indicativa di chi sia l'oggetto di questo assalto della morte: non i vecchi ma i giovani […], non il declinare della vita ma il suo sbocciare (e a questo alludono le frequenti immagini di fiori e di boccioli), non la stanchezza, l'aridità del cuore ma la sua freschezza, il suo desiderio d'amore[33].

La morte colpisce i giovani protagonisti della tragedia perché essa non è l'evento che sopraggiunge alla fine della vita, ma accompagna

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[31]   Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 523 (af. 14). Impossibile rendere in italiano il gioco semantico che produce la parola 'arrêt' che significa sia 'sospensione', sia 'sentenza'.

[32]   *Ibid.* (af. 15).

[33]   Lombardo, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

quest'ultima da subito, da sempre, fino al punto da rendersi indiscernibile da essa: suprema (cioè prima e ultima) alterità, la morte entra nella vita come l'impossibile altro che di ognuno è l'intima verità e che proprio nell'amore di Romeo e Juliet mostra il suo volto imperioso (si tratta, in fondo, di una legge) e ineschivabile.

Il lutto dell'altro portato dai due amanti è il metonimo di un rapporto con l'alterità che riguarda la vita nel suo legame con se stessa e dunque il lutto dell'altro sarà sempre, in un certo senso, il lutto di sé, della propria condizione finita, di quella morte sentenziata/sospesa che struttura la vita come quell'altro che è *intimior intimo meo*.

Ecco che, ancora una volta, la questione del nome torna, per così dire, al suo punto di partenza (quasi si trattasse della circolarità infinita di un impossibile ritorno su di sé): alla domanda di Juliet "What's in a name?" (II.ii.43) non è possibile rispondere perché se non c'è individualità vivente che non sia assoggettata alla legge dell'altro e se non c'è altro senza lutto, lutto dell'altro (prima della sua presenza storica, empiricamente data), allora il nome dell'altro dovrà ospitare anche il lutto del nome, la sua scomparsa. Impossibile, il nome del lutto dell'altro attraversa e infesta tutti i nomi come uno spettro duplicandoli e raddoppiandoli come in un sogno o, meglio, come in quel sogno evocato da Mercutio nel suo discorso sulla Queen Mab – "And in this state she gallops night by night / Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love" (I.iv.69-70) – che sembra svuotare di qualunque consistenza l'amore che, allora, non sarà che sogno: sogno, forse, che non si tratti di sogno, sogno di un nome 'proprio' prima di ogni nome, sogno in cui sia finalmente possibile portare l'altro, e tale portare non sarà, scrive sempre Derrida commentando Paul Celan,

> includere in se stessi, nell'intuizione della propria coscienza egologica. Si tratta di portare senza appropriarsi. Portare non vuol più dire 'comportare', includere, comprendere in sé, ma portarsi verso l'inappropriabilità infinita dell'altro, all'incontro della sua trascendenza assoluta all'interno stesso di me, vale a dire in me fuori di me[34].

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[34]   Jacques Derrida, *Béliers. Le dialogue ininterrompu: entre deux infinis, le poème*, Paris, Galilée, 2003, p. 76 (il verso di Celan che viene commentato recita: "Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen"). In "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 524 (af. 17), il 'portare' l'inappropriabile alterità dell'altro prende il nome di "custodia" ("garde"): "Fin dal giuramento che lega due desideri, ciascuno porta già il lutto dell'altro, anzi gli affida la propria morte: se tu muori prima di me, io sarò tuo custode, se muoio prima di te, tu mi porterai in te, l'uno custodirà l'altro, lo avrà già custodito dalla prima dichiarazione". La custodia è già, in un certo senso, una cripta.

Infinitamente inappropriabile, l'altro rimane per sempre 'fuori' e non potrà che sigillare "A dateless bargain to engrossing death!" (V.iii.115), un "contratto senza data", ovvero un contratto senza tempo, senza contrattempo, senza clausole, senza una qualche forma di 'chiusura' (il significato proprio di 'clausola') che ne renda operativo il contenuto, perché tutta la storia precipita dentro una tomba, una sola tomba per due, per accogliere il duale/duello che della tragedia è stigma e destino.

La tomba, la morte, indicizzano il nome che li porta dentro di sé come ineludibile rovescio ma anche come resistenza, come *principium individuationis* che si inabissa nell'incerta distinzione tra il nome e il portatore del nome: Juliet, scrive Derrida, "sembra chiamare Romeo al di là del suo nome. [...] Ed è nel suo nome che lei ancora lo chiama, e lo chiama a non chiamarsi più Romeo"[35], quasi a sottolineare come è nel notturno gioco che, come ha scritto Guido Paduano, "il nome personale esercita la resistenza grigia dei codici mondani che sono la controparte funzionale, e ahimè vittoriosa, del conflitto tragico"[36]. La tragedia è dunque annunciata dal nome, dalla notte del nome che sottrae alla visibilità, alla presa (anche concettuale) qualunque determinazione, e nella richiesta di rinnegare il nome ("Juliet: Deny thy father and refuse thy name!", II.ii.34) si occulta l'idea di una presenza al di là della presenza (del nome), una visibilità al di là della luce, al di là di ogni ipotizzabile presente. Ecco che, in termini provocatori, Derrida afferma:

> Lei vuole la morte di Romeo. E l'avrà. La morte del suo nome, ovviamente, ("Tis but thy name that is my enemy"), la morte di 'Romeo'. Ma che non potranno disfarsi del proprio nome lo sanno senza saperlo. Lei dichiara guerra a 'Romeo', al suo nome, in suo nome, e non vincerà questa guerra se non alla morte di Romeo, di lui stesso. Lui stesso? Chi? Romeo. Ma 'Romeo' non è Romeo. Appunto. Lei vuole la morte di 'Romeo'. Romeo muore, 'Romeo' sopravvive. Lei lo custodisce morto in/nel suo nome. Chi? Juliet, Romeo[37].

Il nome separa, è principio di separazione e, per questo, è anche principio di relazione: la separazione del/dal nome unisce Romeo a Juliet ("Romeo: Call me but love, and I'll be new baptiz'd; / Henceforth

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[35] Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 525 (af. 18).

[36] Guido Paduano, "Sul significato dei nomi di persona", *Il nome nel testo. Rivista internazionale di onomastica letteraria*, 2-3 (2000/2001), pp. 9-16; p. 9.

[37] Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 527 (af. 21).

I never will be Romeo", II.ii.50-51) ma, nello stesso tempo, sigilla l'impossibilità del rinnegamento del nome, l'insuperabilità del padre, della legge del padre che, a sua volta, incarna la legge della città, in questo caso dell'"ancient grudge" che oppone Capulet e Montague (come nelle parole finali del Prince: "Where be these enemies? Capulet, Montague, / See what a scourge is laid upon your hate", V.iii.291-92). Il nome introduce immediatamente la guerra che, prima ancora che *polemos* tra opposte fazioni, è vera e propria *stasis*, guerra civile che oppone i nomi a loro stessi, che li attraversa per separarli da loro stessi, che condanna a morte prima di ogni civile o politica condanna. Guerra la cui crudeltà risiede nell'implicita promessa che illusoriamente fa balenare: la guerra al nome libererà dal nome, da quanto sembra essere 'solo' un nome, e dal momento che il nome è il portatore del nome, la guerra al nome non potrà che portare alla morte che porta il nome. La morte portata al nome porta la morte del portatore del nome:

> La guerra ha luogo tra i nomi. […] [Juliet] può nella notte rivolgersi a lui, ma a lui ancora nel suo nome, e nella forma più esclamativa dell'apostrofe: "O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?" Non gli dice: perché ti chiami Romeo, perché porti questo nome (come un vestito, come un ornamento, un segno staccabile)? Gli dice: perché *tu sei* Romeo? […] E chiedendogli di dipartirsi dal nome, gli chiede certamente di vivere finalmente, di vivere il suo amore (giacché per vivere veramente se stessi bisogna sfuggire alla legge del nome, alla legge di famiglia che è fatta per la sopravvivenza e che non cessa di richiamarmi alla morte) ma gli chiede *anche* di morire, giacché la sua vita *è* il suo nome. Esiste nel suo nome: "wherefore art thou Romeo? O Romeo, Romeo!" Romeo è Romeo, e Romeo non è Romeo[38].

Irrisolvibile aporia: la morte è la possibilità dell'amore ed è la sua impossibilità o, in altri termini, la morte è l'impossibile verità dell'amore, la notte che rende indiscernibili i contorni delle cose e degli uomini e li consegna alla spettralità della sopravvivenza. Sopra-vivenza che impedisce e permette tanto alla vita quanto alla morte di essere tali e che, mentre costituisce la vita come 'vivente', letteralmente la 'trapassa', vale a dire la scardina dal di dentro strutturandola insieme alla morte e trasformandola perciò in 'trapassata'. In questo senso, la tragedia che separa/unisce Romeo e Juliet, raccon-

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[38] Ivi, pp. 527-28 (af. 23).

ta una 'sopra-vivenza' al di là del nome che costituisce sia la possibilità della vita sia, al contempo, la possibilità della morte: morte della vita e vita della morte.

Il già richiamato congedo dal Medioevo che sarebbe all'opera in *Romeo and Juliet* viene dunque illustrato dall'equivoco metafisico intorno alla 'vita' concepita come opposta alla morte, equivoco che proprio la tragedia metterebbe in discussione attraverso l'indiscernibile groviglio che tiene unite la vita e la morte costituendole come esito, effetto, ricaduta di una differenza che non soltanto precede l'opposizione (seppure secondo modalità che non assegnano a tale precedenza valore temporale) ma che, più ancora, la rende possibile e la attiva. La tragedia del nome costituisce il significante dell'impensato legame tra la vita e la morte, e la singolarità, l'individualità, l'assoluta insostituibilità degli amanti investe immediatamente il loro parlare, il loro definirsi attraverso il linguaggio o, secondo il lessico di Derrida, il loro poter lasciare (ed essere) "tracce" in cui, tra l'origine della significazione segnica e l'origine del senso, si insinua una spettralità che è *hantise*, ossessione dell'altro nell'idea stessa di presenza (o di presente). Romeo è Romeo e Romeo non è Romeo: lo spettro torna prima ancora della morte, nella notte (regno degli spettri) del senso (strutturalmente diurno, luminoso, meridiano) in cui la promessa della rinuncia al nome si sposa con la minaccia dello spergiuro, dell'impossibilità di liberarsi di quanto individua, determina, permette l'uscita dalla notte. Le parole dell'invisibile Romeo sono, in un certo senso, le parole di uno spettro ("ROMEO: By a name / I know not how to tell thee who I am", II.ii.53-54), reale e irreale allo stesso tempo ("ROMEO: O blessèd, blessèd night! I am afeard, / Being in night, all this is but a dream, / Too flattering-sweet to be substantial", II.ii.139-41): qui il contrattempo, il contro-tempo e l'anacronia mandano a fondo l'idea stessa di una interiorità data, presente prima o al di là del nome, l'idea, insomma, che ci sia un Romeo prima del suo desiderio, vale a dire prima di quel mancare a se stesso che costituisce il principio primo di ogni (mancata) identificazione.

Il nome, l'idioma

Alla spettralità di Romeo fa eco "la più implacabile analisi del nome" compiuta da Juliet: un'analisi in cui il nome, nel suo non designare che viene designato, si rivela come "disumano o inumano", e

tale rapporto con l'inumano avviene solo all'uomo, per lui, in lui, nel nome dell'uomo. È l'unico a darsi questo nome inumano. E senza questo nome, Romeo non sarebbe ciò che è, un estraneo al suo nome. Juliet procede quindi nella sua analisi: il nome delle cose non appartiene alle cose più di quanto il nome degli uomini appartenga agli uomini, e tuttavia è altrimenti separabile. Ancora una volta, l'esempio della rosa. Una rosa resta quello che è senza il nome, Romeo non è più ciò che è senza il suo nome. Ma Juliet fa come se, per un certo tempo, Romeo potesse non perdere nulla perdendo il nome: come la rosa. Sii come una rosa, gli dice in sostanza, e senza genealogia, "senza perché". (Ammesso che la rosa, tutte le rose del pensiero, della letteratura, della mistica, questo "formidabile florilegio", assente da tutti i mazzi…)[39].

L'esempio della rosa ("Juliet: What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet", II.ii.43-44) viene sovrasemantizzato da Derrida attraverso il richiamo alla rosa "ohne warum" del *Cherubinischer Wandersmann* di Angelus Silesius e al fiore "assente da tutti mazzi" di cui invece parla Mallarmé nel suo *Crise des vers* (ma perché non spingere oltre l'intreccio della rosa e giungere magari a Gertrude Stein?), e nella memoria dei richiami avanza lentamente l'idea secondo cui la nominazione raggiunge il suo scopo solo quando manca il bersaglio, solo quando nominando non nomina o, meglio, nominando mostra l'innominabile da cui proviene. Se Romeo rinunciasse al nome ("Romeo: My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself, / Because it is an enemy to thee", II.ii.55-56), non potrebbe fare a meno di rinunciare a se stesso, nonostante l'inimicizia, ma rinunciando a se stesso, inevitabilmente, rinuncerebbe a Juliet: nell'insuperabile aporia che annoda Romeo al suo nome, avanza un 'senza', preposizione che, recitano i dizionari etimologici, rinvia a una (*ab*)*sentia*(*m*), a un non-luogo in cui il nome si insinua non soltanto per occuparlo, ma anche (ed è forse questo che maggiormente conta) per manifestare, mostrare, rivelare il non-luogo stesso, il luogo del non-luogo. L'assenza di Romeo dal suo nome è quanto permette a Romeo di essere Romeo al di là del nome che porta: senza nome, Romeo ha bisogno del nome per rivelarsi al di là di esso. Romeo senza Romeo, allora, affinché Romeo sia più che Romeo, altro da Romeo: più che il nome, altro dal nome.

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[39]   *Ibid.*

Il passaggio attraverso la morte è necessario, e l'aporia di Romeo (il suo impossibile separarsi dal nome che porta e che, infatti, lo porterà alla morte) costituisce la radicale verità dell'analitica del *Dasein* elaborata da Heidegger in *Essere e tempo*: la morte, infatti, è dichiarata "la possibilità della pura e semplice impossibilità del *Dasein*"[40], ed è questa possibilità dell'impossibilità del nome, della rinuncia al nome, dell'inimicizia con il proprio nome proprio che detta a Shakespeare un dialogo che "si è impresso, sovra-impresso, testo dopo testo, nella memoria dell'Europa"[41] fino a costituirla come sfrangiata traccia mnestica di cui non smettiamo di inseguire le forme e le figure.

La rinuncia, la spoliazione sono la condizione che permette all'altro di non essere assimilato, appropriato (fosse pure dai nomi, dal linguaggio), neanche dall'appropriazione amorosa:

> La spoliazione deve restare all'opera (dunque rinunciare all'opera) affinché l'altro (amato) resti altro. L'altro è Dio o non importa chi, propriamente, una singolarità qualsiasi, dal momento che ogni altro è ogni altro [*tout autre est tout autre*]. Perché il più difficile, perfino l'impossibile, abita là: là dove l'altro perde il suo nome o può cambiarlo, per divenire non importa quale altro[42].

"Perde il suo nome o può cambiarlo": in questo senso, la richiesta di Juliet a Romeo di assumere un altro nome ("Juliet: O, be some other name!", II.ii.42) è la richiesta di rimanere o farsi altro attraverso una rinuncia che non smette di rinunciare e che, per questo, non può essere considerata né nell'ordine dell'agire né in quello del patire. Romeo deve e non può, come avviene in ogni *double bind*: deve rinunciare al nome al quale non può rinunciare, deve rinunciare a rinunciare e, per questo, deve potersi assentare da sé, divenire un 'senza', assumere il nome (del) 'senza' che è, forse, l'unico (senza-)nome che non porti 'inumanità' con e dentro di sé. Implacabilmente, Derrida

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[40]   Martin Heidegger, *Essere e tempo*, a cura di Pietro Chiodi, Torino, UTET, 1978, p. 378.

[41]   Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 522 (af. 12).

[42]   Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom (Post-Scriptum)*, Paris, Galilée, 1993, p. 92. Sul problematico sintagma "tout autre est tout autre", declinato da Jacques Derrida secondo modalità che andrebbero singolarmente discusse, cfr. la voce "Tutt'altro" da me curata in Silvano Facioni, Simone Regazzoni, Francesco Vitale, *Derridario. Lessico della decostruzione*, cit., pp. 200-209.

stringe in aforisma lo spasmo, la contrazione di un'alternativa che non conosce vie di fuga:

> Lei [Juliet] non gli chiede di perdere ogni nome, solo di cambiare nome: "O, be some other name!". Ma questo può voler dire due cose: prendi un altro nome proprio (un nome umano, questa cosa inumana che appartiene solo all'uomo); *oppure*: prendi un altro tipo di nome, un nome che non sia un nome d'uomo, prendi quindi un nome di cosa, un nome comune che, come il nome della rosa, non abbia questa inumanità di far sì che ne sia affetto l'essere stesso di chi lo porta pur non nominando nulla di lui[43].

L'inumanità del nome appartiene all'umano, all'insieme di pulsioni che governano le più diverse forme di dominio e che istituiscono catene genealogiche sempre affette da quell'"ancient grudge" che, come detto, costituisce l'inespresso (inumano?) orizzonte nel e dal quale la tragedia prende avvio. Il nome negozia, mercanteggia, introduce un'economia nelle relazioni sottoposta alla legge che regola il mercato (e il desiderio) e a cui non è possibile rinunciare, pena la disfatta di ogni possibile legame sociale: Capulet e Montague rappresentano, nell'*economia* della tragedia, le funzioni sociali, i vettori che permettono alla città di costituirsi e organizzarsi secondo leggi e norme ("Romeo: There is no world without Verona walls, / But purgatory, torture, hell itself. / Hence banishèd is banish'd from the world, / And world's exile is death", III.iii.17-20) dalle quali è strutturalmente impossibile espungere la carica di violenza, dominio, forza che le legittimano, ed è per questo che la città, la "fair Verona", è in qualche modo costituita da quella contesa – "strife"[44] – in cui, come continua a recitare il Coro nel Prologo, "civil blood makes civil hands unclean"[45].

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[43] Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 529 (af. 25).

[44] Nella sua traduzione italiana della tragedia, Agostino Lombardo (Milano, Feltrinelli, 1994) rende "strife" con "ira protratta", mentre Salvatore Quasimodo, che ha tradotto la tragedia nel 1949, traduce "odio di parte" (Shakespeare, *Teatro completo*, cit.): l'aggettivo 'protratta' restituisce tuttavia al sostantivo 'strife' una sorta di ineluttabilità che è forse il carattere principale non soltanto della città in cui si svolge la tragedia, ma di ogni città o dell'idea stessa di città.

[45] La presenza del Coro è cruciale (al di là delle considerazioni di ordine drammaturgico e poetico, e al di là del problema testuale sulla presenza del Prologo nell'in-quarto del 1599 ma non nell'in-folio del 1623): gli ordinamenti che sostengono la città e i *dissoi logoi* che la attraversano sono più di una 'semplice' cornice drammaturgica e, seppure in maniera non esplicita o diretta, infiltrano la storia di Romeo e Juliet imprimendole da subito la direzione tragica che prenderà.

La rinuncia al nome di famiglia, alla genealogia, è la rinuncia alla città, è immediatamente 'exile', prima ancora del bando emesso in seguito all'uccisione di Tybalt, perché la legge dell'amore si scontra con la legge della città, la legge dell'economia precipita di fronte all'an-economia dell'amore ("JULIET: Take all myself", II.ii.49), e il fronteggiarsi delle leggi avviene 'in nome' o partire dalla parola data e scambiata dai due amanti: alla richiesta di Juliet di rinunciare al nome, Romeo risponde "I take thee at thy word" (II.ii.49), mentre Juliet, nella simulazione di un dialogo con l'amante invisibile, dopo aver dichiarato che Romeo non potrà che assentire all'amore, dichiara "And I will take thy word" (II.ii.91). Credere alla parola, prendere in parola, prendere la parola: nella circolarità di un gioco idiomatico l'amore dei due amanti si consegna al simulacro della parola, e vi si consegna attraverso la rinuncia al nome o la sua sostituzione, come se la parola (che, seguendo il ragionamento svolto da Derrida, potrebbe essere considerata come l'unità minima dell'aforisma, il suo grado zero) fosse capace di affermarsi rinunciando a sé; come se, di nuovo, la spoliazione della parola fosse il suo più proprio, come se alla parola spettasse primariamente il compito di disvelare quell'intima, unica verità che non può tradursi in parola, che non può consegnarsi alla parola.

Nel circolo della parola, nello scambio che potrebbe chiudersi nell'orizzontalità di una saturazione reciproca, biunivoca, è comunque presente uno sbilanciamento che scaturisce dall'asimmetria della richiesta: Romeo, infatti, non chiede a Juliet di rinunciare al suo nome, e in questa inversione della pratica sociale (è la donna che lascia il suo nome per assumere quello del marito) è presente

l'inversione [che] conferma la legge: il nome del padre dovrebbe esser custodito dal figlio, ed è a lui che ha un qualche senso strapparlo, non certo alla figlia che non ne ha mai ricevuto la custodia. Terribile lucidità di Juliet. Che conosce i due vincoli della legge, il *double bind* che lega un figlio al nome del padre. Non può vivere senza affermarsi nella sua singolarità, senza il nome ereditario. Ma la scrittura di questo nome, che non ha scritto lui ("Had I it written, I would tear the word"), lo costituisce nel suo stesso essere, senza nulla nominare di lui, ed egli, negandolo, non può che annientarsi. In sostanza, può tutt'al più negarlo, rinnegarlo, non lo può cancellare o strappare. È quindi in tutti i modi perduto, e lei lo sa. E lo sa perché lo ama e lo ama perché lo sa. E gli chiede la sua morte chiedendogli di conser-

vare la vita poiché lo ama, perché sa, e perché sa che la morte non gli accadrà per caso. Morte cui lui, e lei con lui, è votato dalla doppia legge del nome[46].

La tragedia è legata al nome, è sempre tragedia del nome, perché questo, in quanto parola, è sempre titolo, nome della legge (non si dà parola senza legge, senza legge della parola): la rinuncia al nome è la rinuncia alla legge o, in altri termini, è consegna alla morte. Non è solo dopo l'uccisione di Tybalt che Romeo diventerà un fuori-legge, ma nel momento in cui accoglie la richiesta che proviene da Juliet, nel momento in cui l'altro irromperà nella sua esistenza costringendolo ad assumere, ad accogliere quella morte che il nome occulta e disvela, e che arriva sempre dall'altro, dal contrattempo dell'altro: un altro che non è l'altro genealogico, che non appartiene alla sequenza della trasmissione ereditaria, che, in fondo, non è un 'simile'. Juliet è tutta presente nel suo offrirsi ("Juliet: Take all myself", II.ii.49) o, meglio, nel suo offrirsi come colei che chiede la rinuncia del nome, che chiama Romeo per chiedergli di non chiamarsi più Romeo, perché il nome che porta è un nome di morte, è il nome della morte, e allora solo morendo alla morte, morendo la morte Romeo potrà superare il contro-tempo (la morte è sempre un contro-tempo) che impedisce all'amore di realizzarsi. Richiesta impossibile: Juliet sa che la sua richiesta non può essere accolta ("Juliet: Well, do not swear. Although I joy in thee, / I have no joy of this contract to-night", II.ii.118-19), e in questa consapevolezza che pure non rinuncia all'impossibile, a chiedere l'impossibile, la tragedia oltrepassa i confini, i limiti entro i quali potrebbe assumere un qualche significato gnomico, sapienziale o perfino catartico.

Tout est dans Shakespeare: tout et le reste, donc tout ou presque

Così Derrida. Nella lunga intervista dedicata alla "strana istituzione chiamata letteratura", dopo aver confessato il suo inesaudibile desiderio di divenire uno "Shakespeare expert", egli dichiara che *Romeo and Juliet* illustra un carattere che, proprio perché costitutivo di ogni testo, si mostra con perturbante forza nelle opere letterarie e poetiche,

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[46]   Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 530 (af. 29).

e che consiste nell'indissolubile e problematico intreccio tra l'unicità, la singolarità dell'opera e la sua iterabilità:

> Ce qui est tragiquement et heureusement universel, ici [i.e. *Romeo and Juliet*], est l'absolue singularité. Comment parlerait-on, comment écrirait-on autrement? Que voudrait-on dire autrement? Et justement pour ne jamais rien dire? Rien qui touche absolument la singularité absolue sans la manquer aussitôt tout en la manquant jamais?[47]

La questione del nome che vertebra *Romeo and Juliet* riflette come un cristallo la più ampia questione del rapporto tra idioma e iterabilità, vale a dire tra la marca unica, irripetibile, della parola e il suo riprodursi in tempi e contesti diversi da quelli in cui è stata scritta: come lasciare allora che un'assoluta singolarità si lasci esprimere da una parola (e dunque da una lingua) che può essere ripetuta? C'è forse una rimanenza, un resto che non si lascia catturare nelle maglie di questa legge della singolarità e dell'iterabilità?

La lettura derridiana di Shakespeare (ma anche di Ponge, Blanchot, Genet, Cixous, Joyce e tanti altri) costituisce in se stessa una risposta alle domande appena poste, perché, secondo il lessico di Derrida, la 'lettura' (qualunque lettura e qualunque testo si legga) si produce sempre come "controfirma" alla firma dell'altro che mette in relazione gli 'idiomi' propri di ogni singolarità, ed è solo in questo modo che una 'salvaguardia' (ma si potrebbe dire anche una 'salvezza') si rende possibile: la 'salvezza' del testo è da intendersi anche nel senso di una sua 'indennità' che lo mantiene altro rispetto alle letture che se ne compiono, mai saturato da queste.

C'è ovviamente qui un rischio, un rischio e una chance che devono essere tenuti presenti e che, peraltro, hanno alimentato per molto tempo i sospetti e le diffidenze nei confronti della pratica della decostruzione[48]: la "controfirma" non autorizza affatto (come spesso si è erroneamente creduto) qualunque possibile lettura, svincolata dal rispetto delle norme che presiedono e organizzano la pratica critica, anzi è proprio l'uscita dall'orizzonte delle possibili letture, magari

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[47]   Derrida et Attridge, "Cette étrange institution qu'on appelle la littérature", cit., p. 284.

[48]   Tra gli studiosi di Shakespeare, uno dei detrattori della decostruzione è Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993 (in particolare p. 41).

in direzione delle letture 'impossibili' (proprio come quella di *Romeo and Juliet*), a spalancarsi verso la responsabilità della "controfirma" e del suo carattere inaugurale. L'"autrement" segnato nel passaggio di Derrida sopra riportato vuole riferirsi a una lettura che istituisce un patto, un contratto con il testo (ma quale lettura non lo è?): un patto rischioso in cui ne va sia della 'firma' sia della 'controfirma' perché, se un senso nuovo può balenare fosse pure per un istante, è necessario farsi carico del rischio della deriva, dell'errore, proprio come fa Juliet quando dichiara a Romeo di temere il patto d'amore perché "It is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden; / Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say 'It lightens'" (II.ii.118-20).

Il rischio oscilla tra due polarità distinte anche se strettamente connesse: ventriloquare il testo, l'opera che si legge, nell'illusione che in questo modo si possa mantenerne salva l'idiomaticità, oppure disciogliere completamente il testo nell'orizzonte storico-culturale da cui proviene, illudendosi, invece, di restituire l'opera all'opera, al suo tempo, all'insieme di condizioni che l'hanno resa possibile. Rispetto a questi due rischi che, in realtà, celano entrambi il rifiuto della responsabilità, Derrida invoca quanto chiama "une expérience paradoxale":

> Une singularité absolue, absolument pure, s'il y en avait, n'apparaîtrait même pas, en tout cas ne se donnerait pas à lire. Pour devenir lisible, il faut qu'elle se *partage*, qu'elle *participe* et *appartienne*. Elle se divise alors et fait *sa part* au genre, au type, au contexte, au sens, à la généralité conceptuelle du sens, etc. Elle se perd pour se donner. La singularité n'est jamais ponctuelle, jamais fermée comme un point ou un poing. C'est un trait, un trait différentiel et différent de lui même: différent *avec lui-même*. La singularité diffère d'elle-même, elle se diffère pour être ce qu'elle est et pour se répéter dans sa singularité même. Il n'y aurait pas de lecture de l'œuvre – ni d'abord d'écriture – sans cette itérabilité[49].

La "s-partizione" è all'opera nell'opera che "si perde per offrirsi": non c'è lettera o letteratura che non si consegni da subito, da sempre, alle letture che se ne possono compiere. Per questo i suoi confini possono essere determinati solo a partire dalla nominazione, dal nome proprio, dalla firma e dall'insieme di 'luoghi' che sono le marche del testo: la nominazione, infatti, istituisce sempre e

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[49]   Derrida et Attridge, "Cette étrange institution qu'on appelle la littérature", cit., p. 286 (corsivi dell'autore).

comunque una tassonomia, anche quando pretende sottrarsene, ed è contro la violenza originaria della nominazione – "dare un nome è sempre, come ogni atto di nascita, sublimare una singolarità e indicarla, consegnarla alla polizia"[50] – che l'opera letteraria tenta di prodursi, sia consumandosi affinché non permangano 'resti' che si lascerebbe classificare dentro generi, sia producendo ipertroficamente 'resti' che sospendono ogni ipotizzabile classificazione. La tragedia di Shakespeare non si sottrae alla legge della singolarità e dell'iterabilità e, anzi, si direbbe metterla in opera proprio attraverso i passaggi in cui il problema della nominazione e quello dell'appello vengono 'rappresentati' (anche e soprattutto nel senso 'teatrale' del termine) unitamente alla questione della morte, del 'perdersi per offrirsi'.

Gli aforismi derridiani dedicati a *Romeo and Juliet* scelgono dunque di disperdersi, di disseminarsi, anche in ragione di una netta presa di distanza rispetto all'idea di un progetto ermeneutico che non lascerebbe residui e che, per questo, non si aprirebbe all'irriducibilità del rapporto tra 'firma' e 'controfirma': un rapporto che, pur appartenendovi, esorbita la troppo semplice circolarità del legame tra testo e interpretazione, perché la firma smargina le 'proprietà' dei nomi e, principalmente, dei nomi propri, messi in abisso dall'intrecciarsi di singolarità e iterabilità.

La firma, allora, in qualità di singolarità irriducibile, mette in gioco una logica interamente giocata sui paradossi della singolarità: "La logique de l'œuvre, notamment en littérature, est une 'logique' de la signature, une paradoxologie de la marque singulière, donc de l'exceptionnel et du contre-exemple"[51]. Il contro-esempio della firma, della lettura che (si) scrive, non sarà allora anche sempre un contrattempo o, meglio, un contro-tempo che nel momento in cui accade, nell'istante del proprio evenire, si sottrae a se stesso per rilanciarsi al di là di quanto lascia precipitare su una pagina? Il contro-esempio della firma non è, forse, l'aforisma per eccellenza? *Romeo and Juliet* sarebbe allora una sorta di firma/aforisma di Shakespeare in cui i protagonisti, nel contrattempo che determina la loro storia e il loro destino, letteralmente ac-cadono come aforismi?

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[50]   Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, Paris, Galilée, 1974, p. 71.

[51]   Derrida et Attridge, "Cette étrange institution qu'on appelle la littérature", cit., p. 277.

Destino di contaminazione, quello dei due 'puri' amanti, in cui il nome introduce la morte da cui è introdotto e che tenta 'aforisticamente' di resistere a tale morte offrendole la propria 'esteriorità' (il petto per il pugnale di Juliet) o la propria 'interiorità' (il veleno ingerito da Romeo), offrendosi, arrendendosi a quella morte da cui pure l'amore promesso dovrebbe mettere al riparo. Ed è in questo gioco di specchi tra nome e morte che, ancora una volta, si affaccia il contrattempo come mancato appuntamento con sé:

> Verità sentenziosa e sentenza di verità che porta la morte, l'aforisma separa, e per prima cosa mi separa dal mio nome. Io non sono il mio nome. Come dire che potrei sopravvivergli. Ma anzitutto è destinato a sopravvivermi. Annunciandomi, così, la morte. Non-coincidenza e contrattempo fra il mio nome e me, tra l'esperienza in base alla quale io mi chiamo o mi sento chiamare e il mio "presente vivente". Appuntamento con il mio nome. *Untimely*, intempestivo, al momento sbagliato[52].

Sempre intempestivo, l'appuntamento con il proprio nome è dunque appuntamento con la morte, vale a dire con la separazione dal nome che tuttavia sopravviverà, magari come il monumento che Montague e Capulet si appresteranno a erigere ("Montague: For I will raise her statue in pure gold, / […] / There shall no figure at such rate be set", V.iii.299-301; "Capulet: As rich shall Romeo's by his lady's lie", V.iii.303), (di)mostrando in questo modo l'intima verità del contrattempo tra la morte e il nome. Il presunto "presente vivente" di husserliana memoria, che aprirebbe alla temporalizzazione originaria e in cui il soggetto si costituirebbe, è attraversato da una crepa, un clivaggio: dal nome che spezza il circolo della coincidenza del soggetto con se stesso, come insinuandovi *non* un altro tempo *ma* un tempo altro, vale a dire un tempo organizzato e costituito da un'alterità che è l'alterità di chi pronuncia il nome, lo chiama (magari per chiedere di rinunciarvi). Ma l'alterità che chiama il nome è a sua volta chiamata dal nome che chiama, ed è nell'indirizzo, nell'appello dei nomi che la singolarità vivente scopre di essere doppiata all'origine di sé, supplementata dal nome: la singolarità del nome è risposta (non causa, non origine) di un appello più antico di ogni udibile appello, prima di ogni riconoscibile voce. Rispondere sarà

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dunque corrispondere, assumere la responsabilità infinita e incalcolabile dell'assenso all'ingiunzione dell'altro, sia che si tratti di un altro individuo, sia che si tratti di un'opera:

> Cette réponse contresignante, cette contresignature responsable (de soi et de l'autre) dit "oui" à l'œuvre, et encore "oui, cette œuvre était là avant moi, sans moi, je l'atteste", même si elle commence par appeler la contresignature co-respondante; et même si donc elle l'aura impliquée de l'origine, pour en présupposer la possibilité à la naissance, au moment du nom donné. La contresignature de l'autre texte se tient sous la loi du premier, de son passé absolu. Mais ce passé absolu était déjà la demande de la lecture contresignante. Le premier n'inaugure que depuis et comme l'attente de la contresignature seconde[53].

La lettura derridiana di *Romeo and Juliet* non deve essere intesa nei termini di un lavoro critico o di una interpretazione che assume un oggetto come dato e, applicandovi un metodo, lo scompone e lo analizza, ma come la lettura/scrittura di un testo che, all'origine, è in attesa della lettura e, dunque, non si dà come compiuto, compatto, chiuso, ma come già da sempre intrecciato a altro, all'altro, preso in una dinamica temporale le cui determinazioni sono fragili e mobili: il testo è in contrattempo rispetto a sé, in eccedenza di sé, smarginato dai suoi propri resti o, meglio, dal nome dell'altro che lo attraversa e non cessa di chiedergli di rinunciare al nome. La vertigine di *Romeo and Juliet*, nome della tragedia che mette in scena il campo tensionale inaugurato dal nome, vale a dire dall'individualità vivente trattenuta nelle maglie semantiche della lingua, raggiunge il suo punto di massima concentrazione nel momento in cui il primo incontro dei due protagonisti si trasforma (e li trasforma) nel duale/duello che annulla gli assiomi della pretesa unità semantica e drammaturgica dell'opera: concentrazione o precipitazione che si fa aforisma o insieme senza insieme di aforismi (?) e che – come recita il primo dei trentanove – "è il nome"[54].

La tragedia di Shakespeare eccede, dunque, le formalizzazioni del pensiero filosofico e le conduce al di là di quanto sarebbero capaci di osare, perché le risospinge verso il punto di irriducibilità

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[53] Derrida et Attridge, "Cette étrange institution qu'on appelle la littérature", cit., p. 288.

[54] Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 519 (af. 1): "1. Aforisma è il nome".

a partire dal quale si modulano ma non riescono a dominare: un punto di irriducibilità in cui il possibile si scopre suscitato da un impossibile che, come tale, esorbita categorie e sistemi e che, anche nel caso di una sua denegazione o rimozione, ritorna (spettralmente) come residuo inassimilabile. L'impossibile che Romeo e Juliet "enunciano con chiarezza, formalizzandolo, anzi, come nessuna speculazione filosofica avrebbe mai osato"[55] si lascia rappresentare come il *punctum caecum* (la notte, l'invisibilità di Romeo, la lettera del Friar che circola senza che il suo contenuto venga mai direttamente letto, gli "antichi rancori" che oppongono Capulet e Montague e che rimangono ignoti) che accompagna senza mostrarsi l'intera rappresentazione avvelenando dall'inizio quella verità che proprio in una pozione, un veleno, celebrerà il suo trionfo:

> 1) due amanti sopravvivono entrambi, l'uno all'altro, in quanto ciascuno vede morire l'altro; 2) il nome li costituisce senza esser nulla di loro, condannandoli a esser quel che, sotto la maschera, non sono, a confondersi con la maschera; 3) i due sono uniti proprio da ciò che li separa, e così via[56].

Assiomatica dell'impossibile, la tragedia di Shakespeare enuncia una serie di leggi la cui forza le oppone alla legge della città. Il campo di forze aperto da tale dissidio inaugura, a sua volta, lo spazio in cui la singolarità vivente è chiamata, letteralmente, a de-cidere, a de-cidersi per l'una o per l'altra delle leggi. Ma non si dà legge che non preveda, come sua ragione intrinseca, una pena per chiunque la infranga o non la rispetti, e nel caso dei giovani amanti di Verona, l'infrazione della legge del dissidio tra Capulet e Montague – legge che la loro promessa d'amore vorrebbe annullare in nome di un'altra legge, l'impossibile della legge dell'altro non più nemico (o non solo nemico) – spalanca l'abisso di una condanna inappellabile e definitiva. La condanna, la fatalità della condanna, è, in un certo senso, anticipata da quell'assiomatica dell'impossibile sopra evocata che vuole che l'unione avvenga nella separazione e a partire dalle tante separazioni che scandiscono la tragedia (la separazione dal nome, quella dell'esilio, la separazione della notte

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[55]   Ivi, p. 532 (af. 36).

[56]   *Ibid.*

della promessa dal giorno della legge, la separazione dalle famiglie e quella dagli amici che muoiono): senza separazione, cioè senza morte, non si dà promessa, perché la promessa promette sempre quanto ancora non si è realizzato, quanto ancora è separato nel tempo, perché la sua impossibile anticipazione (promettere è anticipare l'inanticipabile) disarticola le estasi temporali facendole precipitare una dentro l'altra.

Disarticolato, il tempo non conosce più nemmeno la scansione che lo determinerebbe secondo l'ordine di una successione, di un prima e di un poi, di un oggi e di un domani, come Hélène Cixous rileva con icastica puntualità nella raccolta curata da Daniel Mesguich:

> Demain ils sont morts. La scène se passe demain: hier ils se rencontrent, se précipitent l'un dans l'autre, se jettent dans le ciel, le ciel se referme, s'ouvre, verse deux larmes sur la scène. La scène se passe hier: demain passe en un éclair, c'est dejà hier. Oui, demain est hier[57].

Che domani sia ieri significa anche che la corsa verso la morte non si compie secondo la sequenzialità che la vorrebbe alla fine della storia, alla fine della vita e dunque, in un certo senso, domani. No: la corsa può invertire la sua direzione, può imboccare un sentiero ignoto, può addirittura essere chiesta o invocata *non* come la fine della vita *ma* come la sua conservazione: Juliet, dice Derrida, chiede a Romeo "la sua morte chiedendogli di conservare la vita perché lo ama, perché sa, e perché sa che la morte non gli accadrà per caso"[58]. In questa richiesta impossibile la morte, attraverso la rinuncia al nome, irrompe come l'impossibile che altro non sarà se non la morte stessa. L'impossibile insegue la morte che è l'impossibile.

Una sola, medesima tomba accoglie i due amanti che si danno la morte "in contrattempo" perché hanno cercato di muovere l'uno verso l'altro in contro-tempo, perché a dispetto di ogni apparenza non erano contemporanei, non avevano lo stesso tempo, non vivevano nello stesso tempo: l'irriducibilità del duale/duello che ne ha contrassegnato il destino sembrerebbe placarsi in una ritrovata unità (Juliet, prima di uccidersi, dichiara la morte "a restorative", V.iii.166) dalla quale, però,

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[57]   Hélène Cixous, "C'est l'histoire d'une étoile", in *Roméo et Juliette. Gervais Robin* d'après *William Shakespeare*, cit., p. 20.

[58]   Derrida, "L'aphorisme à contretemps", cit., p. 530 (af. 29).

non scaturirà altra vita né, soprattutto, quella vita altra che aveva alimentato le promesse e i sogni dei due giovani amanti.

Di fronte alla tomba, anche Capulet e Montague si riconciliano mettendo fine all'"ancient grudge" che aveva diviso i loro destini ("Capulet: O brother Montague, give me thy hand", V.iii.296), ma le parole conclusive del Prince non chiudono la storia in una qualche ristabilita armonia ("Prince: A glooming peace this morning with it brings. / The sun for sorrow will not show his head", V.iii.305-6), perché la pace è definita "glooming", e la sua tenebra, la sua oscurità, sembra sposarsi con quella notte che era stata protagonista dell'incontro tra i due amanti e poi della fuga e della morte finale:

> Si dice che teatro è la visibilità, la scena. Questo tipo di teatro appartiene alla notte poiché mette in scena ciò che non si vede, il nome; mette in scena ciò che si chiama perché non si vede o non si è sicuri di vedere ciò che si chiama. Teatro del nome, teatro della notte. Il nome chiama al di là della presenza, del fenomeno, della luce, al di là del giorno, al di là del teatro. Custodisce – e di qui il lutto e la sopravvivenza – ciò che non è più presente, l'invisibile: che ormai non vedrà più la luce del giorno[59].

Lutto e sopravvivenza proiettano la fine della tragedia oltre se stessa, come dichiara il Prince che si sporge oltre il presente, oltre la scena rappresentata: "Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things; / Some shall be pardon'd, and some punishèd" (V.iii.307-8), ed è in questo modo che la tragedia, nella sua struttura narrativa e testuale, si rilancia all'infinito nel gioco delle impossibili sopravvivenze:

> Altra serie, che si incrocia con tutte le altre: il nome, la legge, la genealogia, la doppia sopravvivenza, il contrattempo, in breve l'aforisma di *Romeo e Juliet*. Non di Romeo e di Juliet ma di *Romeo e Juliet*, il dramma di Shakespeare con questo titolo. Che appartiene a una serie, al palinsesto ancora vivo, al teatro aperto dei racconti che portano questo nome. Cui esso sopravvive, ma che, grazie ad esso, sopravvivono. Sarebbe stato possibile un tal genere di sopravvivenza "without that title", come diceva Juliet? E sopravvivrebbero i nomi di Matteo Bandello, di Luigi da Porto senza quello di Shakespeare che è sopravvissuto loro? E senza le innumerevoli ripetizioni singo-

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[59]   Ivi, p. 527 (af. 20).

larmente date in pegno sotto lo stesso nome? E senza gli innesti di nomi? E di altre opere teatrali? "O, be some other name" […][60].

Altri nomi, altre scene. Forse altri aforismi.

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[60]   Ivi, p. 533 (af. 38).

Confusing Matters: *Romeo and Juliet* and Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature**

Jennifer Ann Bates

> [Juliet's soul] is a torch lit by a spark, a bud, only now just touched by love, which stands there unexpectedly in full bloom, but the quicker it unfolds, the quicker too does it droop, its petals gone.
>
> Hegel, *Aesthetics*[1]

> Fire [...] is therefore an existent ideality, the *existent* nature of air, the becoming-manifest of the reduction-to-show of what is other.
>
> Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*[2]

Preamble

This paper is about how we generate continuity from the disparate; how experienced time, like fire, is a show, is tragic, and yet is also kindling cognition. I discuss this by looking at nature metaphors in *Romeo and Juliet* through the lens of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*.

I was motivated to write this, in part, as a response to Paul Kottman's beautiful article "Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*"[3].

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[1]   Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Engl. transl. by Thomas Malcolm Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, 2 vols, vol. I, p. 582.

[2]   Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, Engl. transl. by Arnold V. Miller, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004, paragraph 284, Zusatz, p. 113.

[3]   Paul A. Kottman, "Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 63:1 (Spring 2012), pp. 1-38. See Julia Reinhard Lupton's "Response to Paul A. Kottman, 'Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as

Kottman argues that the play's real issue is freedom: he draws in part on Hegel's discussion, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, of the rites of the ancient family and he contrasts those rites with the lovers' desire for freedom; Kottman argues that Romeo and Juliet battle against social determinism.

I reexamine determinism in a *natural* light. I show that, when we draw in other ways on Hegel, the play is not primarily about freedom. It is more about a natural catastrophe cast in nature metaphors. My claim that it is about a natural catastrophe aligns with Hegel's brief writings about the play[4]; that it is cast in metaphors which can be elucidated via Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, is new.

My premise is that not all tragedies are cultural or moral ones; they are, like the natural show in which we live, confused matters. This opens up interesting new perspectives. For example, in confusing the matters of Hegel's nature philosophy and *Romeo and Juliet*, we can see that tragedy is inorganic, that Paris' love for Juliet is phosphorous – a "shining without burning"[5], whereas Romeo and Juliet's love is a chemical fire which "does not merely burn, but burns up"[6]. Conversely, using the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet we can explain Hegel's assertion that "the transition from inorganic to organic nature" is one from "the prose to the poetry of nature"[7]; we can, because the lovers consummate and die on that threshold[8].

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the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*'", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 63:1 (Spring 2012), pp. 39-45.

[4]   My article is not about Hegel's account of *Romeo and Juliet*, though I discuss this briefly. For a longer discussion of Hegel and Shakespeare in general, see Jennifer Ann Bates, *Hegel and Shakespeare on Moral Imagination*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2010.

[5]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 258.

[6]   "[I]t ceases to be indifferent – it has become an acid", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 258. One can also explain what Hegel means by an "amalgam" by looking at the forced marriage between Juliet and Paris.

[7]   "We have now to make the transition from inorganic to organic Nature, from the prose to the poetry of nature", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, Z., p. 270.

[8]   I could have written about the chemistry of love in *Romeo and Juliet* using "elective affinities" (along the lines of Goethe in his book by that title, in which Goethe shows how a husband and wife in two different couples are attracted to the opposite couple's wife and husband through the "chemistry" of personal affinities). But elective affinities in Hegel means "the [chemical] process in its Totality" (*Philosophy of Nature*, par. 333, p. 261) whereas what I want to focus on is a destructive moment in

In Part One, I begin the comparison of Hegel and Shakespeare by looking at two plant metaphors – the Friar's "plant" and Hegel's "rose in the cross". This comparison concerns the general issue of unifying opposites through mediation.

Part Two introduces Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*: I place the work in the context of his writings and summarize it.

Part Three is concerned with two ideas from the *Philosophy of Nature* about the "show" of nature. (It is these two ideas in particular which, in Part Four, I develop in relation to *Romeo and Juliet*.) The first idea concerns the point of contact between ideality and reality, a contact that generates matter; the second idea concerns ideality as increasingly complex forms of light. That is, it concerns how for Hegel light is progressively, dialectically en-mattered as increasingly complex forms of fire and time, and then as the self-kindling life of plants and animals. In this second idea, the light in chemical fire is the consuming and destructive tragic "prose of nature", a kind of existence directly prior to organic life, which latter is the living "poetry of nature".

Part Four brings all these topics and these two ideas in particular into play in *Romeo and Juliet*. For this discussion, I have shifted away from the politics of Verona and from any Hegelian or other phenomenology of the characters[9]. Instead, out of the play's abundant nature metaphors, I look at the language of light, fire, the role of the earth's elements in relation to the sun and stars, heat and the physical contact of lovers and duelers. In the play, I trace the en-mattering of light through fire, into chemical combustion; I trace the tragic show of the inability of these lovers to exist as the poetry of nature.

Part Five concludes with reflections on these confused matters.

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chemistry *before* this totality is reached; that previous and destructive moment is the process of fire (par. 331). This fire is essential to the transition from the inorganic to the organic (the latter being, according to Hegel, a "self-kindling", par. 336, p. 270).

[9]   For phenomenological readings, see the special issue of *Criticism* on "Shakespeare and Phenomenology", eds James Kearney and Kevin Curran, 54:3 (2012), pp. 427-43.

Part One: "This weak flower" and "the rose in the cross"

a. Friar Lawrence

> Within the infant rind of this weak flower
> Poison hath residence and medicine power;
> For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part;
> Being tasted, stays all senses with the heart.
> Two such opposed kings encamp them still
> In man as well as herbs – grace and rude will;
> And where the worser is predominant,
> Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.
> (*Romeo and Juliet*, II.iii.23-30[10])

In these lines, grace and rude will are compared with the medicinal and deadly power of an herb. For the Friar, this knowledge of herbs is inseparable from reasoning about spiritual and political processes: his physics is inseparable from his meta-physical "ghostly" counsel[11].

The Friar attempts, using herbs and sacraments, to wed opposites: fire with light, lust with love, the real with the ideal, change with eternity. As we know, all his plans go terribly wrong. His explanation at the end is thin comfort.

b. Hegel

> To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present and thereby
> to enjoy the present, this is the rational insight which reconciles us
> to the actual, the reconciliation which philosophy affords to those
> in whom there has once arisen an inner voice bidding them to com-
> prehend, not only to dwell in what is substantive while still retain-
> ing subjective freedom, but also to possess subjective freedom while
> standing not in anything particular and accidental but in what exists
> absolutely[12].

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[10]   All quotations are from William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. J. A. Bryant, Jr.,
The Signet Classic Shakespeare, New York, Penguin, 2nd rev. ed. 1998.

[11]   He is often referred to in the play as the "ghostly confessor" (e.g., Juliet calls him this
in II.vi.21).

[12]   Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Engl. transl. by Thomas Mal-
colm Knox, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 12.

The rose is a natural metaphor at the heart of Hegel's philosophy. As we will see shortly, it is also at the heart, though in a different way, of his reading of *Romeo and Juliet*.

The rose in the cross is a Christian metaphor which is reinterpreted by Hegel's post-Protestant philosophy. For Hegel, it means reconciliation with reality. In general, Hegel thought his speculative science was capable of bridging metaphysical idealism and realism.

Like the Friar, Hegel works with opposites. But Hegel does so dialectically, and for him, all things are already wedded – inter-determining – in the Notion ("Concept"/*Begriff*).

Hegelian reconciliation is expressed in a variety of ways throughout his works. For example, in the closing passage of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes that the reconciliation for spirit is the unity of phenomenology and history[13]. In the *Philosophy of Right*, he writes, famously, that "*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational*"[14]. When Hegel lectured on the philosophy of nature in the first half of the 1800's, he thought he was reconciling metaphysical and religious ideas with his era's scientific knowledge of the natural world[15].

For the Friar, the "weak flower" he is holding is the real and symbolic unity of opposites, it can cure or kill. In Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, "the Notion" – figuratively grasped as the rose in the cross – is the unity of opposites, the germ of generation and of destruction in all natural things.

If we fail to grasp the Notion in reality, according to Hegel, it is most often because we are using only our "Understanding", rather than our reason as well. The Understanding is *too* logical. For example, in drama, the Understanding "emphasize[s] abstractly only one side of the character and stamp[s] it on the whole man as what alone rules him"[16].

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[13]   Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Engl. transl. by Arnold V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, par. 808, p. 493.

[14]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 10.

[15]   Of all his works, Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* brings Hegel the most criticism. He was drawing on science that is now outdated (Hegel was writing before the discovery of dinosaurs or of the germ theory of disease, and before Darwin's theory of evolution) and he championed ideas now disproven (e.g., Goethe's theory of color against Newton's). Nonetheless, there is growing interest in this book today. For a good discussion, see Thomas Posch, "Hegel and the Sciences", in *A Companion to Hegel*, eds Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur, Chichester, Blackwell, 2011, pp. 177-202.

[16]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 240.

By contrast, reason in Hegel's speculative philosophy is capable of grasping what appears illogical:

> [I]n the light of the *rationality* of what is inherently total and therefore living, this illogicality is precisely what is logical and right.
> For man is this: not only the bearer of the contradiction of his multiple nature but the sustainer of it, remaining therein equal and true to himself[17].

In Shakespeare's play, Hegel's rose is on fire.

When Hegel writes about Juliet, he does not refer to the rose in the cross specifically, but he does use the rose as a metaphor:

> Suddenly we see the development of the whole strength of this heart, of intrigue, circumspection, power to sacrifice everything and submit to the harshest treatment; so that now the whole thing looks like *the first blossoming of the whole rose at once in all its petals and folds*, like an infinite outpouring of the inmost genuine basis of the soul in which previously there was no inner differentiation, formation, and development, but which now comes on the scene as an immediate product of an awakened single interest, unbeknown to itself, in its beautiful fullness and force, out of a hitherto self-enclosed spirit. *It is a torch lit by a spark, a bud*, only now just touched by love, which stands there unexpectedly in full bloom, but the quicker it unfolds, the quicker too does it droop, its petals gone[18].

Though Hegel does not discuss the rose in the cross here, a Hegelian must nonetheless try to think it, philosophically, in all places. The confusing matter of *tragic* reconciliation – this rose on fire – is at the center of my paper; more about this later.

Hegel uses the same rose metaphor for the whole play: he writes of Romeo's and Juliet's love as "a tender rose in the vale of this transitory world […] withered by rude storms and tempests"[19]. The whole passage in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, from which this last citation is taken, is instructive. It shows what kind of tragedy Hegel thinks this play embodies. So let me cite it in full.

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[17]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, pp. 239-40.

[18]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, pp. 581-82, my italics.

[19]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, p. 1232.

Hegel begins in general about bad luck and then moves on to tragedy:

> we are confronted by a purely horrible external necessity when
> we see fine minds, noble in themselves, perishing in such a battle
> against the misfortune of entirely external circumstances. Such a
> history may touch us acutely, and yet it seems only dreadful and
> we feel a pressing demand for a necessary correspondence between
> the external circumstances and what the inner nature of those fine
> characters really is. It is only from this point of view that we can
> feel ourselves reconciled in e.g. the fate of Hamlet or Juliet […]. [In
> Hamlet's] melancholy and weakness, his worry, his disgust at all
> the affairs of life, we sense from the start that in all his terrible sur-
> roundings he is a lost man, almost consumed already by inner dis-
> gust before death comes to him from outside. The same is the case
> in Romeo and Juliet. The soil on which these tender blooms were
> planted is foreign to them, and we are left with nothing but to bewail
> the tragic transience of so beautiful a love which is shattered by the
> crazy calculations of a noble and well-meaning cleverness, just as a
> tender rose in the vale of this transitory world is withered by rude
> storms and tempests. But the woe that we feel is only a grievous
> reconciliation, an unhappy bliss in misfortune[20].

The first thing to notice here is that for Hegel not all reconciliations
are comic. The second is that, in both Shakespeare's play and in
Hegel's account of it, the collisions in the play, though social, are
expressed in natural metaphors; the collisions themselves appear to
be deterministic, inevitable, like storms.

In what follows, I show that nature metaphors – these confused
matters, these elemental thoughts – are foundational to reflective ex-
istence, and why being more aware of them can help us to compre-
hend, and sometimes avoid tragedy.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, in particular, can teach us to prop-
erly grasp how "the show" of our existence is time as fire. The best
antidote to tragedy is to remember (to take) that time of synthesis,
to kindle ideas.

There is always "[s]ome consequence yet hanging in the stars"
(I.iv.107). We do well to attend to and interpret these natural lights,
especially as they become refracted in life.

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[20]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. II, pp. 1231-32.

Part Two: Rekindling Hegel's Philosophy of Nature

a. Hegel's Speculative Philosophy and the role of the Philosophy of Nature *in it*

As I mentioned above, in Hegel's philosophy in general, Hegel rejects the work of the Understanding on its own. The Understanding reflects and dissects rather than comprehends; it generates rigid categories in which it captures the content of its reflection. To it, belong the one-sided philosophies of "reflection" and of "identity".

By contrast, Hegel thinks that his Speculative Philosophy, by means of its dialectical Notion, comprehends the "organic" truth of the unity of thought and being.

The Notion is as much subjective as objective; it tarries with and loses itself in the other. Rather than holding identity and difference apart, it sublates contradiction.

The following citation highlights the way in which Hegel's wholes are inherent contradictions and interdependencies; wholes enliven themselves in and through their differences.

> In individuality developed into a totality, the moments themselves are determined as individual totalities, as whole particular bodies which, at the same time, are in relation only as different towards each other. This relation, as the identity of non-identical, independent bodies, is a contradiction, and hence is essentially *process*, the function of which, in conformity with the Notion, is the positing of the differentiated as identical, the removal of difference, and the differentiation of the identical, the enlivening and dissociation of it[21].

For Hegel, identity is identity and difference. To stop at identity or difference, is to fail to be dialectical, to fail to grasp the Notion.

What role does the *Philosophy of Nature* play in our comprehension of these wholes? First, the *Philosophy of Nature* is the middle book in a series of three: the overarching advance of Hegel's Speculative Science in his *Encyclopedia* is from the *Logic* to the *Philosophy of Nature* to the *Philosophy of Spirit*.

There is a progression in these works: the *Logic* gives us the conceptual development of the Notion all by itself; nature and spirit

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[21]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 326, pp. 232-33.

arise as substantial and cognitional forms of it, respectively[22]. But the relation of logic to nature and to spirit is not simple. Hegel does not think that there is a logical, metaphysical "diamond net"[23] on or underlying nature or spirit.

According to him, the Notion is a dialectical process by means of which the object both is itself and is thinkable. Speculative science shows how differences are part and parcel of whatever identity one considers. Logic, nature and spirit are three spheres of this Notional reality.

Rather than imagining that Hegel imposes a logic on nature or spirit, we can think Hegelian reconciliation with reality more accurately when we grasp it as a four-way dialectical interdetermination of one-many with subject-substance[24].

We see this four-way dialectic when we consider Hegel's reading of *Romeo and Juliet*. The tension is between the one-many of their social lives (their being-object as a pair vs. the multiple interpretations of them by those around them), which in turn is in dialectical relation with the other polarity, that between their freedom as subjects and their being-object.

Romeo's and Juliet's freedom is not just constrained by its being-object: it is created and changed in and through being-object, just as their being-object, and the interpretation of it by others, are created and changed through their freedom.

However, my view is that this four-way interdependence in the play is best understood by paying attention, not just to the political, but rather, primarily, to the *natural* character of it.

To prepare for looking closely at this natural aspect in the play, let me briefly summarize Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and then, in Part Three, pull out of it the ideas relevant to my discussion.

Following that, I turn to *Romeo and Juliet* to show how these ideas work in that play.

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[22] For a discussion of the different kinds of "advances" of the dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* vs. the *Logic* vs. *Philosophy of Nature*, see Jennifer Ann Bates, "Hegel and the Concept of Extinction", *Philosophy Compass*, Continental Series, ed. Andrew Cutrofello, editor-in-chief Elizabeth Barnes, forthcoming, 2014.

[23] Hegel, "Introduction to the *Philosophy of Nature*", in *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 11.

[24] For a discussion of this four-way dialectic, see Jennifer Ann Bates, "Organic or Inorganic Freedom?", in *Hegel on Freedom and History*, ed. Emila Angelova, under negotiation with University of Toronto Press.

b. Summary of the Philosophy of Nature

Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is divided into three spheres: Mechanics, Physics and Organics[25]. Just as, according to Hegel, there is no theory of evolution that can account for necessary developments of one species into another over time[26], there is no evolution of one sphere into the other. Each sphere is simply a greater, more complex embodiment of the Notional relationships present in the earlier spheres.

Thus, the mechanics of space, time, matter and motion, of the planetary bodies and the solar system – all of which make up the first sphere – are incorporated[27] in the second sphere of Physics. The *physical* Elements of planet earth – earth, air, fire and water – contain in them the mechanics of space and time, matter, motion and the solar system. These Elements (with all that is going on in them) are in turn incorporated into the earth's meteorological processes.

Chemistry, the moment in physics before the transition to the third, organic sphere, incorporates these previous mechanical and physical processes, as well as magnetic and electrical processes. Finally, in the organic sphere, organic bodies incorporate the inorganic processes as parts of their living, self-perpetuation. (In a moment, I will focus on how this process from inorganic mechanism and physics to life-forms, is traced by Hegel in terms of the ideality and reality of light and fire. For it is this material which illuminates Shakespeare's play.)

In the third and last sphere – organics – Hegel develops levels of self-subsisting life forms from the simplest (slime) up to the highest (the human animal capable of cognition). With this we have left the *Philosophy of Nature*, and entered the *Philosophy of Mind* (*Geist* or "Spirit"), the third book of Hegel's *Encyclopedia*. For with cognition comes spirit, the community of interpreters, doing science, reflecting on and knowing the world. The sciences we do, he claims, make

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[25]   Hegel starts with the most external and abstract – space – and works that via time and motion and place and matter, into the ever more complex entities of general mechanics, physics and organic life.

[26]   Michael John Petry, "Introduction", in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Michael John Petry, London, George Allen and Unwin; New York, Humanities Press, 1970, 3 vols, vol. I, pp. 22-23.

[27]   I use the term 'incorporate' and 'contain' loosely to capture a complex dialectical process of sublation into material existence.

explicit for us the implicit rationality in things[28]. At that point, the door is opened to spirit's historical, anthropological, psychological, phenomenological, religious, artistic and philosophical self-comprehensions. With cognitive creatures doing *speculative* science, the truth is the whole.

The three spheres in the *Philosophy of Nature* show a 'transition' (for lack of a better word) from the abstract ideality of the Notion to increasingly *concrete* ideality, that is, to the existent *reality* of the Notion[29].

So much for my summary of the book. Now let me tease out some important ideas in it which I will take up later in relation to the play.

Hegelian reconciliation, the rose in the cross, is often cast by Hegel in terms of the unity of ideality and reality. Let us approach Hegelian reconciliation in these terms and then compare that rose with the rose of Verona.

Part Three: The rose of reconciliation qua *ideality and reality*

a. The point of contact

Generally speaking, ideality and reality are for Hegel, in each sphere, indeed in each thing, one. "*Reality* and *ideality* are frequently considered as a pair of determinations that confront one another with equal independence […]. But ideality is not something that is given outside of and apart from reality. On the contrary, the concept of ideality expressly consists in its being the *truth* of reality, or in other words, reality posited as what it is in-itself proves itself to be ideality"[30].

There is, nonetheless, according to Hegel, a natural transition, both cognitive and material, between ideality and reality. Let us il-

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[28] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 337, Z., p. 276.

[29] That transition carries on into the *Philosophy of Mind*. So, the Idea (the unity of Notion and reality) is completed in the *nature* of free human cognition. This claim is the topic of another paper. See my notes 22 and 61.

[30] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, Engl. transl. by Theodore F. Geraets, Wallis Arthur Suchting and Henry Stilton Harris, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1991, par. 96, Addition, p. 153. See also Mark C. Taylor's *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2000, p. 156.

lustrate this with a passage from the *Philosophy of Nature* about how the ideality of matter first comes about.

> [When two bodies come into contact] there is no empty space between the bodies (*Massen*) which are thrusting and pressing against each other, they are in *contact*; and it is in this contact now that the ideality of matter begins; and the interest lies in seeing how this inwardness of matter emerges into existence, just as the attainment of existence by the Notion is always the interesting thing. Thus, the two masses come into contact, that is to say, are for each other; this means that there are two material points or atoms, coinciding in a single point or in an identity: their being-for-self is *not* a being-for-self. No matter how hard and brittle the matter is imagined to be, one can imagine that there is still some space between them; but as soon as they touch each other they exist as *one* body, however small this point is conceived to be. This [synthesis] is the higher, materially existing continuity, a continuity which is not external and merely spatial, but real. Similarly, the point of time is a unity of past and future: the two points are in one, and at the same time they are also not in one. Motion is precisely this: to be in one place, and at the same time to be in another place, and yet not to be in another place but only in this place[31].

The higher synthesis is one which does grasp the "existing continuity". In this synthesizing, time plays a crucial role.

The continuity is not "merely spatial, but real"; time makes the moment of identity into a unity of moments, a synthesized continuity[32].

This synthesizing makes use of time's negation of negation, i.e., of the fact that time is not just determination against otherness but also the overcoming of that contradiction (determinateness against an other) *by means of* the realization that each side (determinateness, otherness) is determined *both* by what it is *and* what it is *not*. It is

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[31]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 265, Z., p. 50. It is interesting to note that according to Hegel "motion is *existent* contradiction", Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Engl. transl. by Arnold V. Miller, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press International, 1990, p. 440.

[32]   This is consistent with how Hegel introduces time into space at the start of the *Philosophy of Nature*: a point is spatial (there are infinite points in space); but the negation of a point is time. The negation of the time frame, in turn, is the return of space (a given, spatialized amount of time), what I call the "dovetailing" of space and time. See Jennifer Ann Bates, *Hegel's Theory of Imagination*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2004, p. 41.

the holding together, the recollecting, of contradictory moments as constitutive of the whole[33].

Thus the synthesis *builds one out of contradiction*. Two are made into one[34]. The point of contact which gives rise to matter is a synthesis in which two realities give rise to one ideality about them. In Part Four, we will see how love between two people is such an ideality.

So far, we have looked at a passage that has shown how the ideal "emerges" out of real contact. Now, let us look at the transition of ideality *into* reality; specifically, let us look at it in in terms of light's en-matterings in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*.

The en-mattering of light is the natural "show" of the reconciliation of ideality and reality. The beauty and the problem with this show is that, like all movement and change, it is existent contradiction. It is thus *tragic*.

Following this analysis, we'll look at how both contact and light appear in the show that is *Romeo and Juliet*.

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[33] One of the best accounts of how time is experienced dialectically is in chapter 2 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, Hegel provides a *phenomenological* account of pointing out the "now": "In this pointing-out, then, we see merely a movement which takes the following course: (1) I point out the 'Now', and it is asserted to be the truth. I point it out, however, as something that *has been*, or as something that has been superseded; I set aside the first truth. (2) I now assert as the second truth that it *has been*, that it is superseded. (3) But what has been, *is not*; I set aside the second truth, its *having been*, its supersession, and thereby negate the negation of the 'Now', and thus return to the first assertion, that the *'Now' is*. The 'Now', and pointing out the 'Now', are thus so constituted that neither the one nor the other is something immediate and simple, but a movement which contains various moments. [Hegel goes on in par. 109:] It is clear that the dialectic of sense-certainty is nothing else by the simple history of its movement or of its experience", Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, par. 107, pp. 63-64 and par. 109, p. 64. This phenomenological account is of course of consciousness and its content, not of the natural mechanics of space and time, which is supposed to be separate from consciousness' experience of it. However, in my reading of Hegel, we do the work of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in order to come to the conclusion that thought and being are not separable. Thus in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, even the simple mechanics of the generation of matter are also thoughts; the moments of time, therefore, constitute not just mechanical complexity, but always also their cognitive equivalent. If this were not the case, we would not know time's moments to be the matter at hand. This unity of thought and being is, as I read Hegel, what Hegel means when he writes that ideality and reality are in general the same thing.

[34] Hegel prefers to call this activity reason rather than productive imagination. I have argued that, according to Hegel's own lectures on psychology, the function of the imagination (*die Einbildungkraft*) is precisely what makes reason do this kind of good synthesis. See Bates, *Hegel's Theory of Imagination*.

b. Light's en-mattering[35] and matter's enlightenment: the natural completion of ideality in reality

One of the ways in which Hegel traces the transition of ideality into reality in the *Philosophy of Nature* is the way that the abstract ideality of light gets complicated in relation to matter, transformed in chemical combustion, and regenerated as self-kindling life.

Light, according to Hegel, is a primordial identity[36]. As with all identity, it is abstract until it is made more real through difference. Light's first embodiment is that it is "the self of matter"[37]. Then, in the "physics of the universal individuality", this embodiment of light is further implicated in otherness: as Hegel explains: "This existent, universal *self* of matter is *Light* – as an individuality it is a *star*; as a star which is a moment of a totality, it is the *sun*"[38]. As the sun, light is a moment of a *totality*, because it is a part of the solar *system*: it is thus a moment of a continuous, self-sustaining, infinitely repeating process.

The more complexly light is en-mattered, the more there is – both in the sense of more reality, and more to be explained – about our solar system, its objects, and in particular, our earth. So when light hits the earth and matter is transformed by it, and later, when things grow because of it, light is part of an economy of matter and of life, it is that which consumes and is consumed.

In plant-life, light is the vitality within the individual plant, and then in the animal realm (which Hegel calls the "Fire Kingdom") it is the genus kindled by individuals.

In the animal, through sensation, light is also inwardized, a kind of self-perpetuating and self-sustaining internal system of recollection which, in humans, is further complexly developed as the light of reason[39].

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[35]   This is my term, not Hegel's, but it is legitimized by passages such as: "The plant now reveals itself here as the Notion which has materialized the light-principle and has converted the watery nature into a fiery one. The plant is itself the movement of the fiery nature within itself", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 349, Z., p. 351.

[36]   "Light, as the universal physical identity", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 277, p. 94; "Light is the active identity which posits everything as identical", par. 278, Z., p. 98.

[37]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, p. 87.

[38]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, p. 87.

[39]   For Hegel, reason is en-mattered, embodied, dialectically determined through otherness and difference, a concrete system of knowing in and through the world.

Here is a telling passage about how plants relate to light differently from animals:

> The self does not become for the plant, but the plant becomes a self to itself only in light; its lighting-up, its becoming light […] does not mean that the plant itself becomes light, but that it is only in light […] that it is produced. Consequently the selflike character of light as an objective presence […] does not develop into vision: the sense of sight remains merely light, colour, in the plant, not the light which has been reborn in the midnight of sleep, in the darkness of the pure ego – not this spiritualized light as existent negativity[40].

In order to talk more in depth about the transition from physics to organic life, let me briefly return to Hegel's physics.

The progressive embodiment of light in the physics is a movement from light (universal) to Fire (particular) to chemical combustion (the total, "infinite form"). Thus from the solar system and its universal sunlight, light is differentiated into the four Elements of the planet, one of which is Fire. (The others are Air, Water and Earth.)

> [Fire] is materialized time or selfhood (light identical with heat), the absolutely restless and consuming Element; just as this Element destroys a body when attacking it from without, so too, conversely, does the self-consumption of body, e.g. in friction, burst into flame. In consuming an other it also consumes itself and thus passes over into neutrality[41].

In this second, elemental moment of particularized light, the elements become a *process* – the planet's meteorological system. And then the elements in process combine to give rise to complex, particular bodies. Hegel explains: "The selfhood of light which was previously opposed to heavy matter [the dark], is now the selfhood of matter itself; this *infinite ideality* is now the nature of matter itself […]. The earth separates itself into individualities possessing the entire form in themselves"[42]. Thus there arises, third, the physics of the total individuality.

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[40]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 347, Z., p. 337.

[41]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 283, p. 110.

[42]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 289, Z., p. 124, my italics.

The final moment of this total individuality of particulars is chemistry – that process in which individual matters synthesize or are destroyed upon contact.

In chemistry, chemical combustion – the "Process of Fire" – deserves close attention. For it is the transition between the inorganic and the organic.

c. From the prose to the poetry of nature: combustion in chemistry, self-kindling life ("Fire Kingdom") and the beginnings of enlightened matter

The "Process of Fire" in chemistry is combustion during combination. It is "*Fire*, whereby what is in itself combustible (like sulphur) […] is *kindled into flame*: whereby also […] those bodies in which difference is still indifferent and inert […] are energized into the *chemical opposition*"[43].

Chemical combustion is tragic. To explain this, let me draw out six things that Hegel says about it and then address tragedy directly.

First, chemical contact is dialectical: there is an urge of one side for the other. The two come together and in that contact, burn. According to Hegel, this burning happens in part because the *definition of* combustible is that it is already "inwardly a sheer opposition and so self-contradictory, it stands in need of its other, and only *is* in real connection with its other"[44]; "[t]he individualized body, therefore, is the urge to overcome its one-sidedness and to posit the totality which, in its Notion, it already is"[45].

Second, combustion happens only in relation to the other elements: "The substances in conflict with each other in the process of fire come together only externally […]. They are mediated with each other by Elements, i.e. *air* and *water*"[46]; "Acids get hot, catch fire, when water is poured on them"[47].

Third, the "intrinsically combustible substance", prior to combustion, is identified by Hegel as *sleeping* Time: it "is negativity in itself, Time which is inwardly realized but still *sleeps* […] the quiescent ex-

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[43]   "of *acid* and (caustic) *alkali*", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, pp. 256-57.

[44]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 257.

[45]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 332, Z., p. 259.

[46]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 332, Z., p. 259.

[47]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 332, Z., p. 259.

istence of this sleeping Time […] this negativity is its quality, not a mere form of its being, but its very being as this form – *sulfur* as the earthy basis […]. (*β*) the *acids*"[48].

When that sleeping time of combustible nature actually burns, we have fire, which Hegel says "can be called *active* Time"[49].

Thus in chemical combustion, in this dialectical relation of elements, contact is a burning time, visible, "awake". In *this* contact, when two are made one, the whole burns, indeed the whole burns up.

Fourth, although chemical combustion expresses the dialectical process of all the systems heretofore, the process remains temporally finite (prosaic). This inorganic fire falls short of life's perpetual kindling.

Fifth, by contrast, "*the organism* [*is*] the infinite process which spontaneously kindles and sustains itself"[50]. *The organism* is the "poetry" of nature[51]. It is *restless* time: "The sap circulates throughout the entire plant. This quivering of vitality within itself belongs to the plant because it is alive – restless Time"[52].

Thus in life, the abstract Notion – the ideality of light – is en-mattered, indeed embodied reality. As *genus* it is a self-kindling fire.

Thus, sixth, Hegel calls this living Fire of Life "objective Time":

The chemical process is the highest to which the inorganic Nature can reach; in it she destroys herself and demonstrates her truth to be the infinite form alone. The chemical process is thus, through the dissolution of shape, the transition into the higher sphere of the organism where the infinite form makes itself, as infinite form, real; i.e. the infinite form is the Notion which here attains to its reality. […] Here, therefore, Nature has risen to the existence (*Dasein*) of the Notion; the Notion is no longer merely immanent, is no longer submerged in Nature's mutual externality of being. It is a free Fire (*α*) as purged of matter, and (*β*) as materialized in existence (*Dasein*). The moments of what exists are

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[48] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 334, Z., p. 267.

[49] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 334, Z., p. 267.

[50] The "unity which is the activity of negating this its one-sided form of reference-to-self, of *sundering* and particularizing itself into the moments of the Notion and equally of bringing them back into that unity, is *the organism* – the infinite process which spontaneously kindles and sustains itself", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, p. 270.

[51] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 329, Z., p. 242.

[52] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 346a, Z., p. 329. Also "in the subjectively living being which is its own time", par. 344, Z., p. 307.

themselves raised to this ideality, have only this being of ideality, and do not fall back into the restricted forms of existence: we thus have objective Time, an imperishable Fire, the Fire of Life; Heraclitus, too, declared the soul to be Fire, and the dry souls to be the best[53].

We have thus moved from sleeping time to waking time to a kind of eternity. It is through fire, the middle moment, that the abstract light of the Notion becomes existence as *show*. It is fire that allows for what Hegel calls "the *transition* from inorganic to organic Nature, from the prose to the poetry of nature"[54].

Now we can see how in *chemical combustion*, the show is tragic: "the process of fire is […] an instant of spontaneous life, whose activity, however, hastens to its death"[55]. Chemical fire is "the infinite form", a kind of soul, but not one that keeps itself going. "For chemical processes do not hang together, otherwise we should have Life, the circular return of a process"[56].

By contrast, in *life*, the show is *tragi-comic*: life preserves itself through the destruction of its individuals: "The life-process is also a fire-process for it consists in the consumption of particularized existences; but it perpetually reproduces its material"[57].

In this organic, tragi-comic "poetry" of nature – life – the whole is all the previous processes of all spheres:

The free, independent members of the universal process, sun, comet, and moon, are now, in their truth, the Elements: Air as atmosphere, Water as the sea, but Fire as a terrestrial Element contained in the fructified, dissolved earth and separated off as the fructifying sun. The life of the earth is the process of atmosphere and sea in which it generates

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[53]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, Z., pp. 271-72, my italics.

[54]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, Z., p. 270.

[55]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 336, Z., pp. 271-72.

[56]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 257.

[57]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 283, Z., pp. 110-11. The highest form of life – animal life (which includes human life) – is the "Fire-Kingdom". It rekindles itself in that the genus continues even though the individuals die: "Fire releases itself […] into members, there is a perpetual passage into a product; and this is perpetually brought back to the unity of subjectivity, for the self-subsistence [of the members] is immediately consumed. Animal life is therefore the Notion which displays itself in space and time. Each member has within itself the entire soul […] is not self-subsistent, but exists only as bound up with the Whole", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 337, Z., p. 277.

these Elements, each of which is an independent life for itself while all of them constitute only this process[58].

Life is a shining of greater worth than the starry heavens. In other words, Hegel would agree with the astronomer from Cambridge University I once heard, who said that what we see in outer space – giant nebulae and exploding stars – is far more easily explained than the amazing complexity of the colors of a butterfly's wing. Hegel favors slime over stars: "In fact I do rate what is concrete higher than what is abstract, and an animality that develops into no more than slime, higher than the starry host"[59]. The sea, teaming with life, is for Hegel "an infinite shining"[60].

The reason life is an infinite shining greater than the starry heavens, is that in life the universal light becomes a stabilized reflectedness-into-self of the whole external universe:

> in general, *the existence of organic being is the act of the whole earth, in which it individualizes and contracts itself, the reflection-into-self of the universal.* But equally it becomes a stabilized reflectedness-into-self; and the higher plants and animals are this established reflectedness-into-self[61].

Part Four: Making two into one: The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet

> Fire […] is therefore an existent ideality, the *existent* nature of air, the becoming-manifest of the reduction-to-show of what is other[62].

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[58] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 341, Z., p. 294. The above account of the en-mattering of light in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* is incomplete. I have given the main points in order to indicate generally how light is brought in and through the content of increasingly complex systems.

[59] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 341, Z., p. 297.

[60] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 341, Z., p. 297.

[61] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 343, Z., p. 302, my italics. Elsewhere I argue the following: a plant seed or "germ" is the "*idea matrix*" (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 348, Z., p. 347) but that idea, in organic life, is, via *cognition*, a reflection of the entire idea matrix of the universe. In free human speculative thinking, the Notion and reality are one: that Idea is the *complete* unity of ideality and reality. It is more than merely objective time: it is eternity, unless we burn up. See Bates, "Hegel and the Concept of Extinction".

[62] Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 284, Z., p. 113.

Theater, like fire, is a "reduction-to-show of what is other". The play, too, is about this show.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* shows the en-mattering of light up to and including the moment of combustion. It moves from the abstract light of mere seeing-dreaming (Romeo about Rosaline) to the light of the sun (Juliet) to the fire of passion and conflict (marriage/ duels), to the combustion of tragedy and the stupid neutrality of its last moments of resolution after the deaths.

The tragedy is a destructive chemical fire. The "star-crossed" lovers' union is not a consummation of life's process: Romeo and Juliet die on the threshold of that poetry of nature. The play is about light and fire; about our universal, temporal, natural condition and how we see its show.

a. The en-mattering of light

To begin, we watch Romeo pining selfishly over the unattainable Rosaline. His ego is like the sun's light, which, in Hegel's words, "lacks the infinitude of the return into self". This "light is not self-consciousness; it is only the manifestation *of* itself, not *for itself*, but for another"[63]. Romeo's light falls on primordial contradictions: "Why then […] O loving hate, / O anything, of nothing first created! / O heavy lightness" (I.i.179-81).

The play's early scenes are all about looking and revolve around a masked ball in which looking and not being seen is the name of the game. Benvolio challenges Romeo to "examine other beauties" at the party by "giving liberty unto thine eyes" (I.i.230-31); Juliet says to her mother that, at the party, she will look at Paris, "I'll look to like, if looking liking move" (I.iii.97). (Paris' love for Juliet looks like a case of this abstract looking and loving, but I think rather that his ideal is more en-mattered: his love is like phosphorous substance which glows on its own. Hegel writes that phosphorous "does not receive difference from outside by combining with an actively different body, but […] develops the negativity immanent in itself as its own self"; Paris is thus a "shining without burning"[64].) Romeo follows his friends to the party, saying "I'll be a candleholder and look

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63   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, Z., p. 88.

64   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 331, Z., p. 258.

on" (I.iv.38). On the way, Mercutio tells of how "Queen Mab" makes men see things in their dreams (I.iv.53).

Mercutio's Queen Mab speech ends after Romeo says that he speaks of "nothing" (I.iv.96). Mercutio agrees that these dreams are just "air". "True, I talk of dreams; / Which are the children of an idle brain, / Begot of nothing but vain fantasy; / Which is as thin of substance as the air" (I.iv.96-99).

But fire is immanent in these airy nothings. According to Hegel, "air [is] the invisible destroyer" because it gradually consumes everything (in it, water dries and metals rust[65]); "The air does, indeed, seem to be neutral, but it is the stealthily destructive activity"[66]. When air is ignited, the immanent consuming within it is made a visible flame[67].

If Romeo's "love" of Rosaline and Mercutio's imaginings are "air", further *realizations* of these idealities of love and of imagination are fiery contacts.

The Friar is right to fear that what's in the air in Verona will turn into fire. The problem, however, is not the en-mattering of light as fire. Both the Friar and Hegel see this as the natural course of things. Indeed, for Hegel, the "*inability* to pass to concrete existence, far from being worthy of admiration, is rather a defect"[68]. As we have seen, for Hegel "[i]t is […] absurd to regard the stars as superior, e.g., to plants. The Sun is not yet anything concrete"[69]. True, Romeo says as he's leaving Juliet's balcony, "[a] thousand times the worse, to want thy light!" (II.ii.155). But Romeo would never be satisfied to just watch Juliet, the sun, rising in the East. He wants to consummate his love. He wants to "see" (with the) light differently[70].

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[65]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 321, p. 217. Air is "a universal ideality of everything that is other to it, the universal in relation to other, by which everything particular is destroyed", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 284, Z., p. 113.

[66]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 330, Z., p. 255.

[67]   Hegel believes that air can be ignited, e.g., as lightning (Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 288, Z., p. 121).

[68]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, Z., p. 90, my italics.

[69]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 275, Z., p. 90.

[70]   The sun is not a privileged source of light for Hegel: the more en-mattered light becomes, the more we realize that all things in the solar system are interrelated and inter-causal. He writes that this is as true of the Ego's relations to society as it is of the sun's relation to the planets: "the whole solar system exists together, since the sun is as much produced by the other bodies as *they* are produced by it. Similarly, the Ego is not yet Spirit, but finds its truth in the latter in the same way that light does in the

The problem is not the en-mattering of light, it is, rather, the destructive nature of fire. "[F]ire is this immanently negative, destructive being-for-self, the restless, really different Element whose outcome is the positing of difference"[71]. The problem, as the Friar says, lies "[i]n man as well as herbs – grace and rude will; / And where the worser is predominant, / Full soon the canker death eats up that plant" (II.iii.28-30). The Friar fears that the passions will ignite rude will rather than grace.

The Friar's solution is to bring fire under the sacrament of the church, so that the heat of passion is justified when two are made one flesh. But in the market square of Verona, the heat of day ignites tensions in the air: Mercutio and Tybalt enter into a deadly duel.

In each case, ideality and reality come together. The Friar thinks he can control the contradictory forces. But in the end, Verona's youth burns up. And that is the show. To grasp why, let us look at how opposites evolve in the play.

b. Duals and duels[72]. The heat of touch: joining hands and swords

There are many dualities in the play. The primary is that of light and darkness. "It is the East and Juliet is the Sun" (II.ii.3), and she makes

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concrete planet. I, alone by myself, to esteem this as the highest, is the negative vanity which is not Spirit. The Ego is certainly an absolute moment of Spirit, but not in so far as it isolates itself", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 280, Z., p. 104. Paul Kottman argues ("Defying the Stars") that the lovers are seeking to achieve their freedom over against the social order of the "ancient family" as Hegel describes it. And one can see here that their freedom in Hegel would be subsumed in the greater whole. But one must not stop with that one-sided view: the Ego (sun) and Spirit (planetary system) are causes of each other. Without freedom there would be no social spirit, but without society, there would be no Ego and thus no freedom. Freedom by itself is necessarily tragic because, like fire, it consumes instead of communes. (See Hegel's account of Freedom in the section entitled "Free Mind" in the *Philosophy of Mind*.) The higher order is life's constant kindling, and beyond that, analogously, our communal interpretations, our enlightening shows.

[71]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 329, Z., p. 244.

[72]   See Paul Kottman's discussion of duels in "Defying the Stars", pp. 7-8; he notes that he is saving "the full demonstration of this claim, that Shakespearean drama shows 'duels' to be of secondary significance in the drama of human freedom", for a forthcoming essay, "Duel", in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. Henry S. Turner, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

the moon envious. Phoebus contends with nighttime, the stars with darkness; the morning lark with the nightingale. As Romeo leaves Juliet in the morning, he says "More light and light – more dark and dark our woes" (III.v.36).

One of the best examples of this light-dark opposition is picked up by Hegel in his discussion of similes:

> in so far as passion, despite its unrest, concentrates itself on one object, it may toss to and fro in a variety of images and comparisons which are only conceits about one and the same object, and it does this in order to find in the surrounding external world a counterpart to its own inner being. Of this kind is, e.g., Juliet's monologue in *Romeo and Juliet* when she turns to the night and cries out [Act III, scene ii]:

> Come night! Come Romeo! come, thou day in night!
> For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
> Whiter than new snow upon a raven's back. –
> Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-brow'd night,
> Give me my Romeo: and, when he shall die,
> Take him and cut him out in little stars,
> And he will make the face of heaven so fine,
> That all the world will be in love with night,
> And pay no worship to the garish sun[73].

The other three elements listed in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* are also at work in the play's chemistry. Out of their oppositions combustions arise. We have already discussed how the hot town air is ignited by the contact of Mercutio and Tybalt. Water plays a role in the chemistry of Juliet's gradual demise: after Tybalt is slain and Romeo banished, she is in tears. Her father notices these ebbing and flowing in the "sea" of her eyes; he calls her a water pipe ("A conduit") and refers to her heaving body as a bark upon a sea of tears (III.v.130, 133 and 132).

The earth too plays a role as fundamental origin of contradiction: as the Friar says: "The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb. / What is her burying grave, that is her womb" (II.iii.9-10).

But it is fire – its burning and lightening – which is the predominant element in the play. It is connected with time and consum-

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[73]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 415.

mations which destroy instantly. Thus the Friar warns Romeo that Romeo's "violent delights" may be "like fire and powder, / Which, as they kiss, consume" (II.vi.9-11); and Romeo later requests a poison that will act "As violently as hasty powder fired / Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb" (V.i.64-65)[74].

These rude fires are themselves contrasted with idealities more gracefully joined with reality. For example, the first point of contact between Romeo and Juliet – the touching of Romeo's and Juliet's hands – creates a loving ideality:

> Romeo
> If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
> My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
> To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.
> Juliet
> Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
> Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
> For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
> And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.
> Romeo
> Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
> Juliet
> Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
> Romeo
> O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do!
> They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.
> Juliet
> Saints do not move, though grant for prayer's sake.
> Romeo
> Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.
> Thus from my lips, by thine my sin is purged. [*Kisses her*.] (I.v.95-109)

(Recall too, Romeo's earlier wish: "O, that I were a glove upon that hand, / That I might touch that cheek!", II.ii.24-25. And the later case of banished Romeo, who wails that carrion flies "may seize / On the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand […] / But Romeo may not", III.iii.35-40.)

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74   See too: "Like powder in a skilless soldier's flask, / Is set afire by thine own igno-rance, / And thou dismemb'red with thine own defense" (III.iii.132-34).

In the above citation, the image of the pilgrim's praying hands is mingled with the palm to palm of the lovers' hands and the kissing of lips. Matters are beautifully confused. But this confusion announces the problem of determining, as it were, the *matter* at hand, the ideality of reality; the problem of determining what kind of synthesis this is going to be. Contact and what it means is at the heart of this play's show.

Juliet worries that their loving contact is too much like fire, "too rash […] / Too like the lightening, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say it lightens" (II.ii.118-20).

To secure that their love is not devouring fire, Romeo implores the Friar to join their hands in marriage: "come what sorrow can, / It cannot countervail the exchange of joy / That one short minute gives me in her sight. / *Do thou but close our hands with holy words*, / Then love-devouring death do what he dare – / It is enough I may but call her mine" (II.vi.3-8[75]).

Despite the fact that the Friar fears that their violent delight might "have [a] violent end" (II.vi.9), he sees in their marriage the remedy "to turn […] household's rancour to pure love" (II.iii.88). So he agrees: "you shall not stay alone / Till Holy Church incorporate two in one" (II.vi.36-37[76]). For the Friar, the religious ideality of contact will secure the contact against the fire and time of rude will.

But fire is ignited elsewhere: Mercutio says he would readily brawl in the sweltering heat, and, in unknowing mockery of "two in one", says that, "and there were two such, we should have none shortly, for one would kill the other" (III.i.16-17).

The ensuing duel between Mercutio and Tybalt becomes a mortal contact which initiates the tragic process. It appears as rude will over against Romeo's and Juliet's graceful contact. But the religious import is not the only one: there are natural measures at work in these events.

Mercutio and Tybalt cause the shift in the play. The element *mercury* does not combust, but it is volatile and thus, like the temperature on Mercury, quick to change. It is the *air* that gets ignited.

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[75]   My italics.

[76]   Even after Romeo is banished, the Friar places his hopes in "blazing" (publicly announcing) the marriage: he advises Romeo to go "to Mantua, / Where thou shalt live till we can find a time / To blaze your marriage, reconcile your friends, / Beg pardon of the Prince, and call thee back" (III.iii.148-51).

Fiery conflict has been implicit from the start of the play; it has been 'in the air'[77]. Now, the real air in the market place is heated. Mercutio's encounter with Tybalt ignites it.

The situation is further inflamed when Romeo "twixt them rushes" (III.i.169): Mercutio slain, Romeo takes up the fight with Tybalt and, as Benvolio retells it to the Prince, "to't they go like lightening" (III.i.174).

The chemical composition of the elements has led to this combustion. Prior to this duel, there were negations: the basic elements, the differences, contending opposites. But Mercutio's and Tybalt's deaths are negations of those negations: in the process of opposition, the individuals burn up. Fire is the "becoming manifest of the reduction to show of what is other"[78]. In air, the change of elements is too slow to witness, but fire is the self-manifestation of that process: the burning is the show of consuming.

Thus with the duel, a new time begins, not the sleeping time of opposites kept apart – of night and day, of moon and sun – but of their process in things, the time of things and their burning, the show of their individuality, awake time. It is "Fire […] the existent being-for-self, negativity as such"[79].

In this two-made-one, the unity of ideality and reality can be seen. And the seeing is possible because light is not just that of the sun, but also that of en-mattered reflection. Abstractly, the ideality of every "now" is a continuum between past, present and future: such abstraction is like air, or light. But fire is a visible "now". As Hegel writes: "The first universality (air) is a dead affirmation; the veritable affirmation is fire. In fire, that which is not is posited as being, and vice versa; fire is accordingly *active* (*rege*) Time"[80].

The transition to this world of contradiction is spoken by Juliet: "I be not I, if there be such an 'Ay'" (III.ii.49). Juliet is, as Hegel writes,

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[77]   Indeed it was briefly ignited at the start of the play: the Prince ends the brawl, the "fire of your pernicious rage" (I.i.87).

[78]   "Fire is this same universality [as air] but as *manifest* and consequently in the form of being-for-self; it is therefore an existent ideality, the *existent* nature of air, the becoming-manifest of the reduction-to-show of what is other", Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 284, Z., p. 113.

[79]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 283, Z., p. 110.

[80]   Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, par. 283, Z., pp. 110-11, my italics.

a rose, one that is "a torch lit by a spark"[81]. The show of her life is a blaze, and deadly. JULIET: "Then, window, let day in, and let life out" (III.v.41).

Fire is tragedy: the light of identity in its tragic show. Fire is time that consumes and dies out in that consuming: it is the time which both engenders and defies the continuity of life and of thought. It is that which, tragically, both inaugurates and cuts down, the germ of genera-tion and destruction. Fire, like motion, is existent contradiction.

c. Neutrality as end: tragedy is chemical inorganicity

At the end of the play, after the self-destruction of the lovers, the parents stand around feeling stupid and vowing to make up. On the stage, we see neutralized left-overs, tepid nothings; the parents will make stone statues to honor Romeo and Juliet. The resolution of this tragic chemistry is inorganic.

The play has been a destructive confusion of matters. Would Friar Hegel, the organic philosopher-botanist, have had a plan that worked?[82]

Hegel does not account for an evolutionary transition from chem-istry to life. He simply gives an account of how life is a fuller, infinite actualization of the Notion, an actualization which chemistry ex-presses in a limited, finite way. Analogously, Romeo and Juliet's trag-edy is inorganic. It expresses the Notion operating at that level. There is no evolution from its tragedy to comedy. The tragedy of Romeo and Juliet is simply a play about a natural catastrophe.

This is not so hard to think when we consider that it was, after all, the plague that prevented the Friar's messenger getting to Romeo (V.ii.10). Not all roses in the cross are *comic* reconciliations.

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[81]   Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 582.

[82]   To fully answer this question one has to open topics that I cannot cover here: Hegel's theory of tragedy (Bradley), whether the role of the negative in politics is, for Hegel, always going to lead to tragedy (Lukács), whether we ought to read Hegel's politics *through* his early theory of tragedy (de Boer), not to mention Hegel's own account of this particular tragedy in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. See, respectively, Andrew Cecil Bradley, "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy", in *Oxford Lec-tures on Poetry*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1965, pp. 69-95; Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations Between Dialectics and Economics*, Engl. transl. by Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1966; Karin de Boer, *On He-gel: The Sway of the Negative*, Renewing Philosophy Series, New York-Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

But is there no cure for such tragedy? Is our only choice that between an abstract ideality and a fire that consumes as it shows?

Part Five: Confusing matters

> Confusion's cure lives not
> In these confusions. (IV.v.65-66)

When the Friar says these words, he means that Juliet's grieving parents will not find the cure to what is going on by continuing to believe their eyes (for in reality, at this point, Juliet is not really dead). Their eyes see only contradictions. (Capulet: "Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast; / Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change; / Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corse; / And all things change them to the contrary", IV.v.87-90.)

However, we know that the Friar's cures do not work either. We might well wonder whether all of us just tragically confuse matters even when we think we don't.
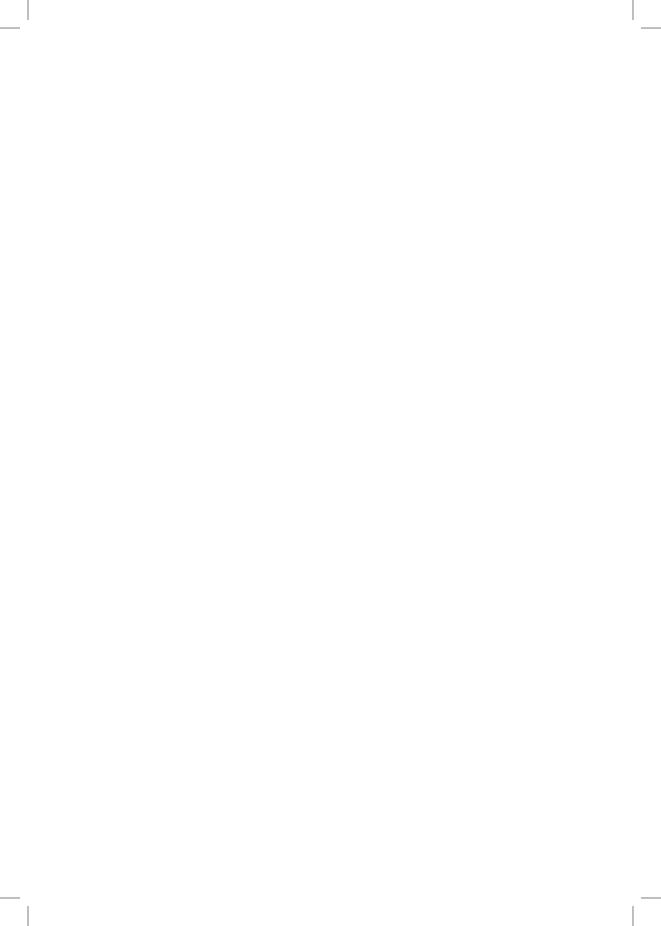
But there are lessons about the nature of reality here. The tragic one is that inside the moment of ideality's first arising, when one becomes two, inside the consummation of love, there is inevitable tragedy, for such consummation is the incarnation of (our) abstract being (light) into time and space. We realize that there is a natural germ of death – the prose of nature – inside the poetry of nature.

There is a comic lesson, too: this incarnation is also a light that becomes the show – the fire of life; and when that is reflected upon, as in theater, it is human enlightenment. We can enjoy the nature of human intelligence. For Hegel, this means using dialectical thinking, not just the understanding of opposites.

The comic lesson does not escape the tragic one, since through our enlightenment, through science and the arts, we don't overcome natural death and tragic chemistries. Concrete enlightenment can show us what is, in perhaps ever truer light, and can therefore help us plan. Nonetheless, the tragic moment in nature remains the *sine qua non* of our even having a sense of time, of our even having the ideality of a now, of a past, of a future. We can prevent some fires, and put some others out, but we cannot do without any fires. For fire is the collision of awake time. The rose in the cross is a torch lit by a spark.

In the end, Shakespeare and Hegel have reminded us – the living – about our tragi-comic existence; and they have reminded us *not* to understand things merely in terms of dualisms (metaphysics vs. reality, grace vs. crude will, religion vs. nature, light vs. fire, abstract philosophy vs. poetry). For when we merely *understand* the matter at hand, we see *only* contradictions; we think, for example, that tragedy is due only to the force of fate, or of the divine, or of some other force beyond our natural existence – even that force we call freedom. The truth of the matter is grasped speculatively – it is a *dialectical* (seeing of the) show.

There are other conclusions. I hope that *this* show of confusing matters has, in its own way, enlightened the matter at hand.

Hamlet and the Passion of Knowledge[*]

Alessandra Marzola

From the dawn of its theatrical history, *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's most inexhaustible tragedy, has resurfaced time and again with wilful perseverance. It has done so by alternatively questioning or eliciting its own modes of repetition; but also by encouraging revisitation and transformation via its own undifferentiated matrix of meaning. Extraordinary reserves of potential have enabled this tragedy to scatter out into a fine dust of enduring lines later used up and reinvested by the media or to settle into monument-like shapes that the canon has invariably entrenched. First and foremost, such reserves have to do with the staging of Renaissance epistemophilia, i.e. a drive towards knowledge which – in *Hamlet* – desire itself endows with the predicate of passion, opening it up to an ever-wider range of questions. Onto the framework of a conventional *revenge tragedy* – a king father enjoining his son to revenge the crime of which he was a victim – a question – Hamlet's crucial trope – is engrafted, which undermines the times and the ways of living and of dying. From its borderline outpost, the prince's gaze reaches out to penetrate such experiences, suspended as it is between a nostalgia for ancient, well-established knowledge and its ravenous proclivity to plumb modernity's new paradigms in their incipient stages. The threshold *Hamlet* looks out from marks the precarious epistemic balance of early modern England, where the sciences, be they old or new, along with the crafts and the arts are given a new lease of life in a shared cognitive venture. The

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[*] An Italian version of this essay is forthcoming in Maria Del Sapio Garbero, ed., *Shakespeare and the New Science in Early Modern Culture / Shakespeare e la nuova scienza in età* early modern, Pisa, Pacini.

blending of various strains of knowledge within the time frame that precedes their neat demarcation into disciplines and sciences takes place in the wake of a proper 'aesthetics of knowledge'. And in its enterprising effort to reshape existing relations between individuals and the new world – thereby altering the whole system of distances and perspectives – such new aesthetics reaches far. It is in fact in an unprecedented show of ambition that it sets out to shape the very subject, or rather the multiple subjectivities of knowledge[1].

In the first place, Hamlet's question addresses what lies beneath and beyond the body: that inner space which had then been turned into a passionate ground for anatomical observation. For anatomy had by then seeped into the collective imagination from the field of medical research, via the popularity of anatomical theatres. Ultimately, the desire to know what "lies inside", or, in the famous epigram of the Danish Prince "that within which passes show" (I.ii.85[2]), taps and strains the flow lines of scientific, philosophical and rhetorical knowledge in an effort to see whether these, apart from anatomical science, may in fact provide answers to the underlying question. And answers may come by sifting and testing the success of such disciplines in anatomizing their objects of study: along with the depths of the body, the density of a language which strives to voice them, and the density of time which marks their various beats[3].

In *Hamlet*, such conjuring of different areas of knowledge is all the more effective because it is powerfully enhanced by the poignant biblical echoes in scene v, Act I. In a dark, solitary place on the brink of a precipice, the ghost of the father, belched out of its tomb, trickles its poisonous story into the ears of his son and seals it with a double injunction to be revenged and to be remembered[4]. Critics have not failed

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[1]   See Elizabeth Spiller, *Science, Reading and Renaissance Literature: The Art of Making Knowledge, 1580-1670*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[2]   All quotations from *Hamlet* are from the following edition: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1980.

[3]   On this topic see: Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, London-New York, Routledge, 1995; Andrew Cunningham, *The Anatomical Renaissance: The Resurrection of the Anatomical Projects of the Ancients*, Aldershot, Scholar Press, 1997.

[4]   See I.v.1-111. Injunctions to vengeance occur at lines 9-10: "Hamlet: Speak. I am bound to hear. / Ghost: So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear"; and at line 25: "Ghost: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder". The injunction to remember marks instead the conclusion of the story at line 93: "Ghost: Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me".

to notice that the ekphrastic *tableaux* called forth by the Ghost's narration harks back to the book of Genesis by way of numerous suggestions. In particular, it looks back to the primeval sin committed in the Garden of Eden, superimposed with the scene of that first fratricide which was the fateful outcome and echo of that sin. The association between the Ghost's story and the biblical account must have been virtually instantaneous at the time, given the immense popularity of the Fall theme. Not only was the scene of the Fall played out in abundant detail in contemporary iconography: like Holy Scripture itself, that scene was also made the object of a relentless and quite momentous work of translation and reinterpretation on the part of Reformed Protestant theologians[5] in whose reading salvation and redemption were overshadowed, if not yet altogether suppressed, by new emphasis on the trauma of guilt. In the exegetical practice of preachers and theologians such a difficult revisitation of Genesis was never quite taken as final, yet it was made explicit in the daily work of interrogating texts, a work in progress which spans at least fifty years, the long period of planning for what was to become the authorized version of the Bible published under the aegis of James I in 1611. The Holy Book, its reformed reinterpretations and the exegetical method that sets them apart: these all set up a scene which, in Hamlet's meeting with the ghost of his father and in the account of regicide, is flooded with a starkly tragic and dramatically topical light. Ambiguities, gaps and contradictions in the account of the royal Ghost – who peeps through the mist of his Purgatorial penance in the "flower of sins"[6] only for the short time to him allotted – once again conjure up the horrifying imperfection of salvation, the trauma of loss and of Fall, the reiteration of sin. It is the guilty whisper of the Ghost, its unsettling shape, similar yet not identical with King Hamlet's, that ultimately poisons his commanding warrant for vengeance and remembrance and opens up the dizzying chasm of sense to the questioning eye of his interlocutor. Thus Hamlet's request for knowledge finds its sense and its urgency in the revelation of a biblical Fall which, albeit deprived of salvation and oppressed with guilt, is paradoxically imposed upon as the foundational scene of action.

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[5]   Extensive documentation on the iconographic currency of both these biblical scenes is provided in Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden: Construction of Family Values in Early Modern Culture*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.

[6]   "Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand / Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd, / Cut off even in the blossom of my sin" (I.v.74-76).

As it retells the modes and the shapes of Hamlet's question, the play makes an extraordinarily trenchant contribution to the cultural venture – at once political and religious – of interrogating the Scriptures, particularly the primeval sin recorded in the book of Genesis. In that revisitation, which puts back on stage the trauma of Protestant modernity, *Hamlet* shows, as no biblical exegete could ever have done, the scope of desire. It is desire which – together with unworkable mourning for the loss of Eden – feeds his epistemophilia[7]. Addressed as they are to the body and to its interiority – or rather its viscerality; to Time; to the gauging of time; to the Arts; to memory techniques and their encroachment upon oblivion – the queries and the doubts Hamlet raises derive from his questioning of the Fall and ultimately converge onto one single interrogation of knowledge. The remarks that follow are meant to explore the forms of Hamlet's interrogation and the ways in which such forms are made to converge.

Lancets and clocks

On account of its uncommon length and its jumbled pace, often winding into blind spots or straying into digressive subplots, *Hamlet* is well known to defy the time of performance (unabridged theatrical versions are quite rare). It is also well known that Shakespeare took an unusually long time (no less than three years) to draw up even a provisionally acceptable script after many rough drafts. To us, such false starts come across as the equivalent, possibly fortuitous but certainly quite unique, of the disjointed time that the play immediately foregrounds and that Hamlet recalls to conclude Act I. There he bemoans the exacting charge issued by the ghost of his father to rectify such disjunction: "The time is out of joint, O cursèd spite, / That I was born to set it right!" (I.v.188-89).

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[7]   As David Hillman has recently shown, the epistemophiliac drive, which in Freudian psychoanalysis and in later Kleinian developments designates the child's curiosity for the mother's body and for the inner workings of his own body, provides a very adequate description of the nuances that the anatomical and bodily imagination of early modernity takes on in *Hamlet*. (David Hillman, *Shakespeare's Entrails: Belief, Scepticism and the Interior of the Body*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 81-116.) It is no wonder that, despite anachronisms, twentieth century psychoanalysis should have found in this first tragedy of interiority compelling echoes of the inner dynamics of the unconscious.

The disjointedness of Time – which in the words of the Danish prince takes on a broad sense ("time" at line 188 is both the time marked by the hourglasses and the whole episteme itself) imbues the whole play, caught in the vice-like grip of a 'diseased' time fluctuating between anticipation and delay[8]. Undependable because abruptly turned over to individual perception against proper gauging or adherence to the cycles of nature, Time stutters on in continual jolts. In the indecent hastiness of the royal wedding between his mother and his uncle, Hamlet witnesses its obscene acceleration; in the continual deferral of his vengeful 'deed' he decrees its maddening slowing down. On the other hand, to the Elsinore court prince Hamlet's protracted time of mourning is unbearable: it is provocatively displayed in the black colour of his garment, as an eclipse of the Royal sun. Yet even beyond such divergent ways of seeing, which weave the fabric of the whole tragedy, it is the articulation of clandestine scheming that calls for hastiness and speed. The concealment of Polonius's body, the plots hatched to get rid of Hamlet: such events bespeak the unreliability of the Danish world and by extension of the English world it adumbrates. Slowness and delays are disciplined by the threat of exposure or possibly even death. Studded with the diction of urgency and delay, the rhetorical warp of the tragedy in turn dithers between the leisurely and the lively, between the winding volutes of Ciceronian style and a pressing readiness to fragmentation. Think for instance of the abrupt occlusions in Hamlet's first soliloquy, where an elegiac stream of fantasized dissolution is broken up by the elliptical segments of an unbearably pressing scene (I.ii.129-58[9]). Or think of the pendular rhythm of "to be or not to be", modernity's most celebrated soliloquy, where a perfectly balanced initial sequence breaks down into a list and finally jerks into a sudden acceleration (III.i.56-89[10]).

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[8]   The centrality of the Time theme in *Hamlet* and its implications in the play are discussed in Wylie Sypher, *The Ethic of Time: Structures of Experience in Shakespeare*, New York, Seabury Press, 1976. Significant remarks on this subject are also found in Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, and Eric P. Levy, *Hamlet and the Rethinking of Man*, Cranbury, Farleigh Dickinson, 2008, pp. 150-67.

[9]   Fragmentation in this soliloquy is addressed in Davide Del Bello and Alessandra Marzola, *Shakespeare and the Power of Difference,* Bergamo, Sestante, 2011, pp. 131-48.

[10] For an analysis of the soliloquy's muddled rhythm see: Douglas Bruster, *To Be or Not To Be*, London, Continuum, 2007, pp. 43-64. I have followed here Bruster's

The disease of Time, a time which eludes the grasp of knowledge and the check of reckoning, ultimately infuses the shape and the sense of this tragedy; it is in fact its very symptom. To Shakespeare's England, suspended between a nostalgia for cyclical iteration and a linear, forward thrust impressed by incipient commercialism, the question of Time is unsettled. It is the crucial issue that, with tragic reverberations, the play amplifies.

It is in fact not coincidental that clocks should have become a key addition to household furnishings and private outfits in sixteenth century England. Technological refinement, combined with increasing popularity, turned clocks into a staple domestic feature, so much so that even the Queen could sport a miniature one shaped as a ring on her finger. Yet all that apparently failed to appease the deep-seated anxieties of the social imagination[11]. Quite the contrary. The wide availability of clocks arguably encouraged a personalized use of time and marked a shift towards internalization. Time was thus handed over to the unpredictable twists of individual experiences and fed into the chain of collective fantasies and anxieties. Anxiety of Time and about Time, heightened by the reform of the Catholic calendar and the subsequent abolition of liturgical holidays, touches after all one of the raw nerves in the social body. It acts as the catalyst for epistemic bewilderment, which the play detects and records from its start, pinpointing its main symptoms in the dismayed and pressing questions of one of the sentries:

Marcellus
Good now, sit down, and tell me he that knows
Why this same strict and most observant watch

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definition of "soliloquies" as the speeches Hamlet delivers "*in what he believes*" to be solitude (the added emphasis is mine). For a discussion of this point see Bruster, p. 44.

[11] The centrality of the notion of Time in Renaissance culture and the progressive release of tools meant to measure it are discussed in Gerhard Dohrn Van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clock and Modern Temporal Orders*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996. See also D. H. Wood, *Time, Narrative and Emotion in Early Modern England*, London, Ashgate, 2009. The transformation of the clock into a privately owned object in Shakespeare's time is discussed in Adam Max Cohen, *Shakespeare and Technology: Dramatizing Early Modern Technological Revolutions*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 127-49.

So nightly toils the subjects of the land,
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
And foreign mart for implements of war,
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.
What might toward that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day?
Who is'it that can inform me? (I.i.70-78)

Marcellus's questions, only partly answered by Horatio's updates on the risks of an impending war with Norway (I.i.79-106) cast a powerful light on the multiple, pervasive occurrences which disrupt time by accelerating it. And Time, thus disrupted, in turn gives such occurrences unwarranted and tragic prominence. The heightening of exacting night watches, the unceasing production of weapons, the relentless work of carpenters enlisted abroad: all these turn Denmark's war preparations into a construction site changed beyond recognition by the "sweaty haste" which engulfs it. It is the uncanny effect of this alteration in Time which underlies the account of the ghost in the fifth scene of the first act, turning it into a patchy and questionable narrative. In the ghost's recollection of regicide, what is compelling is not only the lingering on the disfiguring effects of poisoning, but also the emphasis on the suddenness of their visible manifestation: poison penetrates quickly as mercury, stops the blood flow with arresting violence, while a fouling bark instantly mars the polished surface of the body[12]. The hebona Claudius treacherously spills into the ear of the king acts as a reactant to a guilt which surges up abruptly in defiling signs, very similar to those Luther assigned to the visible forms of the original sin[13] and quite similar to those which defaced the bodies of plague victims, a notorious sight to Elizabethan audiences. This dramatic re-enactment of the biblical sources taps and moulds

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[12] "Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole / With juice of cursed hebona in a vial, / And in the porches of my ear did pour / The leprous distilment, whose effect / Holds such an enmity with blood of man / That *swift* as quicksilver it courses through / The natural gates and alleys of the body, / And with a *sudden* vigour it does posset / And curd, like eager droppings into milk, / The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine, / And a *most instant* tetter bark'd about, / Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust, /All my smooth body" (I.v.61-73, my emphasis).

[13] Martin Luther, "Lectures On Genesis", in *Luther's Works*, eds Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann *et al.*, Engl. transl. by George V. Schick, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986, 55 vols, vol. I, pp. 3-73.

social anxieties about the unwieldiness of contagion and mass annihilation[14] by engrafting them onto a reformed reading of Genesis. What ensues is the obliteration of 'becoming', i.e. the time of metamorphosis: the king's body suddenly appears like coarse bark, while innocence and virtue precipitate into visible marks of guilt which take away the time for penance and redemption. The very image of the Fall turns into the vision of ruinous collapse, forever ripping and severing the ties with Grace, laying the stain of unexpiated guilt onto the table of reckoning:

> Ghost
> Thus was I sleeping by a brother's hand
> Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatched;
> *Cut off* even in the blossom of my sin,
> Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled,
> No reckoning made, but sent to my account
> With all my imperfections on my head – (I.v.74-79, my emphasis)

The traumatic collapse of Time and Kingship is refracted in the catastrophic fall of Gertrude from the hyperbolic majesty of the king to the deathbed of wretched Claudius, a "falling off" which adds to the sense of absolute deprivation:

> Ghost
> O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!
> From me, whose love was of that dignity
> That it went hand in hand even with the vow
> I made to her in marriage; and to decline
> Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
> To those of mine! (I.v. 47-52)

In this crucial scene, horror for the compression of Time into simultaneity is magnified by the sudden imprisonment of the body inside a bark. Such cortex defaces the body's smooth surface: it sets up in its place the outrageous image of rotting flesh which confines the king's

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[14] For an analysis of the effects of the plague on the social imagination and of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre politics see Frank Percy Wilson, *The Plague in Shakespeare's London*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1963; Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Stuart Year*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991; Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman, eds, *Representing the Plague in Early Modern England*, London, Routledge, 2011.

effigy within an unreachable space and obstructs his opening onto the world. In that rigid shape, cut off from its natural closeness to the outside, the tragedy foreshadows the *corpus clausus* of the modern subject, imprisoned within the narrow scope of himself, forever prevented from identifying with others. As it exhibits symptoms that closely recall those attached to the disease of 'melancholy' in contemporary medical tracts, the body also becomes the repository of a sceptic imagination inflamed by the abrupt unknowability of what is denied to the gaze of experience[15]. In that pivotal account, the disturbing permutation of the time sequence into simultaneity and the sense of confinement within a body that has become inaccessible create an anamorphic effect that eventually contaminates the whole system of signs and differences on which the paradigm of knowledge is based. Anamorphism casts its puzzling shadow on all relationships, erasing differences (between life and death, guilt and innocence, royalty and abjection), disrupting the horizon of perception in a sort of earthshattering deflagration.

The substance of *Hamlet* consists in a reverberation of and a response to that disjointed account. Its plot is the staging of the symptomatic repercussions of that trauma. Starting with the opening night fraught with mysteries, Time and Space seem suddenly torn from familiar perception, curled up in an opaque membrane which needs to be opened up and unfurled, "unfolded"[16]. Bodies usually confined within the defensive armour of a flat and insensitive effigy are suddenly exposed in the unbearable materiality of solid and sordid flesh[17]; sudden deaths set in as unforeseen side effects of life itself.

The tragedy's anatomical way of knowing takes after the 'solidity' of such disfigured integument. What ensues is a raving, impelling need to force and penetrate all the outer layerings that impede knowledge of the spaces, the forms and the words once familiar but

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[15]   See Hillman, pp. 43-64.

[16]   The second line of the initial dialogue is in fact an injunction to 'manifest' or 'unfold' oneself ("Stand and unfold yourself!", I.i.2), which Francisco addresses to his fellow guard Bernard, as if his form were curled up in a deceptive coil.

[17]   I am thinking here of the opening lines of Hamlet's first soliloquy: "O That this too too sullied flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew, / Or that the Everlasting had not fixed His canon against self-slaughter" (I.ii.128-31). Controversy over the variants of the adjective attached to "flesh" (either the "sullied" of the edition I cite or the "solid" of other versions) does not prevent us from accepting, as is now established practice, both readings within the horizon of meaning that the text opens up.

now seemingly lost to the dark depths of an unknown interiority. Hamlet, himself confined within a too solid flesh, locked up in the nutshell of existence[18], rips and tears tapestries, bodies and words with the same urgency that drives him to 'twist' Gertrude's heart[19]. Rather than aiming for truth, Hamlet sets out to expose his own claim by showing that it is not what it seems, that there is more to it than what is seen. Mania and frenzy arise from his anxiety that not knowing may become explosive, that the shell containing his lack of knowledge may burst, spilling out the disjointed splinters of the self. "Let me not burst in ignorance!" (I.iv.46), Hamlet pleads addressing the Ghost. It is as though the eruption of his father's shape from the tomb that contained it and the sudden burst of shrouds that shakes the earth were also confining him, his son, within the tomb of an ignorance likely to burst the nutshell of his own self:

> Hamlet
> […] but tell why thy canonized bones, hearsèd in death,
> Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre
> Wherein we saw you quietly interred
> Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws
> To cast thee up again. (I.iv.46-51)

'Knowing why' has ultimately become a matter of life or death. It is as though the suddenness of the Fall had turned incarceration in the body into an implosion of 'not knowing' that threatens to erupt. Both animated and sickened by the dread of imploding and exploding, Hamlet's desire to know is expressed in a double movement that alternates between the forcing of membranes and barriers and a sort of defensive tightening inside enclosures and armour. The pendulum between questions and litotes marks the oscillation between the two epistemic modes of a sceptical and melancholic modernity, observed in its incipient neurotic implications.

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[18]   "O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams" (II.i.253-55).

[19]   In the *closet scene*, as the intimate space of the new royal couple is flung open by his intrusion, Hamlet's anatomical frenzy finds its crucial expression, as seen in the words that he first addresses to Gertrude: "Peace, sit you down, / And let me *wring* your heart. For so I shall, / If it be made of penetrable stuff, / If damnèd custom have not brassed it so / That it be proof and bulwark against sense" (III.iv.36-40, my emphasis).

Memory, trauma and repetition

It comes as no surprise that the Ghost's injunction to remember in the final line of his account ("Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder", I.v.24) should trump his first bidding to revenge, thereby shifting emphasis from *res publica* to private concerns. In the form of matter exploded from the grave that contained it and locked up in its defacing husk, the ghost of the king father cannot but ask his son to re-join his fragments even though it entails that the son abdicate his own place in the chain of being. Knowledge is thus burdened with the mortgage of a memory that cannot possibly be handled by the very arts meant to teach its practice, the arts that extol it as a divine gift and a source of immortality[20]. How to remember what is like him and what is unlike him, but never him? How to recall what challenges integration in the "tables of [his] memory" that are supposed to record the traces of a life meant to imitate a broken divine order? In the theatre of memory that the scene is supposed to make present, the story and the ghost to be remembered and avenged with exemplary swiftness represent a tumultuous and ungovernable excess of signs. In order to commit them to the table of his mind, Hamlet will have to erase what is already there and leave the way open to the compelling injunction of his father:

> Hamlet
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
> That youth and observation copied there,
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmixed with baser matters. Yes, by heaven! (I.v. 98-104)

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[20]   A crucial analysis of the rediscovery of the role of the mnemonic arts in the Renaissance is given by Frances Yates, especially in her trailblazing book: Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* [1966], London, Ark, 1984. Bibliography on all aspects of this issue is vast. For the purposes of this contribution I will mention: William E. Engel, *Mapping Mortality: The Persistence of Memory and Melancholy in Early Modern England*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995; Garrett A. Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005; Peter Holland, ed., *Shakespeare, Memory and Performance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

The wax of the table appealed to by Hamlet ("My tables – meet it is I set it down", I.v.107) – and then by him impressed with writing along explicit stage directions – materializes the malleability of memory as a virtual prosthesis of his mind. It is a substance apt not only to embrace memory's imprints but also to allow their immediate erasure. For the 'matter' bidding remembrance imposes itself with such destructive and devastating force that in order to remember one must of necessity forget[21]. Long before the Ghost compels him to remember, Hamlet is in fact overwhelmed by the violence of a memory he cannot possibly handle, a scene that bursts open against the resistance of thought. To no avail, Hamlet's horrifying question – "Must I remember?" (I.ii.143) – endeavours to resist the image that sets before his eyes Gertrude's ravenous sexual greed: "Why she would hang on him as if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on" (I.ii.43-44). And thought falls back, faced with the unworkable task of recording the short lapse of time between Gertrude's tears of sorrow for the death of the King and her wedding to a new husband. It is a time that eludes computation, since it seems to get shorter as words are forced to recall it[22].

As in the Ghost's account, here the inevitability of remembrance and its impossible integration mark the sudden upsurge of traumatic knowledge. And because of its unworkable horror, such knowledge is to be repeated without end. In the very same terms – those of reiterated trauma induced by the guilt of our progenitors – the Reformed theologians interpreted the biblical episode of Cain's fratricide, which *Hamlet* reverberates in the assassination of King Claudius. The Lutheran epiphany of guilt witnessed in Hamlet's initial soliloquy and unfolded in the Ghost's story dramatizes the traumatic revelation of original sin and its repercussions for later theological interpretations[23].

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[21] For an insightful reading of *Hamlet* vis-à-vis the crisis of the memory paradigm on the threshold between memory and oblivion see Greta Perletti's study: Greta Perletti, "'I find thee apt': Hamlet and the Transformation of the Art of Memory", in *The Difference of Shakespeare*, ed. Alessandra Marzola, Bergamo, Sestante Edizioni, 2005, pp. 91-112.

[22] The marks that punctuate the soliloquy keep revising the measure of elapsed time, progressively reducing its span: "But two months dead, nay not so much, not two!" (I.ii.138); "And yet within a month – / Let me not think on't! Frailty, thy name is woman. / A little month, or e'er those shoes were old" (I.ii.145- 47); "Within a month" (I.ii.153).

[23] For a more detailed discussion of reformed exegesis and their topicality in *Hamlet* see: Heather Herschfeld, "Hamlet's 'first corse': Repetition, Trauma, and the Displacement of Redemptive Theology", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 54:4 (2003), pp. 424-48.

Although it cannot be made part of memory – itself a mere organic aggregate of mind impressions mimicking providential cosmogony – the scene of guilt can never possibly slip into the kind of oblivion praised by Michel de Montaigne as a new beneficial way of relating to time[24].

In the epistemic interlude between remembrance and oblivion repetition comes forth as the symptom of a Protestantism endlessly traumatized by the Fall. Repetition is also what marks the style required by a memory equally traumatized by a paternal story that cannot be coped with. Throughout the play, the various echoes of the Ghost's story are but replicas of his initial questioning. Hamlet repeats the forms of the Ghost's narrative: he enjoins and forbids, spreading the poison of his pestilential word. He puts it back in the limelight, showing how the smooth surface of the world has become thick, coarse and inaccessible. And eventually he forces its closure. Regardless of what it may actually reveal, the play's anatomical gaze is shaped by the mode of reiteration and by the urgency of its inevitability.

Hamlet's traces and the form of desire

The stammer of the Ghost's memory in the syndrome of repetition comes to a turning point when Hamlet refuses to remember his father or to reconstitute his father's character, which is now foreclosed and hidden inside interiority. He will make room instead for his own ambitions and advance his own claims, previously inhibited by his father's imperious injunction which bound him, his son, to 'morph' into the father's shape[25]. Like wax on the table of memory, the scene seems to have become malleable, susceptible to abrasions, substitutions, and multiplication of imprints. Since his father's royal seal rescued him from Claudius's ambush and helped him return to Denmark incognito, Hamlet has become indifferent to the question of what is inside, and has grown instead hypersensitive to the ways in which signs and words may serve the uses of the world: the strategies of survival

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[24]   See especially Michel de Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebond", in *The Complete Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, Engl. transl. by Donald M. Frame, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1958, Book II, pp. 318-458.

[25]   On the topic of Hamlet's 'cloning' as induced by the questioning of a narcissistic ghost see: Linda Charnes, *Hamlet's Heirs: Shakespeare and the Politics of a New Millennium*, New York, Routledge, 2006, pp. 53-73.

and the stratagems of politics. Being 'I' is an act of language which produces multiple identities, shapes which morph according to circumstances. Before Ophelia's grave Hamlet high-handedly claims the coincidence between oneself and one's name ("This is I, / Hamlet the Dane", V.ii.253-54), but in front of Laertes, and the Elsinore court, he does not hesitate to deny it. Instead, he narrates himself in the third person, as a victim of the madness that usurped his name, taking it away from himself:

> Hamlet
> Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
> If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
> And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not. Hamlet denies it.
> Who does it then? His madness. (V. ii. 227-31)

Taking his distance from what is inside, Hamlet writes about himself as a novelist *avant la lettre*, either sparingly or in great detail, according to his interlocutors. He writes letters that offer different versions of his fortuitous escape from Claudius's ambush. Yet it's not only Hamlet who scatters different traces of *Hamlet* about the scene. For Hamlet's name and Hamlet's story, in the last portion of the tragedy, seem to take on a new malleability and to encourage amplifications and reductions which vary according to the context[26]. At the cemetery, to the grave-digger who is unaware of the identity of his interlocutor, Hamlet is simply someone sent to England because he was mad; someone born when he had just started his grave-digging job. To Fortinbras, who takes over at the end of a scene, Hamlet is the one who, had he been put to the test, would have proved a true king. So to him ought to be paid the respects usually paid to a soldier[27].

The proliferation of Hamlet's profiles, both positive and negative, paves the way to the dissemination of his traces in the endless future of the character's reception. It is as though the fiction of interiority

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[26] See the detailed account of the events addressed to Horatio in letter form (IV.vi.13-30) and the laconic announcement of his "sudden and strange return" addressed to Claudius (IV.vii.43-46).

[27] "Let four captains / Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage. / For he was likely, had he been put on, / To have proved most royal. And for his passage / The soldiers' music and the rites of war / Speak loudly for him" (V.ii.389-94).

that had driven the play's anatomical probing had finally dissolved. The cemetery is the place where such disappearance is forcefully played up in a stage revival of the 'danse macabre'. Unlike Hamlet's Ghost, the bones of the dead have nothing to say. Not even the skull of Yorick, the beloved court jester, can escape erasure from the table of the mind. The memory that is left of him is the tale of what has been lost irretrievably. The space between the inside and the outside turns out to be as inconsistent as the dust of Alexander's body, earth and lime which could serve only to plug a barrel of beer. The desecrating mockery of the uses Hamlet envisages for that substance obliterates his eagerness to know what is inside: it resets both the race of time and Hamlet's endless dithering; it sheds an emphatic light on the "nutshell" of his name. The present and the future become one and the same: interchangeable as the king and the king's brother, as the time of life and the time of death, whose unpredictable fortuitousness becomes a sign of providence:

> Hamlet
> We defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. It be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man knows of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be. (V.ii.213-18)

In this interval between the past and the future, the one Hamlet in fact claims to himself, what is highlighted is the unconditional superiority of the "readiness"; the willingness to let one's traces be shaped by chance, by future, by history. Such meek pliability to changing forms, especially the willingness to deny oneself, does not in fact mark a break with the story of the paternal ghost. Rather, it picks up and develops the heavy accumulation of prohibitions that conclude the narration by adding up quite incongruously to previous injunctions:

> Ghost
> If thou hast nature in thee *bear it not*,
> *Let not* the royal bed of Denmark be
> A couch for luxury and damned incest.
> But howsomever thou pursuest this act,
> Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught. (I.v.81-86 , my emphasis)

Hamlet frames his endless dithering through the litotic mode of understatement. For understatement confirms the privilege assigned to the folds of names and its possible redefinitions in the negative, so that even 'non-doing', 'non-being', or abstention may change "the stamp of nature" by sheer iteration[28].

Litotes is the figure of speech which foreshadows the repression that is essential to action in the stories and in the history to come. Yet emphasis on litotes, combined with the leaving behind of one's traces to future appropriations, does not stifle desire. Rather, it re-kindles it and turns it into an eagerness of telling and of being told. It is the eagerness which, at the end of the play, revives and rephrases the Ghost's urgency, inhibited only by a supernatural ban from telling the secrets of his sulphureous prison: "Were I not forbid I could a tale unfold" the Ghost had whispered at the very beginning of his account, foretelling interdictions while also leaking the terrifying suggestions of the secret he could not possibly reveal:

> Ghost
>   But that I am forbid
> To tell the secrets of my prison house,
> I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
> Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
> Make thy two eyes likes stars start from their spheres,
> Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
> And each particular hair to stand an end
> Like quills upon the fretful porpentine. (I.v.13-20)

"Had I but time", Hamlet adds in the theatrically long time of his death, "I could tell you":

> Hamlet
> Had I but time, as this fell sergeant, Death,
> Is strict in his arrest – O, I could tell you –
> But let it be. Horatio I am dead. (V.ii.330-32)

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28   I am thinking here of the exhortations to abstinence and to the reiterated prohibitions Hamlet directs to Gertrude in the *closet scene*, at the end of his talk (III. iv.141-71; 183).

Eagerness to speak, inscribed in the many partial, broken or unuttered stories of the play[29], rises up again at the end. Impending death cuts the story short, thereby generating a desire *to let* audiences hear the elusive voice that is now asking leave to speak. Against the limited time of life there rises a struggle not at all weakened by bleak surrender to the twists of fate. The father's injunction to revenge and remember what lies outside the accepted models of remembrance is also an injunction to attempt new forms of knowing one's interiority.

A faulty ring in the chain of being, Hamlet nevertheless delivers *what remains* of the story of the father to Fortinbras's action and Horatio's words. Hamlet in fact forbids Horatio the consolation of stoic suicide, requiring him to live to tell his story, drawing his breath in pain: "And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain / To tell my story" (V.ii.342-43). Despite the commanding tone of his testamentary act, Hamlet is lost in his legacy. Nothing except tenuous traces remains in the sketchy drafts of the stories his heirs will tell of him in the epilogue of the play. In a bombastic, orthodox catalogue of carnage and bloodshed, Horace promises to dispense violence to a world unaware of the events that occurred (V.ii.365-79). And that certainly does not do Hamlet justice; nor in fact does the curt injunction of Fortinbras, who issues the order to fire, thereby letting war violence erupt into the very last exchange of the play. And yet it is perhaps Hamlet's tenuousness, his demise into unrecognizable, different words, that makes it possible for us to discern the extraordinary potential of finding a *Hamlet* without Hamlet[30]: a Hamlet who bequeaths only the vacuum left in his 'I' by the speech of his father[31], an interruption that, preserving the nostalgia for lost plenitude, nour-

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[29]   See Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 216-42.

[30]   On the issue of the absence of Hamlet, understood as character or identity in the sense later widely celebrated by Western critics see Margareta de Grazia, Hamlet *without Hamlet*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007. See also: Alessandra Marzola, "Shakespeare without 'Characters': The Difference of *Hamlet*", in Marzola, "Shakespeare without 'Characters': The Difference of *Hamlet*", in Marzola, ed., pp. 67-90.

[31]   The reference here is to the famous sixth seminar of Jacques Lacan in the following English edition: Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*" (1958-1959), in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading Otherwise*, ed. Soshana Felman, Baltimore-London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, pp. 11-52.

ishes the endless desire to win it back.

Hamlet's Interim naturally echoes the tragic implications of a given historical imagination: the one found in England between the end of one century and the onset of another. Undoubtedly, the wound in Hamlet's name evokes the demise of the Tudor name handed over to the dynasty of the Stuart, as Elizabeth I appointed James VI of Scotland as her heir in 1603. And the threshold between two worlds that the tragedy puts on stage embodies the apprehensions and nightmares of a society challenged by the instability of its monarchy, undermined by internal rebellions and conspiracies, as well as mounting outbursts of republicanism. In the future of the country that *Hamlet* prefigures in Fortinbras's order, one can already envision the Puritan and revolutionary zeal of Cromwell and the provisional erasure of signs of monarchy in the brief republican experience.

A tragedy shaped by its time, steeped in first-hand experience, *Hamlet* however turns the story from which it takes shape in a sort of springboard for stories to come. That it does by exposing the origin of a trauma one cannot but keep questioning and exploring. The unflagging cognitive drive that animates the Reformed exegesis of the Book of Genesis greatly enhances the convergence of old and new sets of knowledge at the time, paving the way to a future exploration of the substance of interiority: from anatomy to variable patterns of psychoanalysis – from Freud to Lacan, up to neuroscience. But Hamlet's empty outline, suspended between the cyclical time of redemption and the vertical time of productivity and new wars, is also a malleable trace. Its wax-like pliability is there for future interpreters and story tellers to use. Because of its ability to stir up a passion for knowledge and make us embrace its transmutations, *Hamlet* functions as a matrix of desire making us repeat to no end the famous line of its hero: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (I.v.165-67).

It Nothing Must[*]

Simon Critchley, Jamieson Webster

Is *Hamlet* a nihilist drama? Is it really a play about nothing? We kept noticing occurrences of the word 'nothing' in *Hamlet* and then began to link them together and discovered that nothing, as it were, structures the action of the play and the interplay between its central characters. In a deep sense, this is indeed a play about nothing. We'd like to enumerate these nothings and then, like T. S. Eliot on Margate Sands recovering from a nervous breakdown, see if we can connect nothing with nothing. In the enigmatic words of the player queen in *The Mouse-trap*: "it nothing must" (III.ii.156[1]).

The Ghost

In the opening lines of the play, Marcellus asks Barnardo if the ghost, "this thing", has appeared again, and he replies, "I have seen nothing" (I.i.22). The ghost *is* nothing, of course, so Barnardo confesses that he has seen it, that is, not seen it. In matters ghostly, there *is* nothing to see. Barnardo, Marcellus, and Horatio are left begging for the ghost to speak. Variations on the words "Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!" are repeated twelve times in Act I. If there is nothing

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[1] Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. George Richard Hibbard, The Oxford Shakespeare, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.

to see, then that nothing is charged with speech. What follows, as we have shown, is that nothing of the truth is spoken while speech abounds everywhere, speech precisely of nothing.

Theater

Hamlet grasps the Gorgiastic paradox of theater – namely, that it is a deception in which the deceived is wiser than the nondeceived. At first the paradox appalls him, before appealing to him with the conceit of the play within the play. Theater is "all for nothing" (II.ii.545), a monstrous fiction and conceit that produces crocodile tears in the eyes of hypocrite actors.

Ophelia

As the play within the play is about to begin, a particularly manic Hamlet unleashes a volley of bizarreness at Claudius, talking of capons, chameleons, and eating the promise-crammed air. Claudius wearily responds: "I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet: These / Words are not mine" (III.ii.89-90); to which Hamlet quips: "No, nor mine now" (III.ii.91). Refusing to sit next to his mother, Hamlet lies at Ophelia's feet, but his words turn obscenely toward her lap and to what lies beneath it:

> HAMLET
> Do you think I meant country matters?
> OPHELIA
> I think nothing, my lord.
> HAMLET
> That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.
> OPHELIA
> What is, my lord?
> HAMLET
> No-thing.
> OPHELIA
> You are merry, my lord. (III.ii.108-113)

As a venerable tradition of philosophical misogyny insists, extending back to Aristotle's patriarchal biology in *De Generatione Animalum*, the

vagina is a thing of nothing, a negative to phallic positivity. It is both the hollow 'O' in 'Ophelia' and in "For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot" (III.ii.126). The female sexual organs are also identified with matter, which only receive form and life through the pneumatic spark of male semen – country matters is therefore a pleonasm.

But then, as ever in Shakespeare, matters immediately flip around. When Ophelia politely asks what the silent dumbshow at the beginning of *The Mouse-trap* meant, Hamlet replies with a slew of lewd puns on the 'sh' diagraph:

> HAMLET
> Ay, or any show that you'll show him. Be not you ashamed to show,
> he'll not shame to tell you what it means.
> OPHELIA
> You are naught, you are naught. I'll mark the play. (III.ii.134-38)

The truth is that Hamlet is naught, both naughty and nothing, a naughty naught, a zero, a whoreson zed, an 'O'.

Gertrude

The word 'nothing' acquires an ever-increasing imperative force and velocity in Hamlet. The next series of 'nothings' occurs in the extraordinary scene with his mother. After asking why Hamlet speaks to the nothing of the ghost and bends his eye on "vacancy", Gertrude adds:

> GERTRUDE
> To whom do you speak this?
> HAMLET
> Do you see nothing there? (III.iv.124-25)

She replies like a true scholastic philosopher trained in Aristotle:

> GERTRUDE
> Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.
> HAMLET
> Nor did you nothing hear?
> GERTRUDE
> No, nothing but ourselves. (III.iv.126-28)

Gertrude sees nothing and hears nothing and concludes that the ghost is nothing but "the very coinage of your brain" and "ecstasy" (III. iv.132-33), which then precipitates Hamlet's explosion of more dagger-like language. She thinks her son is as mad as the sea and wind, but she would. Her passions are not the nothing that is the very coinage of one's brain but the base utility of a woman who satisfies her whims with what merely is, at her will. Hamlet even tries to reduce his mother to this zero point, the time when the hey-day in the blood is tame and waits upon the judgment, but she hears none of it.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

If Hamlet is mad, then this doesn't prevent him from elaborating a subtle dialectical critique of the feudal theory of kingship, where the king is identified with the body politic, and the king's *real*, as was said in Elizabethan English, is a realm both real and royal. The limits of the king's body – which is two bodies in one: part human and part divine – are the frontiers of the state, whose ceiling is heaven itself. Deliberately subverting the entreaties of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (or Rossencraft and Gilderstone, as they are called in the First Quarto, who become Rosincrance and Guyldensterne in the Folio), when they ask where he has hidden the body of Polonius and demand that he come with them to see King Claudius, Hamlet replies:

> Hamlet
> The body is with the King, but the King is not with
> The body. The King is a thing –
> Guildenstern
> A thing, my lord?
> Hamlet
> Of nothing. Bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after. (IV.ii.25-28)

At which point, the hunted Hamlet simply runs away. As well he might, for this is treason. The king cannot be nothing. He is the some-thing of some-things: the totality, the whole, the all, as certain German philosophers were wont to say. Hamlet is denying the legitimacy of Claudius's kingship by refusing the identification of the king with the body of the body politic. The true king is a ghost (i.e., a nothing), and Claudius is a king of shreds and patches (i.e., he is nothing). Notice

the strange economy of nothingness here: Gertrude declares to Hamlet that the ghost of her dead husband is nothing. Just two scenes later, Hamlet, taking over her words as always, declares that the new king is nothing.

Indeed, although Hamlet is not physically onstage at the time, having just left to visit his mother, he appears to be responding here to Rosencrantz's political theology of majesty:

> The cease of majesty
> Dies not alone; but, like a gulf, doth draw
> What's near it with it. It is a massy wheel,
> Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
> To whose huge spoke ten thousand lesser things
> Are mortised and adjoined, which when it fall,
> Each small annexment, petty consequence,
> Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone
> Did the King sigh, but with a general groan. (III.iii.15-23)

The body of the king is the body politic, and when the king dies, there is the real, royal risk that the state will die with him. This is why the king must have two bodies, one corporeal and the other divine, which means that although the physical substance of king-ship is mortal its metaphysical substance is immortal. This is the apparent paradox contained in the words "The king is dead, long live the king". In an image that recurs in *Hamlet*, the king is the *jointure* of the state, and the time is out of joint because the usurper king is that nothing who brought to nothing the true king and stole Hamlet's inheritance.

Fortinbras

Hamlet is sent to England to be murdered. Just before he disappears from the stage, there is a short but extraordinary scene on a plain in Denmark, which is slashed to a mere eight lines in the Folio edition[2].

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[2]   Given his preference for the Folio text, Hibbard concurs with this cutting, claiming that Hamlet's final soliloquy, "for all its felicity of phrasing, is redundant. It tells us nothing we do not know already, except that the Prince has become unrealistic" (*Hamlet*, ed. George Richard Hibbard, p. 109). For us, on the contrary, the poignancy and power of this last soliloquy reside in its lack of realism.

The frame of the scene is war, a futile territorial and religious war, between the Protestant Norwegians led by Fortinbras and the Catholic Poles. Hamlet inquires of a captain in Fortinbras's army as to the substance of the conflict, and he replies: "We go to gain a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name" (IV.iv.17-18[3]). Yet the patch of ground is garrisoned with what Hamlet imagines – although he is never given this information – as "Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats" (IV.iv.24). Oddly, thirty-five lines farther on, Hamlet substitutes souls for ducats and exaggeratingly speaks of "The imminent death of twenty thousand men" (IV.iv.59).

Hamlet being Hamlet then asks to be left alone for a moment and soliloquizes for the last time. The pattern of the soliloquy closely resembles that of the meditation on theater from Act II, which here becomes a theater of war. He ruminates on the essential nihilism of war, where twenty thousand men go to their deaths for nothing, for "a fantasy and trick of fame" (IV.iv.60). But then he finds in the spectacle yet more motivation for his promised act of revenge: "How all occasions do inform against me, / And spur my dull revenge" (IV.iv.31-32). He continues:

> Witness this army of such mass and charge,
> Led by a delicate and tender prince
> Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed,
> Makes mouths at the invisible event. (IV.iv.46-49)

Is it not odd that Hamlet denigrates Fortinbras as a "delicate and tender" puff and then with his dying words advocates for his succession as king of Denmark? Be that as it may, Hamlet's familiar line of reasoning here is the following: seeing twenty thousand men led by a dainty, puffed-up prince fight over nothing but a "quarrel in a straw", Hamlet asks himself "How stand I then?" (IV.iv.50). Namely, if twenty thousand men are prepared to fight over nothing, then how can one man who has genuine cause for action, such as himself, *do* nothing? Therefore, he concludes, he must do something.

He ends the soliloquy with the words "My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth" (IV.iv.65). And with that, he disappears until Act V. Now, there is no doubt that Hamlet's thoughts are bloody. He fan-

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[3]   Hibbard's edition reports the scene in Appendix A (pp. 355-69). In this section quotations are from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, eds Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006.

tasizes repeatedly about an act of ultraviolent vengeance that must be performed at exactly the right time. But that time never comes. Hamlet never lives in his own time. The problem does not lie with Hamlet's thoughts but with his acts.

Of course, Hamlet being Hamlet knows this with the lucidity of a philosophical anthropologist. Earlier in the soliloquy, anticipating the culminating question of Kant's critical system, he asks: "What is a man?" (IV.iv.32). The answer, of course, is a rational animal. The human being is divided between the beastly need to feed and God-given reason and the capacity for "large discourse" (IV.iv.35). So, Hamlet ratiocinates, which part of us causes inhibition at the level of action? He ponders:

> Now, whether it be
> Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on th'event
> (A thought, which quartered hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward) I do not know
> Why yet I live to say this thing's to do,
> Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
> To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me. (IV.iv.38-45)

There are perhaps no more poignant words in *Hamlet* than these: he simply does not know whether it is animalistic cowardice or the fault that flows from an excess of thought that prevents him from the act of revenge. He has cause, will, strength, and means, and he can mumble to himself, like a character in a Nike commercial, "Just do it". But nothing happens. It's like the moment at the end of both acts of *Waiting for Godot* when first Vladimir and then Estragon say: "Yes, let's go". Beckett's stage direction reads "[*They do not move*]"[4].

Laertes

Laertes is Hamlet's rival, the double he both deeply admires and who functions as a kind of mirror in which Hamlet begins to glimpse the filaments of his desire. During the final, fatal rapier match, the "water-

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[4] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, London, Faber & Faber, 1986, pp. 52, 88.

fly" (V.ii.84) courtier Osric declares: "Nothing neither way" (V.ii.253). These words describe with precision their intense loving hatred, their frenmity. There is "nothing neither way" to choose between them.

What Hamlet and Laertes have in common, which brings them together and tears them apart, is a love of Ophelia, debased in life only to be elevated in death. Immediately after Hamlet departs for England, there follows a curious scene that begins with Gertrude refusing to speak with Ophelia: "I will not speak with her" (IV.v.1). However, within fifteen lines, after hearing the arguments of an unnamed Gentleman, Gertrude changes her mind and declares: "Let her come in" (IV.v.16). What sways her is the potent political threat that Ophelia poses. "Her speech is nothing", the Gentleman insists, and "nothing sure", but "it doth move / The hearers to collection" (IV.v.8-9). Ophelia, raving in psychotic grief, in "winks, and nods, and gestures" (IV.v.11), suggests that Gertrude and Claudius are responsible for her father's murder. In the nothing of Ophelia's speech something is heard, standing in such strange contrast to the general deafness of Elsinore castle.

Horatio then advises Gertrude to see Ophelia because she may "strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds" (IV.v.14-15). This might give one pause: what exactly is Horatio doing in this scene at all? Is he truly Hamlet's bosom buddy, or has he somehow become Gertrude's close counselor? It is not at all clear. Indeed, in the Folio edition, the part of the Gentleman is elided, and the scene becomes an intimate tête-à-tête between Horatio and the queen.

But the real nature of Ophelia's threat is revealed as she is exiting this scene. After a flow of seeming non-sense and mad song, she simply adds: "My brother shall know of it" (IV.v.68). However, it appears that Laertes is already fully aware of the situation and about to storm the king's palace in the next scene. The winks, nods, and gestures of Ophelia have already insinuated themselves into the ear of Laertes, as Claudius readily admits:

> Wherein necessity, of matter beggared,
> Will nothing stick our person to arraign
> In ear and ear. (IV.v.88-90)

When Laertes and Ophelia meet onstage for the first time since their father's death, she comes a-singing, armed with flowers. She speaks: "It is the / False steward that stole his master's daughter"

(IV.v.173-74). Laertes responds, as if to Claudius's words above: "This nothing's more than matter" (IV.v.175).

The most insurrectionary political threats in *Hamlet* are nothings that are more than matter and that circulate from ear to ear, ghostlike, outside the control of the king and his war-like, massy-wheeled state. The nothing of Ophelia echoes Hamlet's insistence on the king as a thing of nothing. In short, there is a palpable political threat in *Hamlet* that operates through a double negation: to bring to nothing that which is – the matter of the usurper king's state – and to see that which is from the standpoint of a nothing that exceeds it: the ghostly, the spectral, which is also the order of truth and justice, the truth of what happened to Hamlet Senior and the justice of the act of retributive revenge. In order to rebut this threat, Claudius engages in a wonderful example of that quintessential political act – lying – in order to turn Laertes's rage away from him and toward the final showdown with Hamlet. Claudius argues that if Laertes is to truly show himself Polonius's son, then he must kill Hamlet – prove your love with murder!

Horatio

In a heartfelt declaration of love, Hamlet says to Horatio: "For thou hast been / As one, in suff 'ring all, that suffers nothing…" (III.ii.60-61). It is certainly true that Horatio has to suffer Hamlet's tangled knot of nothings throughout the play. And this is nowhere truer than in the cluster of negations that appear in the "We defy augury" speech we looked at above: "If it be now, 'tis not to / Come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, / Yet it will come" (V.ii.167-69) and so on.

How might one understand the "not" here, the "nothing"? Hamlet goes on, "Since no man knows / Aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?" (V.ii.169-70). Namely, no man knows aught of aught he leaves. Therefore, to follow Hamlet's reasoning, we know naught. We know nothing. When Hamlet concludes: "Let be" (V.ii.170), does this mean let naught be? Let nothing be? Recall that the ghost – who is nothing – accurately reports: "Let me be" (I.v.59).

The readiness that is all is a readiness for the "not" that will come and become now. We must hold ourselves ready for it and, to use Edgar's word from the end of *King Lear*, endure. We must hold our-

selves ready for nothing. This is what we earlier called Hamlet's disposition of skeptical openness. We must not claim to know aught of what we truly know naught.

Does this mean that Hamlet is a nihilist? After his cunning escape from the fatal clutches of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, many readers insist that Hamlet has changed. They claim that he has thrown off his madness; his "antic disposition" disappears; he appears more mature and resolute. In Harold Bloom's words: "What seems clear is that the urgency of the earlier Hamlet has gone. Instead, a mysterious and beautiful disinterestedness dominates this truer Hamlet, who compels a universal love"[5]. Is it really *clear* that Hamlet has changed? Do the ever-shifting melancholia and mania of the earlier Hamlet yield to a truer and more beautiful disinterestedness? Is Hamlet someone who, at the end of the tragedy, compels universal love? To understate matters somewhat, we are not convinced. Is Hamlet really so different when he returns from his passage to England? Is he really more resolute and less crazy? And if he is so utterly changed, then why does he immediately leap into Ophelia's grave and wrestle wildly with Laertes? If he is suddenly so disinterested, then why does the "bravery" of Laertes's grief put Hamlet into such a "tow'ring passion" (V.ii.81), as he later confesses to Horatio? Does such behavior not betray a certain ugly interest rather than beautiful disinterest? Why does Hamlet rave at Laertes – "Woo't weep? Woo't fight? Woo't fast? Woo't tear thyself? / Woo't drink up eisel? eat a crocodile?" (V.i.265-66) – before being wrongly declared mad by Gertrude in exactly the same, stupid, misguided way as she said earlier when her son saw the ghost? Does Hamlet compel universal love? Or are we not reluctantly obliged to conclude that Hamlet is really not such a nice guy? That all his beautiful contemplation is for nothing?

For Bloom, any "apparent nihilism" on the part of Hamlet gives way to "achieved serenity" and "authentic disinterestedness"[6]. In fact he goes so far as to say that Hamlet is a resurrected Christ figure during Act V, at the same time that he represents an Old Testament Adamic truth: "there is a God within him, and he speaks: 'And yet, to me, what

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[5]   William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, fully annotated, with an introduction by Burton Raffel, with an essay by Harold Bloom, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 230.

[6]   "An essay by Harold Bloom", p. 231.

is this quintessence of dust?' Hamlet's is the most refined of all Adamic dusts, but remains the Old Adam and not the New: essentially dust"[7]. This sounds delightful, if not completely contradictory, but all in all it is the assurance of the claim to authenticity, old or new – and thereby to a certain moral standard for what might count as the humanity that Shakespeare allegedly invents – that we doubt and that fails to see the sheer weirdness of the play. We here concur with Melville's hero, Pierre:
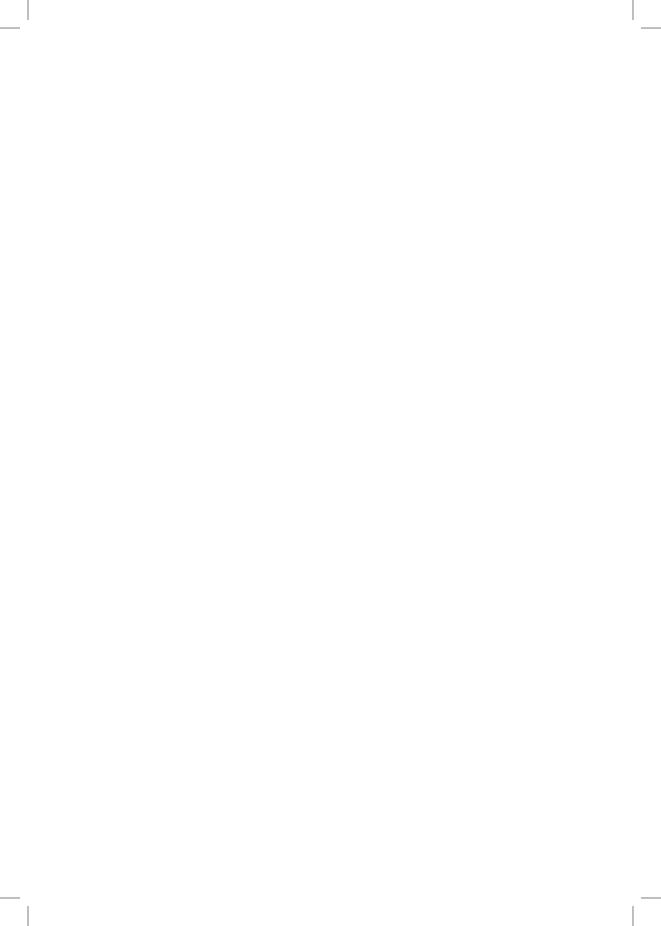
> Pierre had always been an admiring reader of *Hamlet*; but neither his age nor his mental experience thus far, had qualified him either to catch initiating glimpses into *the hopeless gloom of its interior meaning*, or to draw from the general story those superficial and purely incidental lessons, where the painstaking moralist so complacently expatiates[8].

Pierre then tears his copy of *Hamlet* into "a hundred shreds" and drops them at his feet[9].

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[7]   Harold Bloom, *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*, New York, Riverhead, 2003, p. 145.

[8]   Herman Melville, *Pierre, or The Ambiguities*, London, Penguin, 1996, p. 169.

[9]   Pierre gloomily goes on in his interpretation of *Hamlet*: "If among the deeper significances of its pervading indefiniteness, which significances are wisely hidden from all but the rarest adepts, the pregnant tragedy of Hamlet convey any one particular moral at all fitted to the ordinary uses of man, it is this: – that all meditation is worthless, unless it prompt to action; that it is not for man to stand shilly-shallying amid the conflicting invasions of surrounding impulses; that in the earliest instant of conviction, the roused man must strike, and, if possible, with the precision and force of the lightning-bolt".

Shakespeare's Sense of Dialectics:
A Philosophical Contribution to Kate's Policy

Franca D'Agostini

For someone who is not familiar with Shakespearean studies writing about Shakespeare is a sort of suicide. It is much like writing about Kant, or Plato, for people who are not skilled philosophers. And yet, there is an aspect of Shakespeare's work which is peculiarly attractive for a person who, like me, studies metaphysics and philosophical logic, and it is the special and deep sense of conceptual dialectics revealed by Shakespeare's text. So I will try to say something about this, without touching the technicalities of philological and literary analysis, and trying not to make too many mistakes in this regard.

1. Super-concepts

Shakespeare's work is full of dialectics, in any sense of the term 'dialectics': as the art of discussion, or the art of dramaturgic conflicts (in Brecht's idea), or as the art of contradictions; finally: as the semantics of concepts, and especially 'second-order' concepts, such as truth (and falsity), reality (and appearance), identity (and difference), etc. This last meaning is not largely used, in the tradition, but historically it is one of the first, and most important (especially for Hegel, in a possible interpretation[1]). And it is the meaning I tend to favour (though not disregarding the connection with the others).

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[1] See Angelica Nuzzo, "Dialectic as Logic of Transformative Processes", in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi, Durham, Acumen, 2006; and Elena Ficara, "Hegel's Dialectic in Contemporary Continental Philosophy", *Idealistic Studies*, 39 (2010), pp. 87-97.

Generally speaking, concepts, in Shakespeare's theatrical work, do live, and play one against the other, in a way that has no equivalent, as far as I know. And I suggest that this is not a *linguistic* or merely *expressive* feature, though Shakespeare's euphuism or pre-baroque concettism have been frequently mentioned by critics and interpreters. Rather, I would say, it is a *logical* as well as *practical* requisite. Possibly, one could even say that from the conceptual logic that Shakespeare puts into practice, very often (if not always) springs the very structure of the figured action.

It is this, I think, that makes Shakespeare's text a true resource for philosophers. Although it is a *methodological* and not *theoretical* resource. "Play with concepts!" is the suggestion that Shakespeare, as it were, addresses to philosophers: "because concepts are your creatures, and the material of your work, like wood for a woodcarver". 'Playing' here means seeing the ambiguity of concepts, their tendency to clash and fight, to iterate reflectively, mutually connect and exclude each other. When you think you have found the way of getting the better of them, suddenly they produce the worst: contradiction, absurdity, and also epistemic and practical injustice.

But more specifically, the main role in this picture is played by that special sort of concepts that I mentioned before, and that I would call, following a suggestion that incidentally appears in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, "super-concepts" (*Über-begriffe*). Possibly, the shortest list of super-concepts is the one that the medievals called 'transcendentals': *unum*, *verum*, *bonum* – where *unum* (for both Aristotelian and Platonic traditions) ultimately means *esse*, being, reality. But the list may be longer, we may also add other second-order concepts, more or less semantically connected to them.

Now, what of these (and similar) concepts[2] is most important for our needs is that they are so to speak everywhere, in our thinking and reasoning, and acting. In fact, they are the principal structures that rule our inferences, and via our (more or less good) inferences rule our beliefs, decisions, and actions. In fact, they mainly have an *inferential* role: I know or believe that things stand in a certain way (reality is so made), so I believe or suppose they also are or might

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[2]   Notably, they are for Aristotle as well as for a long philosophical tradition the typical subjects of the "first philosophy", *prima philosophia*. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 2, 1008a-c.

be in another way; I think (know, believe, suppose) that what you say is true, and consequently other sentences are also true; I know this action is good, then some other actions are also good. Notably, these three exemplified inferences do not 'contain' anything, they have no content: it is not specified which action the good action is, which sentence you uttered, and which sorts of things I am referring to. We simply see that truth, reality and good are the forces that drive thought from premises to conclusions. I infer 'from this, that' because I infer true from true, being from being, and good from good.

So we can say these concepts are the formal, I would say super-formal, structures that govern our thinking. And via our thinking, they rule our interactions, and discussive confrontations. Because a second important aspect of the *Überbegriffe* is that they mainly have a *critical*, that is, *sceptical* role (in the ancient sense of *skepsis*, 'research'). I never think of reality, or truth, or good. I always use them, but I do not mention them, and I do not even think of them as such (although I am a philosopher).

However, when some of these concepts in my view are so to say *violated*, or used in a distorted or doubtful way, they suddenly appear in my mind. If anyone tries to make me believe that something that I know to be non-existing, in fact exists, or tries to pass off as true what I know or suspect to be false; if I see injustice, wickedness, and evil deeds, that occur (or risk occurring) without punishment: well, in these cases, the comedy (or tragedy) of super-concepts begins. And they begin to openly act in our language and thought.

A third point which should be taken into consideration is that these special kinds of second order concepts are universally 'ordinative', which means they put general order into concepts: they provide a high-level organization of the conceptual dotation we normally use in our thinking. For instance the concept of reality does unify and organize our unspecified vision of single things or events, by offering the distinction between those of them that are real, and not only apparent (seeming). From now on, we will be able to further specify the domain of real entities, for instance by distinguishing, if we want, those among them that are physical (being in space and time), and those that are not, or which ones belong to possible worlds. Also, we may note that the notion of physical objects also includes animals, and human bodies, distinguishing among them female and male bodies, and the practical and social properties they respectively have.

This system of concepts, which is more or less 'naturally' involved in our language, has no true relevance, as such (except possibly for philosophers belonging to neo-positivist tradition). And it is not even relevant to specify in detail the typological relations occurring between first, second, third order etc. concepts, and between them and the super-ordinative transcendental principles. What is interesting, in fact, is the *dialectical movement* which stirs the supposedly ordinate hierarchy of types or orders. And this dialectical movement is characteristically due first to the possible *iteration* of super-concepts, namely in their epistemic and semantic role, which was one of the first elements of Plato's concern, as developed in *Parmenides*.

To put things very simply: we may say: "it is not true that what you believe is not true", and even this may be true or false, or we may say "it is true that truth is not a concept", which is not true; or we may say "it is not true that there is no truth", which is surely true. Also 'good' has a similar property of 'iterability': I say "it is not good to think that this is not good", or "what is judged being good is not good", or also: "it is good to promote good actions", "people who believe there are good things generally are not good", etc. Evidently, the conceptual names in each case may be different, so we may have the oxymora of bad goodness, or unjust justice, useless utility, rational irrationality, but also unfaithful loyalty, or loyal unfaithfulness, or sad happiness and happy sadness, and malicious candour, cooperative conflicts, or also, like Bianca says, in *The Taming of the Shrew*: content of a discontent (I.i.80[3]). These are *stratified* contradictions, where the second level of a certain concept denies and stultifies the first level. Hegel (mainly in his early writings) paid special attention to the philosophical import of self-contradictory iterations, focusing, for instance, on the paradox of 'infinite finiteness' inconsequently defended by some interpreters of Kant.

But it is the so-called *undefined iterability* of super-concepts that causes many problems for philosophers, and somehow even justifies their job, in many cases. Because very often, people who pretend to be defenders of good in fact are not good, and brave supporters of truth are consummate liars, and what seems to be existent, or is universally alleged to be existent, does not exist. So the philosopher's job

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[3]　All references are to William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Brian Morris, The Arden Shakespeare, London-New York, Methuen, 1981.

is to disentangle these conceptual stratifications, revealing what is false in the pretended truth, and injustice in the alleged justice.

The playing of unjust justice, untrue truth, true appearance, false reality, etc., is possibly the most evident philosophical feature we may find in Shakespeare's work. If we accept this basic idea, we can see that the expression 'linguistic game' with reference to Shakespeare's method is not totally appropriate, or rather, does not exhaust the specific playing of language and thought involved in it. This playing is not only linguistic or poetic, but one would say logical, which means it concerns reasoning, and the way in which natural rules and mistakes of our reasoning, depending on the natural use of iterable concepts, rule our life.

2. Dream scepticism and double deceits

So both tragedy and comedy of human thought, as it were, may be connected to super-concepts, as they are the both mental and linguistic forces of (wrong or right) reasoning, ultimately governing human beliefs, decisions, and actions. Shakespeare more than other theatre writers grasps and gives us back these tragedies and comedies. The philosophical game which is to be played then is not properly (and only) the dance and playing of words, or characters, but of super-concepts: and this is namely what Hegel, following the ancient philosophers, called dialectics. In Shakespeare's texts we discover "the logical thrill of dialectics" (as the young Nietzsche described Plato's interpretation of Socrates' teaching).

I focus here on one of the most puzzling of Shakespeare's comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew*, where the special happiness of Shakespearean dialectics finds two typically super-conceptual subjects: *true* and *false* (or *reality* and *appearance*), and *masculine* and *feminine*. Notably, the latter have super-conceptual reference insofar as anthropological specifications, that is to say, specifications of the general notion of human being.

The frame of the comedy, which is only a sort of prologue in the 1623 version, immediately presents the abyss of what contemporary philosophy calls *dream scepticism*[4]: the beggar mocked, who awakes as

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[4]   A very nice presentation of the entire theme, which occupies endless literature nowadays, is Jan Westerhoff, *Reality: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

a fake 'lord', and very soon (in fact too soon) believes that this is his reality. And the false appearance of which Sly, the beggar, is victim, introduces all the substitutions of the story which follows. Not only that, but also the other theme, the difference between men and women, and namely the submission required for women, is mentioned.

"[H]e shall think by our true diligence / He is no less than what we say he is" (Induction.i.68-69). Why is it so easy to deceive people about their own identity? The first answer is well known: because we all live, as far as truth and reality are concerned, all alone with our experience, and we know that our experience may be deceptive. We need other people's confirmation, and even when facing unequivocal evidence, if someone else (possibly more than one person) is resolute enough in denying our conviction, we very easily capitulate, and falsity becomes truth.

So it is the natural *loneliness* of conscience, which is here put into light: the fact that I am alone, with my awareness of being existent, in some sense, ultimately creates my sense of being and being a single entity in the world. But this awareness in itself is what introduces the hyperbolic doubt of scepticism. How do you know that you're not the only true human being, endowed with interior feelings, in a world of zombies, that is people who have only the appearance of feelings and internal states but are not endowed of either? How do you know you are not a brain in a vat, connected to computers giving the impression of being the person you believe to be, and the impression of things like you think things are? These are the very famous *sceptical hypotheses* cherished by contemporary philosophers. However, setting aside the relevant contributions to the theme provided by a vast filmography, from *The Matrix* onwards, we see that in Sly's case the tragedy of subjectivity, closed in the strict and inexpressive loneliness of consciousness, is translated into comedy, which means action, and representation.

The second theme, the simple equation 'honourable women = obedient women', is presented when the lord suggests instructions for the page Bartholomew:

> dress'd in all suits like a lady.
> […]
> He bear himself with honourable action,
> Such as he hath observ'd in noble ladies
> Unto their lords, by them accomplished.
> […]
> With soft low tongue and lowly courtesy. (Induction.i.104-12)

The ancient *topos* of tearful womanliness, which prepares Kate's dry eyes, is also mentioned:

> Bid him shed tears, as being overjoyed,
> to see her noble lord restored to health,
> […]
> If the boy have not a woman's gift
> To rain a shower of commanded tears,
> An onion will do well for such a shift,
> Which in a napkin being close convey'd. (Induction.i.118-25)

So the joke is ready, and here is the false truth revealed, the simulated recognition:

> Thou art a lord, and nothing but a lord.
> Thou hast a lady far more beautiful
> Than any woman in this waning age. (Induction.ii.62-64)

After a brief doubt ("would you make me mad?", Induction.ii.17), Sly willingly capitulates:

> Am I a lord, and have I such a lady?
> Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?
> I do not sleep. I see, I hear, I speak.
> I smell sweet savours and I feel soft things.
> Upon my life, I am a lord indeed.
> And not a tinker, nor Christophero Sly. (Induction.ii.69-74)

Eventually, the wisest decision is taken: "Well, bring our lady hither to our sight, / And once again a pot o' th' smallest ale" (Induction.ii.75-76). And also the residual doubt is presented in fairly inattentive way. The Servingman says: "These fifteen years you have been in a dream, / Or when you wak'd, so wak'd if you slept", and Sly in turn: "By my fay, a goodly nap. / But did I never speak of all that time?" (Induction.ii.80-83). In fact, the servant's explanation simply confirms what happened just before – which would have to be considered suspicious. However, the perplexity is soon dispelled.

So we see here the second reason why the trick so easily succeeds, which is what is most interesting, in my view. It is the fact that the Lord's fictional strategy is paralleled by Sly's almost blind assent, which evidently is not only due to the force of shared opinions about

reality against the weak loneliness of consciousness, but also to the very pleasant reality that the fiction presents.

Ultimately, what really does Sly have to lose, if he had to lose truth, and reality? What really does he have to gain, gaining truth? In Sly's view, the trick in itself provides an advantage, so it is not important if lady, dresses, ale, wealth and comforts truly are his own possession, or not. Why not simulate believing what those people seem to be eager for him to believe? Double fiction, one would say: the fiction is fictionalized in turn. We can see that Gorgias' principle always holds: who exactly is the deceiver? Who is the person who is adopting a certain strategy, to deceive others? At least in some cases, the deceived is smarter than the deceiver.

Sly's policy in this sense is a typical super-conceptual strategy, insofar as it concerns truth and falsity, reality and false appearance. And we may apply it to any sceptical hypothesis. If you suggest to me that reality is different from how I think it is, maybe I cannot show it is not so, but I can always say that as far as the false reality remains what I think it is, and gives me all the resources and joys it usually gives me, there is no point in gaining or losing truth about it. In other terms, if Descartes' deceiving demon has really given me the show of life, and the sumptuous fiction of reality, I am totally grateful to him. Because this falsity, which is the show of life, is a precious gift[5].

Definitely, the two tricks (one perpetrated by the Lord and the other given by Sly's rapid approval), join and come to a final accomplishment: "Now Lord be thanked for my good amends", Sly says, and all: "Amen" (Induction.ii.98-99). And just after this, the page in the guise of a lady introduces what will be the second (double) super-conceptual trick, the trick centred on woman's submission: "My husband and my lord, my lord and husband; / I am your wife in all obedience" (Induction.ii.107-8).

3. Male women and female men

The conceptual perspective is extremely useful when you have to come to terms with incomprehensible and ambiguous phenomena of

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[5]   This is sometimes claimed by suggesting that Descartes' demon is the "second God" of gnosticism.

life. Very simply, the rule is: each time you find an intractable problem, a paradox, or some irreducible contradiction, pay attention to the super-conceptual problem involved, because very often this happens because there is some hitch, somewhere, concerning truth or being or good (or their names and equivalents). So it is useful to have an idea of the nature of these and other concepts, and their odd behaviours. The experience of the semantic behaviour of concepts (especially super-concepts) should be, hypothetically, the main requisite of philosophers (not only analytic philosophers, or philosophers of language). But it concerns, as I hinted above, the same play of life, insofar as grasped by thought and language.

3.1. The play of concepts

In the third volume of his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Hegel suggests that Shakespeare's characters are in fact concepts: in Shakespeare we find "the universality of humanity", and grasped as such[6] without any flexible adaptation to the variety of life. Shakespeare's characters (Hegel mainly speaks of tragedies) do not have the vagueness and internal contrasts of psychical life, rather, they represent the virtues and vices of conceptuality, and so their adventures and misadventures are the adventures and misadventures of thought.

The fact is that concepts do have a life, and a variety, they fight and dance, as I suggested above. And this depends of their nature, which is worth now seeing in some detail, with special reference to the ambiguous and fragile concepts of man and woman, male and female. We can isolate five points.

First, concepts are cognitive unities (usually instantiated by one or more words), but they have no true unity, actually: they are *mereological sums* of *disparate determinations*. When you say "male", or "female", you do not properly say something definite. Or at least: you cannot think that the *intension* (to say the conceptual content determining the collection you are referring to) is uniform. Because with 'male' you may mean lots of things, and accordingly, when you use

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6   Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "In Shakespeares Lustspielen und Tragödien überwiegt das Allgemeinmenschliche", in *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, vol. III, in *Werke*, auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832-1845, neu ed. Ausgabe, hg. von E. Moldenhauer und K.M. Michel, Bd. 15, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 498.

(thinking or speaking) the predicate 'female' you include in one word very many disparate properties. Some of these properties are obvious, and have biological nature, some are social, psychological, and evidently cultural. In this heterogeneous set of disparate aspects, you will find inconsistencies, contrasts, and diversities of all kinds.

Second, we have seen that concepts, and namely general (super-conceptual) determinations are *iterable*, so you may have impolitical politicians, and evidently male women, or female men. And this effect is not only a rhetorical artifice, an oxymoron, or a linguistic game, but it is the simple reality of things, when grasped by language and thought. If we take this into account, we are ready to acknowledge the disguise not only (or properly) of people and characters, but of concepts. Everyone knows that simulated second-order behaviours are at the basis of every problem in our public life. Second order conceptual simulations may drive our beliefs where we do not really want them to go, and consequently may drive our actions to what we would never do, otherwise. Accordingly, a female man might find difficult to express his female nature because people expect him to behave in a non-female way, and this dysfunction may affect the same person, and his/her surroundings in infinite ways. So in the notions of female man or male woman we find the stratified contradiction I have mentioned above.

Third, concepts are *vague*. Which means: their application (assertibility, and thinkability) is (often) to be practiced in degrees. Some first-order concepts are typically vague, like 'old' or 'tall'. And vagueness in this case depends on the perspectival nature of the concept (what is old or tall for me is not old or tall for you), as well as on temporal variations, because: what is not old today is old tomorrow. Some concepts-predicates are 'multi-dimensional', say: nice, or happy. There are many ways, and perspectives, and times, of niceness, or happiness. This typically affects truth, because when we have to say "this is happy", or "this is nice", "he's an old man", or "he's tall" the truth of our assertion should be graduated (half truth, almost truth, etc.).

As to male and female determinations, contemporary philosophy tells us that there are (at least) five sexes, in fact, and manliness and womanless are to be located in a graduate line, of this sort:

Man   Woman

At the two heads of the line we have the perfect male, and the perfect woman, while in the middle, we have the perfect hermaphrodite. The other two determinations are male woman and female men, and the graduation of the line lets us see that there are infinite degrees of more or less strong femaleness of men, and maleness of women, from 0 to 1.

To a certain extent, one may say that all concepts are vague[7]. And so truth itself is vague. This is the typical result of fuzzy logics, which deal with reasoning involving vague premises. So the basic graduated line (what gives us most of problems) is the one concerning truth, because we may have 0.5 true, or 0.8 true, or 0.2 true, etc. sentences:

$$\text{False} = 0 \qquad\qquad\qquad \text{True} = 1$$

The fourth point, which is worth underlining, is something that the dialectical tradition has somehow overemphasized, and it is the *conflict* occurring between concepts (and consequently between ideas, theories, and ways of thinking and conceiving reality, because some concepts become ideas, and so produce ideal pictures, and *Weltanschauungen*). At first, one might think that the gradual nature of truth should lead us to admit that everything is grey, shadowed, vague and substantially untrue. But this is simply wrong, because it misunderstands the fact that in the line there are the two heads, actually: so there is absolute falseness (point 0) and there is absolute truth (point 1). We are generally aware of the phenomenon of vagueness, which is fairly intuitive, but we also know that something is surely true, and something false. As a matter of fact, we know lots of absolute truths: for instance I know that I am here now, I know that the Pythagorean theorem is true, I know that I do not like wicked people, and I can acknowledge wickedness (even if I can forgive them, thinking they are somehow in trouble), etc.

This means that ultimately, vagueness does not really change our vision of things, and our ways of thinking of them, and speaking of them[8]. So we see that even if vagueness seems to be everywhere, it does not remove the conflict between true and false, good or bad, appearance and reality, and any other contraposition of this sort. So we also see that the border between the extension and counter-extension

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[7]   See Graham Priest, "A Site for Sorites", in *Liars and Heaps: New Essays on Paradox*, ed. J. C. Beall, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2003.

[8]   This is a point stressed by Stewart Shapiro in *Vagueness in Context*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

of concepts is fragile, and continually violated, but *it remains a war zone*. And it is in this war zone that the relation between Katherine and Petruchio (and more generally, but at first latently, between husbands and wives) develops, in the comedy.

Finally, the fifth point is something that instead the anti-conceptual perspective, say the one defended by Nietzsche, or by some feminist philosophers, has always opposed to Hegel and other interpreters of conceptual dialectics. It is the fact that concepts do serve for describing and even seeing real objects and facts, but they are totally different entities. Real things, facts, and events, are manifold, and vague, and move, exactly like concepts, but *in a totally different way*. The realm of concepts-words is endowed of a sort of reality, or factuality, that parallels the true effective reality, pretending to take care of it (and in a sense taking care of it), but in fact systematically violating its true nature[9]. In fact concepts give uniformity where there is heterogeneity, steadiness where there is movement, and they actually organize reality into hierarchies, structures, levels, etc. This is evidently due to their capacity of making one what is disparate, and to collect things, on the basis of their similarity: I can say "this is a woman" because someone a long time ago noted that many human individuals presented certain shared properties, and he or she, a long time ago, called this set of things 'women'. Now I can speak of women in the world, and think of them, because I have this concept-name. But notably, the individuals that I 'collect' with it remain heterogeneous, and mobile. Then concepts (words) somehow *violate the truth, in the very moment in which they give us the opportunity of telling the truth*. This is basically the reason why some philosophers, following Nietzsche[10], have thought that language, and the claim to truth that language supposes, are basically a deceitful trap, in which we are forced to live and think.

If we take into account all this (internal multiplicity, possible iterability, vagueness, conflict, disparity between concepts and real things), we are ready to enter into the "logical thrill of dialectics" that ultimately rules our life, and makes of it a conceptual play, to be played in a tragic or comic way.

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[9] Notably, this is exactly what Petruchio does, in simulating care toward Katherine, while in fact destroying its nature. The difference is that the power of language, as it were, is without deceiving intention.

[10] See Nietzsche's early writing *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* (1873).

And namely, we can look at Kate's misadventures in the perspective of a certain social life, in which movements, vagueness, iterability and conflicts of predicates endowed with ontological relevance, such as male and female, are disregarded, and they are entangled into a system of true falsity and false truth, of stratified simulations and disguises. The origin of the entire mechanism is evidently what a feminist reading would stress, that is: the problem of power; the power of men over women, and the failure of attempted efforts of women to contrast it. But what creates the story, is the use of truth and lie, semi-lie and half-truth, that each concept-character puts into practice.

3.2. Katherine the curst

Maybe it is not by chance that the "conceited history", as history of concepts, begins by Lucentio's profession of Socratic faith.

> Here let us breathe and haply institute
> A course of learning and ingenious studies.
> […]
>   I study
> Virtue and that part of philosophy
> Will I apply that treats of happiness
> By virtue specially to be achiev'd. (I.i.8-20)

This is openly the theory of *areté* plus *noesis* producing *eudemonia* (virtue+knowledge = happiness), and it is also accompanied, to complete the picture, by the Socratic idea of *philein*, the pleasure of knowledge, negatively declared by Tranio: "No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en" (I.i.39).

The announced pleasure tells us that, ultimately, all serious knowledge may turn into comedy. And soon the story enters into the main game, the one concerning Kate's supposedly intractable disposition. The difficulty of finding a husband for her, leads Baptista to the decision:

>   importune me no farther
> For how I firmly am resolv'd you know;
> That is, not to bestow my youngest daughter
> Before I have a husband for the elder. (I.i.48-51)

In fact, Kate's first words, prepared by Gremio's verdict "She's too rough for me" (I.i.55), are not totally rough, if not else, because they openly contain a prayer "I pray you, sir, is it you will / To make a stale of me amongst these mates?" (I.i.57-58). So we may suppose the beginning of the hostility was not hers.

What Katherine tries to win (and won't succeed) is the force of the prejudicial conception of 'female disposition' surrounding her: "No mates for you / Unless you were of gentler, milder mould", so Hortensio says (I.i.59-60), and further, against Katherine's rude words (inspired by legitimate pride), he exclaims: "From all such devils, good Lord deliver us!" (I.i.66), while Tranio comments: "That wench is stark mad or wonderful forward" (I.i.69). Also Bianca's mild behaviour, and modesty, and silence (praised by the wise Lucentio) contrasts Kate's feminist rebellion, which is destroyed in an instant by Bianca's quiet and poisoned words: "Sister, content you in my discontent. / Sir [to the father], to your pleasure humbly I subscribe" (I.i.80-81).

Kate's problem is clearly political. It arises from the legitimate reaction to a conceptual content that she refuses, because she can see in it an entire system of false humility (Bianca), trivial desire (the 'mates') and affectionate domination (the father Baptista). The poor Katherine tries to face these unfortunate waves by roughly protesting her right of freedom and human dignity "shall I be appointed hours, as though, belike, I knew / Not what to take and what to leave?" (I.i.103-4). And it is *ontological* freedom: freedom of not being what one is supposed to be. Later, she will openly say: "I see a woman may be made a fool / If she had not a spirit to resist" (III.ii.218-19).

Sure, Kate is a shrew, the term is irremediably negative[11]. But why is she so bad, rough, and even brutal? Many clues tell us that she is exasperated and made wicked by the duty of being a woman in the way in which a woman supposedly must be. The concept of 'woman' in which and by which her life and behaviour are located and described is a prison, for her. And she is even more exacerbated by the passive-aggressive attitude of her sister, who is not behind her, and rather, with graceful submissiveness, perfectly complies with a woman's identity duties. Thus implicitly confirming that she is wrong, in asking for ontological freedom.

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[11]   On the meaning of 'shrew' see Nadia Fusini, "La tortora e il calabrone", in *I volti dell'amore*, Milano, Mondadori, 2003, p. 41.

Kate's shrewishness is then the reaction to falsity and repression involved in the conception of woman expressed in Baptista's, Bianca's and other people's words and attitudes. Later, Petruchio will get the point: "yourself and all the world / That talk'd of her have talk'd amiss of her. / If she be curst, it is for policy" (II.i.283-85). And this is exactly Kate's policy: being rough when women are required to be sweet, being talkative and contentious when women are supposed to be quiet, calm and silent. It is a rebellion against the traditional concept of 'woman': Kate shows these properties (being silent, quiet, sweet) are not given as such.

Petruchio perfectly grasps the truth of Kate's situation. But he uses this awareness to introduce and develop his own fictional strategy. As Lucentio has come to Padua for philosophy, so Petruchio has come "Hapily to wive and thrive as best I may" (I.ii.55), and Katherine is surely a good candidate. There is the problem of Kate's intemperate mood, actually. "[T]hough her father be very rich, any man is so very a fool to be married to hell?" was Gremio's verdict (I.i.123-25), and Hortensio warns Petruchio:

> Her only fault, and that is fault enough,
> Is that she is intolerable curst,
> And shrew and froward so beyond all measure
> That, were my state worser than it is,
> I would not wed her for a mine of gold. (I.ii.87-91)

But this is not a problem, for Petruchio, who typically represents the perfect man, so to speak: the person whose property of being man has value 1 (in the supposed masculinity scale). He has no fear of hell, and even less of cursed or mad women:

> Be she as foul as was Florentius' love
> As old as Sybil, and as curst and shrewd
> As Socrates' Xanthippe, or a worse,
> She moves me not, or not removes at least
> Affection's edge in me, were she as rough
> As are the swelling Adriatic seas.
> I come to wive it wealthily in Padua;
> If wealthily, then happily in Padua. (I.ii.68-75)

His experience makes him the paradigm of male determination and courage:

> Have I not heard great ordnance in the field,
> And heaven's artillery thunder in the skies?
> Have I not in a pitched battle heard
> Loud 'larums, neighing steeds, and trumpets clang?
> And do you tell me of a woman's tongue
> That gives not half so great a blow to hear
> As will a chestnut in a farmer's fire?
> Tush, Tush, fear boys with bugs! (I.ii.202-9)

We see then Katherine's disadvantage: that she has to face this perfectly masculine man, when she is a woman who is not strictly and entirely 'female'. Face to Petruchio's value 1, Katherine is a 'male woman', so she is endowed of the intermediate value 0.75, or even less. Notably, this disparity does not concern the *psychology* of characters, but the *concepts* they represent (like Hegel suggests), and the playing of their respective properties (courage, sweetness, determination, submission, etc.).

3.3. Petruchio's policy

It is a true war. "I am as peremptory as she proud-minded" (II.i.131), but Petruchio's strategy at first is to conceal the war under kindness and false wooing, to destroy Kate's defence by mental confusion and contradiction; though sometimes leaving it emerge, by facts, actions, and words. In this process, truth and falsity play an important role, as always happens when a conflict for supremacy is at stake.

The first step is plain falsity, evidence negated: "Hearing thy mildness prais'd in every town, / Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded, / Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs, / Myself am mov'd to woo thee for my wife" is Petruchio's beginning (II.i.191-94).

And further:

> 'Twas told me you were rough, and coy, and sullen,
> And now I find report a very liar;
> For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,
> But slow in speech, yet sweet as springtime flowers.
> Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look askance,
> Nor bite the lip, as angry wenches will,
> Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk.
> But thou with mildness entertain'st thy wooers,
> With gentle conference, soft and affable. (II.i.237-45)

The ambiguity is poisoned, and unbearable, because Petruchio seems to side with Kate, against other people who do not understand her, but, he simply does not tell the truth, of which Katherine is totally aware.

And the second step is to let the war become evident:

> For I am he am born to tame you Kate,
> And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate,
> Conformable as other household Kates. (II.i.269-71)

And Katherine has a lucid mind on this point:

> You have show'd a tender fatherly regard
> To wish me wed to one half lunatic,
> A madcap ruffian and a swearing Jack,
> That thinks with oaths to face the matter out. (II.i.279-82)

Petruchio's false alliance goes on:

> Father, 'tis thus: yourself and all the world
> That talk'd of her have talk'd amiss of her.
> If she be curst, it is for policy,
> For she's not froward, but modest as the dove.
> She's not hot, but temperate as the morn.
> For patience she will prove a second Grissel,
> And Roman Lucrece for her chastity.
> And to conclude, we have 'greed so well together,
> that upon Sunday is the wedding day. (II.i.283-91)

Katherine, reluctant, comments: "I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first" (II.i.292). Despite this, the appearance is saved by Petruchio in front of other men:

> 'Tis bargain'd 'twixt us twain, being alone,
> That she shall still be curst in company.
> I tell you 'tis incredible to believe
> How much she loves me. O the kindest Kate!
> She hang about my neck, and kiss on kiss. (II.i.297-301)

And the war is always in progress, though in Petruchio's philosophy of genders, even the calmest and peaceful man (say 0.7 man) has victory

in his grasp, as he can easily manage to tame the most quarrelsome woman (say 0.3 woman):

> O you are novices. 'Tis a world to see
> How tame, when men and women are alone,
> A meacock wretch can make the curstest shrew. (II.i.304-6)

It is enough to be a man, to have a guarantee of victory and supremacy.

Faced with this double disconcerting attitude, Kate is aware of the announced disaster. She comments:

> I must forsooth be forc'd
> To give my hand, oppos'd against my heart,
> Unto a mad-brain rudesby, full of spleen,
> Who woo'd in haste and means to wed at leisure. (III.ii.8-11)

And it is in a last residual effort to contrast the mad-brain man, that Katherine defends her ideal of resisting woman "a woman may be made a fool / If she had not a spirit to resist" (III.ii.218-19).

A natural component of the concept of true man (see the first property of concepts above mentioned) is the idea of *ownership*, and to complete the picture, Petruchio emphasizes this aspect:

> I will be master of what is mine own.
> She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house,
> My household stuff, my field, my barn,
> My horse, my ox, my ass my any thing.
> And here she stands. Touch her whoever dare!
> I'll bring mine action on the proudest he
> That stops my way in Padua. (III.ii.227-33).

However, these aspects of male determination, which would make the situation clearer, are not enough to dispel the main point of Petruchio's strategy, which is ultimately the *simulation of madness*, by plain falsity, inexplicable kindness, sudden roughness, and absence of any consequence. Notably: to simulate madness is a strategy that power often adopts, because in this way you will have the fear of subjugated people, and the end of any rational defence of them. Tranio comments: "Of all mad matches never was the like" (III.ii.240), and Bianca: "That being mad herself, she's madly mated"

(III.ii.242). While Gremio's judgement is: "I warrant him, Petruchio is Kated" (III.ii.243[12]).

But the difference between the two 'madnesses' is already evident: Katherine is consequent and sincere, in her being not a 'woman' like people think a woman should be, her policy is only the political effort to make clear her dignity as a human being, as such endowed with free will and able to make decisions about her own destiny. So the war she is fighting is not the contrast between men and women, played by other women using 'female' means. She tries instead to defend her right – as a human being – to speak and answer back, to discuss and refute, when people criticize her or her behaviour. Even, the right of hitting, banging and beating, a right that ultimately she *should* have, inasmuch as male people have it. The problem she is facing is the dissonance between the concept of woman in the specific account given by her father, her sister, and generally other people, and the reality of her own singular being: so she's dealing with the fifth of the conceptual problems listed in 2.1. Petruchio simply wants to restore the alleged properties of 'good wife' in a wife who has only one of them: a large dowry.

3.4. The school of cruelty

'Paraconsistent' logicians try to save logic from the ruinous effects of contradiction. The main and first of these effects is classically the *explosion* of truth. The principle[13] is: if you accept even only one contradiction, the logical system 'explodes', because *everything becomes true*. So the system 'trivializes'. Evidently, if everything is true, then everything is also contradictory, any empty thing is also full, any object is absent and present at the same time, any truth is also falseness, and any falseness is also truth. In a word, you accept that for each proposition p true, 'not p' will be true as well. So here is the explosion of any meaning, sense, and truth. And when you have the explosion of language, power is the only thing that remains.

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[12]   See Fusini: in fact, to obtain Kate's transformation, Petruchio himself had to transform in turn, becoming rough and cruel like she was. Fusini observes that the idea of *transformation* is crucial, in the play. More generally some transformation, or taming, is somehow natural and necessary, in relations between women and men; the good relation arises, in any case, from "the miracle of metamorphosis" (Fusini, p. 52).

[13]   See Graham Priest, *In Contradiction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006 (2nd edition).

The trivialization of language and thought is the ultimate result of Petruchio's policy, after the wedding, when the rich new wife is located in his own house, at his own disposal, and so can be dominated by an entire strategic system. So he creates what Hannah Arendt called an "organized lie", a structure of beliefs and a way of reasoning simply based on misleading and false principles, and a systematic negation of the evidence of facts (Arendt says "factual truth").

Petruchio's cruelty was already clear at the beginning, when he reversed Kate's image, by declaring "thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous", and "sweet as springtime flowers" (II.i.239-40). This is the first 'violence' perpetrated against Kate's identity[14]. Against the prison of being a woman in a socially accepted way Kate had adopted another identity, the identity of "intolerable curst, / And shrew and forward so beyond all measure" (I.ii.88-89), and now all this becomes nothing, in Petruchio's words.

The passages of Petruchio's trivialization are totally clear, and so we attend the accurate construction of the organized lie. Petruchio bereaves Katherine of food and sleep, by pretending to take care of her: so we have first *the stratified contradiction of being careful in denying all care*. Katherine is completely aware of the mechanism:

> And that which spites me more than all these wants,
> He does it under name of perfect love,
> As who should, if I should sleep or eat,
> 'Twere deadly sickness or else present death. (IV.iii.11-14)

And he utters *contradictory statements*, that deny both p and not p at the same time, or assert both. In brief he adopts the typical "newspeak" language of totalitarian power well described by Orwell in his *1984*. But he also destroys *consequentiality* (which is a typical effect of explosion), the right nature of inferences (from this, that) that come from asserting stable truth. And all this wrapped in a game which is the game of taming a shrew, that is to say: to make a 1 female person of a woman who is only 0.3 female or so (in the sense in which 'female' should be intended).

Faced with the power that destroys rationality, violating any consequentiality, and any truth, Kate says:

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[14]   Fusini notes that in this way Petruchio "tears her image and identity from her" (Fusini, p. 45).

> My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
> Or else my heart concealing it will break
> And rather than it shall, I will be free
> Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words. (IV.iii.77-80)

This is Kate's feeble rebellion, and Petruchio, without any conse-
quence: "Why, thou say'st true. It is a paltry cap" (IV.iii.81) (but
she was saying the opposite). And she answers: "Belike you mean
to make a puppet of me" (IV.iii.103), and again he: "Why, true, he
means to make a puppet of thee" (IV.iii.104). And when the tailor
tries to re-establish truth and meaningfulness: "She says your wor-
ship means to make a puppet of her" (IV.iii.105), Petruchio exclaims:
"O monstrous arrogance! Thou liest" (IV.iii.107) and he protests the
tailor for not having done what requested.

   Even the most obvious evidence is destroyed: "Good Lord, how
bright and goodly shines the moon" (IV.v.2), Petruchio says. "The
moon? The sun! It is not moonlight now" Kate objects (IV.v.3), and
her husband: "I say it is the moon that shines so bright" (IV.v.4), and
she insists, "I know it is the sun that shines so bright" (IV.v.5). But
here is the power of the owner that becomes power of reality, and
truth and falsity: "It shall be moon, or star, or what I list" (IV.v.7).
And when contradicted, the power can punish the refuter: "Or e'er
I journey to your father's house, / [*To Servants.*] Go on and fetch our
horses back again" (IV.v.8-9). So Hortensio (who now sees Kate's un-
fortunate situation) suggests: "Say as he says, or we shall never go"
(IV.v.11).

   This is the usual reaction to unjust power: to accept the negation
of evidence, for fear, but also for practical reasons, because otherwise
the utilities of life, like going where we were supposed to go, and
doing what we supposedly should do in a context of destroyed truth
are impossible. But are the results of these 'practical reasons' without
truth truly 'practical', that is to say useful, for shared needs? Possibly
not. Their only effect is to allow the unjust power to go on with its
perverse method, whose primary food is the absence of truth.

   The complete strategy is openly presented in the famous passage
of Act IV:

> Thus I have politicly begun my reign,
> And 'tis my hope to end successfully.
> My falcon now is sharp and passing empty,

> And till she stoop she must not be full-gorg'd,
> For then she never looks upon her lure.
> […]
> She ate no meat today, nor none shall eat;
> Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not.
> […]
> Ay, and amid this hurly I intend
> That all is done in reverend care of her.
> […]
> This is a way to kill a wife with kindness. (IV.i.175-95)

Killing by kindness and faked care has been typical of 'paternalistic' strategy, in patriarchal contexts. And it creates a true didactical system. Tranio will comment: "Faith, he is gone unto the taming-school", and Bianca: "The taming-school? What, is there such a place?"; "Ay, mistress, and Petruchio is the master, / That teacheth tricks eleven and twenty long, / To tame a shrew and charm her chattering tongue" (IV.ii.54-58).

4. Kate's policy

Petruchio's success is anticipated by the synthesis provided by Curtis' words:

>   In her chamber,
> Making a sermon of continency to her,
> And rails, and swears, and rates, that she, poor soul,
> Knows not which way to stand, to look, to speak,
> And sits as one new-risen from a dream. (IV.i.169-73)

This is the typical effect of organized lies: that people living in them, do live in a dream, in a fictional reality, which is not exactly the happy dream of romance fiction, because it is continually contradicted by the hard and true reality of deprivation and humiliation.

People living in an organized lie are deprived of *reality*, and *truth*, and evidently of *god*. From now on, they won't be able to use any one of the three super-concepts. They won't have any further hope of getting Lucentio's equation: *arete+noesis = eudemonia* (virtue+knowledge = happiness). So they do not know "which way to stand, to look, to speak" and they live as in a sort of half dream, like Curtis says of Katherine.

It should be noted that Kate already lived in a sort of organized lie: the one, less cruel but no less fictional and misleading, produced by her father Baptista, and by the people surrounding her. And she tried to struggle within the limits of that ideological structure. So in a sense Petruchio's policy was disloyal, simply because its victory, against such a weak opponent, was too easy (as he otherwise had supposed, seeing the frailty of the system in which Katherine lived).

The absence of logic and truth destroys all of Kate's resources. Thought and language are led, by themselves, to annihilation, because any contrast or defence, any good or bad argument becomes irrelevant in the face of Petruchio's power, which is both the power of plain falsity (see the case of moon), of plain non-consequentiality (see the contrast with the tailor), and the power of false intention of kindness and attentions toward Kate (softly killing). So Kate capitulates, eventually: "Be it moon, or sun, or what you please. / And if you please to call it a rush-candle / Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me" (IV.v.13-15) and later: "What you will have it nam'd, even that it is, / And so it shall be so for Katherine" (IV.v.21-22).

This puts an end to the war: "Though long, our jarring notes agree" (and the wise Lucentio states it, at the beginning of V.ii). There is no more enmity between Katherine and Petruchio. In total submission, Katherine accepts to destroy her own cap, because asked by Petruchio: "Katherine, that cap of yours becomes you not. / Off with that bauble, throw it under foot", (V.ii.122). But by far more important was the destruction of language and thought that she had to accept before.

And we see then the reversal of the situation[15]. The shrew is tamed, and women who were once sweet reveal their combative disposition. Katherine's performance gives rise to scandal among women, and the quiet Bianca reveals her fighting spirit (significantly, the matter concerns a cap, which is supposed by the author to be one of the mainly important things for women):

Bianca
Fie, what a foolish duty call you this?

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[15]   *The Silly Lady* (*La dama boba*), the famous comedy by Lope de Vega of 1613 (perhaps inspired by Shakespeare's play), develops a very similar reversal, though concerning becoming intelligent of a silly girl, well indoctrinated by love. A confrontation between the two plays will reveal, I suppose, many interesting aspects, also from a dramaturgic point of view.

Lucentio
I would your duty were as foolish too.
The wisdom of your duty, fair Bianca,
Hath cost me a hundred crowns since supper-time. (V.ii.126-29)

And here is the no more gentle Bianca's answer: "The more fool you for laying on my duty" (V.ii.130).

Petruchio: "Katherine, I charge thee, tell these headstrong women / What duty they do owe their lords and husband" (V.ii.131-32).

The long final monologue, addressed to the widow and other women who are not humble servants of their husbands, is a very famous text, a true set piece for actresses. It celebrates in an ambiguous way the final victory of men over women, and definitive capitulation of any female effort to revenge.

I am asham'd that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace,
Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love, and obey.
Why are our bodies soft, and weak, and smooth,
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,
But that our soft conditions and our hearts
Should well agree with our external parts?
Come, come, you froward and unable worms,
My mind hath been as big as one of yours,
My heart as great, my reason haply more,
To bandy word for word and frown for frown.
But now I see our lances are but straws,
Our strength as weak our weakness past compare,
That seeming to be most which we indeed least are. (V.ii.162-76)

Kate seems to have espoused the entire ideology. In the monologue, all aspects of it are mentioned, even, as we can see, the connection between female submissive attitude and biological conditions. But is it really so? Has Kate really espoused what she in all ways tried to combat? In fact, the entire comedy develops and illustrates the overturning of truth and falsity, reality and appearance, and the traps that language may create by making appear false what is true and vice versa. Ultimately, this same overturning is the core of Kate's and Petruchio's crazy alliance, based on the explosion of language.

Because what ultimately makes Petruchio and Kate unite is this destruction of any concept, as such: which means (see the fifth aspect of concepts) the destruction of any cultural prison for men and women. In this perspective, it is not so difficult to read Kate's monologue as totally fictional and ironical, as the continuation of the strange crazy war that wife and husband have undertaken[16].

Is the shrew really tamed? This is the same as asking: did really Sly believe he was a lord? Hortensio congratulates Petruchio: "Now go thy ways, thou hast tamed a curst shrew" (V.ii.189). But is it really so? The wise Lucentio has the last word, which is ambiguous, in a certain way: "'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tam'd so" (V.ii.190). What is really a problem with men and women is the idea of 'man' and 'woman' that members of the two categories conceive and cherish. What is wrong is the idea that women are and should be in a certain way, and not in another, and consequently, if one tries to behave as if she were in the other way, she is simply wrong. If we accept this (a shared point for recent feminism) the philosophical aspects of Kate's policy seem to emerge in the clearest way. It is not clear if she really espouses the ideology, because in a world without truth there is no true submission, and no true acceptation of an ideology more than another. But this absence of truth is as such the beginning of a possible future truth: and this is typical of the dialectic of concepts. Because when you destroy the alleged meanings of concepts, you may be ready to promote your (and their) future freedom.

A possible contribution to Kate's policy would be then: play with the contradictions, the absence of consequentiality, the lies of power, and wait for the moment in which the power itself will become a victim of its own contradictions, lack of sense, and lies. It is not so easy, because really weak people are weak also in their being alone. No woman in fact defended Katherine, when she was a shrew, and no woman sees her new strange submission. So what ultimately she can do is to adopt Lucentio's Socratic suggestion (happiness = virtue+knowledge), with a specification: do not search for your happiness *in* intellectual virtues (so closing yourself in the dream of reason), but *by* intellectual virtues. We must admit that since the be-

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[16]   See Fusini, in which Kate's "ironical" apologetic of husbands is interpreted as a development of the amorous skirmish, ruled by the new language of Kate's metamorphosis.

ginning Kate's policy is searching for freedom in language, and free reasoning. The fact that she did not succeed, surely, was due to her intractable mood, in a context in which the adulation of power (so falsity) would have been more appropriate, given her loneliness. But it was also due to the fact that she was the character created by a (male) theatre writer, who was surely genial, but was forced to accept (or willingly accepted) the dominant vision. We have seen the first two phases of Kate's policy: we do not know whether in a further sixth act of the comedy another turn would have taken place.

Tempo e sovranità. Note a *Richard II*

Edoardo Ferrario

1. Immagini di sovranità

Centrale, non soltanto nei drammi di argomento storico ma nell'intera opera di Shakespeare, il tema della sovranità è stato oggetto di numerosi studi[1]. Al fine di delimitare il contesto entro il quale queste mie note si iscrivono, richiamerò qui a grandi linee tre celebri interpretazioni che, come apparirà ben presto, mostrano tanti punti di contatto quanto altrettante significative divergenze.

Nei testi di introduzione all'edizione italiana del primo tomo dei drammi storici, Giorgio Melchiori sottolinea come "il disegno ispiratore" della tetralogia che comprende le storie di Riccardo II, Enrico IV (parte I e parte II) ed Enrico V, "ha carattere essenzialmente politico"[2], e consiste in una giustificazione dell'ascesa della dinastia che da circa un secolo regnava sull'Inghilterra: un disegno che, sempre accompagnato dall'"indagine del sovrano come persona umana", trova l'unità di questi due registri nel concetto di storia, "se per storia si intende" – come scrive Melchiori – "l'indagine dell'*homo politicus*, il che vuol dire, per Shakespeare, la scoperta dell'uomo senza altri aggettivi"[3]. Il

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[1]   Ringrazio di cuore Rosy Colombo per avermi coinvolto nell'impresa di questo numero di *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies*, segnalandomi l'importanza di *Richard II* per i miei interessi filosofici. A differenza del testo di *Richard II*, che ho consultato anche nell'edizione curata da Agostino Lombardo per Newton & Compton (Roma, 1999), a cui si riferiscono le indicazioni dei numeri dei versi, in tutti gli altri casi ho utilizzato l'edizione in 9 volumi curata da Giorgio Melchiori per I Meridiani, Mondadori.

[2]   Giorgio Melchiori, "Introduzione al primo tomo", in William Shakespeare, *I drammi storici*, I Meridiani, Milano, Mondadori, 2008, tomo I, pp. lxii, lxi.

[3]   Giorgio Melchiori, "Introduzione ai drammi storici", ivi, p. lii.

carattere politico della tragedia di Riccardo II, e più in generale delle *histories* shakespeariane, si mostra particolarmente a riguardo della "funzione" e della "concezione stessa dell'istituto monarchico", che appare qui significativamente "conforme alle dottrine ufficiali degli storici e dei giuristi Tudor"[4], soprattutto per ciò che concerne la teoria "dei 'due corpi' del sovrano"[5].

Questa teoria è stata oggetto di un famosissimo studio di Ernst H. Kantorowicz[6], il cui secondo capitolo è interamente dedicato a una lettura di *Richard II*. Pur non esitando a definire l'opera shakespeariana come "la tragedia dei Due Corpi del re" – osservando che "sarebbe strano" che Shakespeare, il quale "padroneggiava il gergo di quasi tutte le attività umane, fosse stato all'oscuro del linguaggio costituzionale e giuridico corrente" – Kantorowicz tiene a precisare però che la questione se egli "avesse o no familiarità con le sottigliezze del gergo giuridico" non ha, dopotutto, "grande rilevanza". "La visione del poeta della doppia natura del re" – prosegue infatti Kantorowicz – "non dipende da argomenti di diritto costituzionale, dal momento che tale visione potrebbe sorgere molto naturalmente da un substrato puramente umano"[7].

Quella peculiare finzione giuridica consistente nell'idea della congiunzione nella figura del Re del corpo politico immortale e di quello naturale mortale (idea che, pur disponendo di una lunga tradizione, era diventata "un tratto caratteristico del pensiero politico inglese dell'età elisabettiana e della prima età Stuart"[8]) "non apparteneva

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[4]	Giorgio Melchiori, "Introduzione a *Riccardo II*", ivi, p. 8.

[5]	Melchiori, "Introduzione al primo tomo", cit., p. lxv.

[6]	Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *I due corpi del re. L'idea di regalità nella teologia politica medievale*, Torino, Einaudi, 1989. Su *Richard II* in relazione al tema della sovranità e alla teoria dei due corpi del re, segnalo inoltre, tra i lavori più significativi comparsi negli ultimi anni: David Norbrook, "The Emperor's New Body: *Richard II*, Ernst Kantorowicz and the Politics of Shakespeare Criticism", *Textual Practice*, 10 (1996), pp. 329-57; Keir Elam, "In What Chapter of His Bosom? Reading Shakespeare's Bodies", in *Alternative Shakespeares*, vol. II, ed. Terence Hawkes, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 140-63; Lisa Hopkins, "The King's Melting Body: *Richard II*", in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, eds Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard, 4 vols, vol. II *The Histories*, Malden, Blackwell, 2003, pp. 395-411; Anselm Haverkamp, *Shakespearean Genealogies of Power*, London, Routledge, 2011; Lorna Hutson, "Imagining Justice: Kantorowicz and Shakespeare", *Representations*, 106 (2009), pp. 77-101; Viktoria Kahn, "Political Theology and Fiction in *The King's Two Bodies*", *Representations*, 106 (2009), pp. 118-42.

[7]	Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[8]	Ivi, p. 43.

agli arcani della sola corporazione dei giuristi": era, come scrive Kantorowicz, un "luogo comune" nell'ambito della cultura e dell'ideologia politica del tempo. Non sono tanto "le prerogative giuridiche che i giuristi inglesi raccoglievano nella finzione dei Due Corpi del Re"; è "l'aspetto umanamente tragico della 'geminazione' regale" a essere sottolineato nella tragedia di Riccardo II: un dramma nel corso del quale la "finzione dell'unità dei due corpi si spacca in due" e dove non soltanto "la natura umana del re prevale sulla natura divina della Corona, e la mortalità sull'immortalità" ma – "ciò che è peggio" – "la stessa regalità viene a significare morte, nient'altro che morte"[9].

Pur iscrivendosi dunque nella cornice delle teorizzazioni correnti del potere sovrano, la vicenda di Riccardo II ce ne rivela così, secondo Kantorowicz, un esito che – da un certo punto di vista – appare esattamente opposto: "Il re che 'mai muore' ha qui lasciato il posto al re che sempre muore e che è soggetto alla morte più crudelmente degli altri mortali"[10].

Il richiamo alla sovranità non tanto in termini istituzionali quanto piuttosto come cultura e ideologia politica diffusa, si ritrova anche nelle pagine del secondo capitolo ("La grande eclissi. Forma tragica e sconsacrazione della sovranità") del libro di Franco Moretti *Segni e stili del moderno*[11]. Va detto subito però come non sia all'"idea" o alla "finzione" del monarca come *gemina persona* – e in verità nemmeno a un'analisi di *Richard II* o di altre *histories* shakespeariane – che l'autore dedica qui la sua attenzione, quanto piuttosto al tema della sovranità in tragedie come *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, evidenziando per di più come in esse si compia una svolta o una radicalizzazione. A differenza di ciò che accade nelle opere di argomento storico, "l'essenza del dramma" di tragedie come quelle che ho appena ricordato non consiste *tanto* nel "conflitto tra i personaggi", l'interesse non si concentra *più* "sullo sviluppo e l'esito dello scontro" per la conquista della Corona e del potere sovrano, *ma sul divenire di questo stesso potere* "un *problema*, e un problema insolubile"[12]. Eppure…

Eppure, se prescindiamo o almeno limitiamo la pertinenza di questioni legate alla forma drammatica e all'intreccio narrativo, le

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[9]   Ivi, pp. 4, 31, 30.

[10]   Ivi, p. 31.

[11]   Franco Moretti, *Segni e stili del moderno*, Torino, Einaudi, 1987.

[12]   Ivi, pp. 79-80.

analisi condotte da Moretti contengono uno sfondo di considerazioni che si rivelano importanti anche per leggere l'opera a cui ci stiamo dedicando.

Moretti osserva come la tragedia elisabettiana e giacomiana dia in un certo senso per scontata, anche se in realtà si tratta di un "omaggio ambiguo", l'idea corrente di sovranità (l'idea cioè di un "potere che ha la sua fonte *in se stesso*", di "un universo in cui *tutto ha origine dalle decisioni del re*"[13]), dato che questa, a dispetto della sua modesta e limitata capacità di descrivere i reali rapporti di potere, era la "*teoria politica*" che in quell'epoca il "nuovo sistema" mirava ad accreditare (e che "richiedeva un aumento di potere non per lo Stato, ma appunto per il monarca"). In questo senso, ad essere messe in scena non sono tanto "le istituzioni dell'assolutismo, ma la sua cultura, i suoi valori, la sua ideologia". E ciò che ne risulta – e che rappresenta il "'compito' storico assolto di fatto" da Shakespeare e dalla tragedia del suo tempo – è "la distruzione del paradigma fondamentale della cultura dominante"[14].

Riferendosi alla celebre formula schmittiana ("Sovrano è chi decide sullo stato di eccezione"[15]), Moretti osserva che "la tragedia inglese ci presenta una dinamica dei fatti esattamente opposta a quella descritta da Schmitt a proposito della dittatura […]. Quella forza che il re manifesta nella sua decisione non solo lo proclama tiranno, ma anche incapace di governare. L'esercizio conseguente della sovranità porta a una completa anarchia: le due cose fanno tutt'uno. L'assolutismo appare alla cultura tragica […] come un irresolubile *paradosso*"[16].

A parte qualche sfumatura, non sembra di scorgere nella trasparenza di queste parole un ritratto di Riccardo II?

2. Finzione contro finzione

Come nelle letture che ho richiamato qui per sommi capi, e di cui continuerò a valermi nel corso del mio lavoro, anche queste mie note

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[13]   Ivi, pp. 54, 52.

[14]   Ivi, p. 51.

[15]   Carl Schmitt, "Teologia politica. Quattro capitoli sulla dottrina della sovranità" [1922], in Id., *Le categorie del 'politico'*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998, p. 33.

[16]   Moretti, *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 51.

hanno per argomento il concetto di sovranità. Non tanto però in relazione alla storia o agli istituti giuridici o alla cultura e all'ideologia dell'assolutismo, quanto innanzitutto per quel suo radicamento nel "sé" che Emmanuel Levinas – che non ha mai smesso in tutta la sua opera di richiamarsi a Shakespeare – indicava come il *fatto* stesso che, per un "esistente", esistere significa *iniziare*, e cioè esercitare una "maîtrise", una "souveraineté" assoluta sul proprio stesso "essere"[17].

Sebbene fosse proprio all'ontologia che Levinas riferiva qui le sue analisi, il richiamo a queste parole non ha lo scopo di stabilire un fondamento ontologico o esistenziale a nozioni sociologiche o antropologiche, e d'altro canto nemmeno a un concetto giuridico-politico – *fin dove lo è* o *sempre lo sia* – come quello di sovranità, quanto piuttosto di evidenziare un aspetto che se la critica non ha certamente mancato di sottolineare (la 'persona umana', l''uomo senza altri aggettivi', il 'substrato puramente umano'…), non sempre risulta però tematizzato in modo specifico e messo in rapporto con la questione del potere: un aspetto e un rapporto che invece – e questa è la cosa che conta – a me sembrano significativamente segnati nell'opera di Shakespeare.

Questo aspetto e questo rapporto non vengono qui certo alla luce nel corso di descrizioni fenomenologiche o attraverso una qualche "analitica esistenziale", ma grazie a una *finzione poetica* che nelle radici dell'idea stessa di sovranità guarda così a fondo e ha tanta forza – una forza più sovrana della sovranità stessa, verrebbe da dire, forse perché tutt'altra – da svelarne la *finzione concettuale*. E ciò nel corso di sequenze drammatiche e verbali ciascuna delle quali ha la cogenza di una deduzione, il potere di un'illuminazione. Atto dopo atto, scena dopo scena, è la verità stessa del potere sovrano – *e cioè* la sua menzogna, la sua tragedia e la sua farsa – che si scopre attraverso un esperimento di anatomia che Shakespeare conduce mettendo nelle mani del suo personaggio il bisturi con cui egli compie la propria vivisezione.

E se da un lato il carattere fantastico di questo esperimento di scomposizione non è mai a meno di un profondo significato filosofico (non è forse superfluo ricordare come Husserl riconoscesse nella

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[17]   Emmanuel Levinas, *Le temps et l'autre*, Paris, PUF, 1983, p. 35 (tr. it. Genova, il melangolo, 1987).

"fantasia" e nella "finzione" l'"elemento vitale" della filosofia o, per meglio dire, della sua fenomenologia[18]), ciò accade dall'altro perché quel 'significato' la poesia ha l'audacia di eccederlo, di vedere oltre.

Specchiandosi nella sua rappresentazione poetica e drammatica, il paradigma filosofico o teologico-politico della sovranità – un paradigma tanto fortunato da essere stato perfino assunto come l'essenza stessa del 'politico' – si scopre per ciò che è: non molto più che una costruzione razionale, un'"idea' della volontà, un 'come se', una finzione, utile forse in qualche caso a fare sistema (a dare unità e indirizzo a un insieme disomogeneo di comportamenti e di nozioni), ma terribilmente disastrosa quando *dimentica* il suo stesso carattere di finzione, quando *perde di vista* le radici da cui trae il suo alimento (o il suo veleno). Sono *questi* gli *arcana* che la vicenda di Riccardo II *ci dà da pensare*, sottolineandone l'aspetto insieme tragico e grottesco, abissale e banalissimo: ciò che solo il gioco di una *vera* finzione è capace di mostrare, 'sospendendo' e mettendo 'fuori gioco', come si direbbe ancora con il linguaggio della fenomenologia, ogni reificazione obiettivistica. Certo, nella tragedia di Shakespeare *la* sovranità ci apparirà nelle sembianze di *un* sovrano. Ci apparirà come un volto (la poesia non è forse questo 'come', questa continua esitazione?): sempre che sia possibile in questo caso parlare di 'apparire' (dato che la "face" di Riccardo II, come dice lui stesso, "like the sun did make beholders wink", IV.i.283), e sempre che l'*autorappresentazione* sovrana di Riccardo non abbia trasformato la sua "face" in una mancanza di volto, nell'iperbole vuota di se stesso. Come in un certo senso è prima che inizi la 'catastrofe'.

3. *My crown I am*

Nelle parole di Franco Moretti citate a conclusione del primo paragrafo avevo detto di scorgere l'abbozzo di un 'ritratto' di Riccardo II. Cercherò ora di precisarne meglio qualche dettaglio: cosa che permetterà di introdurre l'altro termine dell'endiadi contenuta nel titolo di queste note.

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[18]   La formulazione esatta (e più radicale) di Husserl è questa: "la *'finzione' è l'elemento vitale della fenomenologia, come di tutte le scienze eidetiche*". Cfr. Edmund Husserl, *Idee per una fenomenologia pura e per una filosofia fenomenologica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1965, p. 150.

"My crown I am" (IV.i.190): la singolare espressione impiegata da Riccardo nel dichiararsi disposto a rinunciare alla maestà regale a favore del suo rivale Bolingbroke è una spia evidente di come il suo "io" si fosse fuso in un unico blocco con la sua Corona fino a rendersi duro, insensibile, sordo, freddo come quel metallo, rigido e incapace di adattarsi, come solo un'idea può essere. Testimonia di come egli avesse fatto della sovranità l'essenza del suo "io", e del suo "io" il riflesso del suo potere assoluto, fino a rendere indiscernibili la sua 'persona' dalla sua 'prosopopea'. E una prosopopea continua Riccardo lo è davvero: rigido come un morto, folle e testardo come un unico istante, come quell'istante indivisibile che l'ha incoronato Re, confinandolo nella solitudine assoluta di un 'attimo' sovrano. Perché, presa alla lettera, come a lui capita di fare, la sovranità è la contrazione del tempo in un unico istante: quell'istante della decisione che, per quante volte si ripeta, resta sempre *ogni volta unico* – e dove un istante è *ogni volta unico*, allora *non ci sono più istanti* e il tempo è cancellato nell'"ora' della decisione sovrana. La sovranità non è, non deve, non può, *non dovrebbe* poter essere che *un solo istante*, la finzione di un attimo indivisibile, estatico, inesteso: soggettività senza soggezione, spontaneità senza affezione, decisione senza passione, tempo che cancella il tempo, quel tempo che Riccardo crede di *dare* senza doverlo al tempo stesso *subire*.

Riccardo crede di essere proprietario assoluto della decisione che *fa* il sovrano, crede di disporre del potere dell'inizio, crede di essere, come un direttore d'orchestra o un metronomo, signore del tempo e delle sue misure, padrone di allungarlo o di accorciarlo con una sola "little word" (come gli riconoscerà Bolingbroke, I.iii.213), di ritmarlo a suo arbitrio, di decretarne l'inizio e la fine ("il tuo tempo è finito", dirà a John of Gaunt). Ma è incapace di esserne affetto, di riceverlo da altri: fino al momento in cui, vedremo, sarà costretto a *subirlo interamente*. Nella presunzione sovrana di dare il tempo a ogni cosa, di essere padrone della *totalità* del possibile (e cioè del mondo, dell'"idea" di mondo, secondo Kant), Riccardo si rende insensibile al tempo, rendendosi così *insensibile alla sensibilità stessa*, perché il tempo non è che sensibilità, sensibilizzazione, pathos, passione, affezione, passato, memoria, accoglienza, alterità (senza di che non ne avremmo alcuna esperienza). Insensibile al tempo per statuto regale (*Nullum tempus currit contra regem*[19]), Riccardo, dicevo, è insensibile

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[19]   Cfr. Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

alla sensibilità stessa: incapace di modificarsi, sempre sul punto di alterarsi e di dare in escandescenze, non abilitato o impossibilitato a riconoscere all'altro e al tempo (è lo stesso, no?) i loro 'diritti'. Il tempo si può intonarlo, ritmarlo, scandirlo in un modo o nell'altro, si può allungarne e accorciarne le misure, variarne la metrica, ma nessuno può veramente *darlo* (nemmeno il delegato del Sovrano del mondo, il rappresentante in terra della divina *regio possibilitatum*) ma tutt'al più *toglierlo*, come – lo vedremo – replicherà a Riccardo John of Gaunt. Il tempo non si dà ma, diceva Heidegger, "si dà tempo" (*Es gibt Zeit*[20]).

La decisione sovrana è il potere sull'inizio, dell'inizio, dell'inizio del tempo e dell'inizio del mondo: "as the world were now but to begin", come in *Hamlet* (IV.v.105) afferma un personaggio al seguito di Re Claudio all'apparire di Laerte acclamato re dal suo popolo ("Laertes shall be king! Laertes king!", IV.v.110). Come se (*as*) quell'inizio avesse il potere di cancellare, di rimuovere e rilevare in sé (*aufheben*) la continuità delle istituzioni e delle tradizioni, la "antiquity" e il "custom" (*Hamlet*, V.iv.106): ciò che significa – come, con saggezza inascoltata, dirà York a Riccardo che si appresta a depredare John of Gaunt e, attraverso di lui, il suo erede Bolingbroke, dei suoi possedimenti – strappare al tempo "His charters and his customay rights" (II.i.196). La sovranità è tutta contenuta nella finzione di quell'"as" e di quel "now": *come se* il mondo avesse inizio solo *ora*, tutto in quest''attimo', solo 'adesso'. Come se quel "now" fosse l'inizio del tempo e del mondo. Il potere sovrano è il potere di *un solo*, di *un unico* istante, che si ripete ogni volta come fosse la prima. Come se quell''ora' di tempo potesse cancellare il tempo stesso, tutta la recettività e la passività che l'ha reso possibile. Ed è in quel "come se" (*as, als ob*), è in quella finzione di una "spontaneità assoluta" che comincia a emergere l'"antinomia" della sovranità, nel senso in cui ne parlava Kant nella prima Critica. Ci torneremo.

Tratteniamoci qui ancora un po' sul costrutto di quell'*ego sum* "my crown" di Riccardo, richiamandoci nuovamente a qualche parola di Kantorowicz. Nessuna cesura temporale *dovrebbe* avere il potere di dividere l'istante della sovranità, *dovrebbe* avere il potere di spezzare la continuità chiamata a garantire il "carattere perpetuo della

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[20]   Martin Heidegger, *Tempo ed essere*, Napoli, Guida, 1987, p. 106.

monarchia"[21]. Nessun "intervallo" di tempo *dovrebbe poter* separare il passaggio della Corona da un re a un altro re[22]: come ci mostra in modo simbolico, minuzioso, quasi rituale, il passaggio di quell'insegna regale dalle mani di Riccardo a quelle del cugino Bolingbroke.

> Here, cousin – seize the crown. Here, cousin –
> On this side, my hand; and on that side, thine. (IV.i.181-82)

Non soltanto su quell'anello d'oro su cui brillano le gemme come astri celesti *tutto ritorna a se stesso e allo stesso*: è la corona stessa che passando da un capo all'altro, da un re a un altro re, deve ritornare a sé, senza alcuna interruzione d'istante.

Nelle grida lanciate alla sepoltura dei sovrani francesi nell'abbazia di Saint-Denis ("Le roi est mort!... Vive le roi!") la spaziatura di quei tre puntini è solo il segno della pausa del respiro richiesta per saldare indissolubilmente insieme il sintagma della morte e quello della vita, l'istante senza tempo in cui la mitica Fenice rinasce *come se stessa* dalle sue stesse ceneri. Contro ogni evidenza, abbacinando ogni evidenza, nemmeno una briciola di tempo *dovrebbe poter* separare la vita dalla morte, la morte dalla vita, il vivo dal morto e il morto dal vivo. Nella sovranità – o per meglio dire nei sui *condizionali incondizionali* – non c'è tempo. E non c'è tempo per la sovranità. La sovranità non può dividersi né condividersi: una possibilità, un potere che è proprio solo della morte, perché solo la morte – quella morte che "keeps […] his court" (III.ii.162) dentro il vuoto della Corona, come dovrà riconoscere Riccardo quando comincerà a *subire* gli effetti delle sue azioni e delle sue decisioni – può donare a un mortale quella finzione di immortalità che lo rende sovrano. Solo l'ʼanelloʼ del ritorno, il ritornare a sé della Corona, può, parafrasando Nietzsche, imprimere sul divenire il sigillo dell'eterno. Solo l'incombere, il sovrastare *dall'alto*, l'*imminere*, il *beforstehen* della morte, come diceva Heidegger[23], può rendere un se stesso signore di se stesso, può fare l'altezza dell'Altezza. Solo l'"incondizionalità" della morte può rendere "incondizionato" un potere mondano. E se è nella *Jemeinigkeit*, nell'esser-sempre-mia, della morte – per ricorre-

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21 Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

22 Cfr. ivi, p. 331.

23 Martin Heidegger, *Essere e tempo*, Torino, UTET, 1969, pp. 377-78.

re ancora a parole heideggeriane – che risiede, il carattere proprio, l'*Eigentlichkeit* di una esistenza umana, se come ci dice anche re Riccardo, ormai sul punto di vedersi alienata ogni cosa ("lands, […] lives, and all", III.ii.151), "nothing can we call our own but death" (III.ii.152); se nessuno può 'togliere' a un altro la 'proprietà' della sua morte, *allo stesso modo* nessuno potrà *propriamente* privare Riccardo della sua Corona: dovrà essere egli stesso a farlo illudendosi di conservare comunque una monarchia interiore, mentre si accorgerà ben presto che con la distruzione del suo potere sovrano andrà in pezzi anche il suo regno interiore, dato che l'uno e l'altro non erano per lui che una medesima cosa.

Murato vivo nella solitudine assoluta del suo potere indivisibile e incondivisibile, vivo-morto, morto-vivo, né vivo né morto, e morto e vivo, transfert inconsapevole della perennità della Corona, 'subject' di quella finzione, soggetto a essa, finzione di se stesso, sordo e crudele *come lo vuole la sua volontà sovrana*, Riccardo non può che nutrirsi di solitudine.

E quando, scena dopo scena, Riccardo vedrà infine quella sua condizione di assoluto isolamento raffigurata nella cerchia muraria del castello di Pomfret in cui è imprigionato – come lo era in precedenza dal cerchio della sua corona – allora gli si apriranno gli occhi. Anzi, le orecchie: quelle orecchie che – prima che tutto avesse inizio, prima che Bolingbroke corresse contro di lui calcando le orme che il tempo gli disegnava davanti – John of Gaunt aveva inutilmente tentato di aprirgli, di *dissordargli* ("undeaf", II.i.16), con la "deep harmony" che hanno "the tongues of dying men" (II.i.5-6), quelle orecchie che, sorde a ogni ascolto che non fosse l'armonia, o meglio la disarmonia della sovranità, ecco che ora gli si spalancheranno di colpo all'udire una musica che stride ("sour"), che non tiene ("keep") il tempo, che lo spezza ("broke"), che non osserva, che non rispetta, che non mantiene la misura ("no proportion kept"); quella musica che ora gli svelerà di quanto immenso vuoto fosse fatto il suo "state", e al tempo stesso *chi* fosse il vero attore protagonista di una rappresentazione di cui, a dispetto della sua invadente presenza di sovrano, egli non era in fondo che una semplice comparsa. Gli si svelerà tutto questo, e lui lo rivelerà a noi, grazie alle parole piene di poesia, di verità e di musica di cui Shakespeare gli farà dono (V.iv.41-48).

Restiamo alla musica.

4. *Music at the close*

Prigioniero nel castello di Pomfret, consapevole di non aver più nulla
in cui sperare, Riccardo tenta di giocare un'ultima carta:

> I have been studying how I may compare
> This prison where I live unto the world;
> And for because the world is populous,
> And here is not a creature but myself,
> I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out. (V.iv.1-5)

Nonostante ormai non abbia più termini di paragone (ma Riccardo
ne ha mai avuti oltre a se stesso, se è vero che la grandezza della
sovranità, come Kant diceva del "sublime", è "al di là di ogni
comparazione"?[24]), nonostante non sia ormai più in condizione di
confrontarsi con altri (ma lo aveva mai fatto?), Riccardo ci prova lo
stesso, mettendo in atto un esperimento di autogenerazione (ma,
anche in questo caso, dobbiamo correggerci: Riccardo non aveva mai
fatto altro).

Questo esperimento che, come vedremo tra non molto, ha
anch'esso a che fare col tempo e con la musica, consiste nella finzio-
ne di una sorta di andro-partenogenesi, grazie alla quale, facendo
della sua mente ("brain") la femmina del suo spirito ("soul") e del suo
spirito il padre (V.iv.6-7), Riccardo cerca di produrre una *generazione
spontanea* di pensieri che, *generando a loro volta altri pensieri*, alla fine
dovrebbero popolare il suo "little world" di "humours" (V.iv.9-10)
differenti come succede nel grande mondo. Il gioco però non lo
soddisfa (non potrò entrare qui nei dettagli, pure interessantissi-
mi): dopotutto, è sempre lui a condurre la musica, a darle il tempo,
a recitare ("play") diverse persone (di Re, di mendicante, e poi di
nuovo di mendicante, e di nuovo di Re: non molto 'diverse', dunque)
"in one person" (V.iv.31). Ed è allora che – nella consapevolezza che
né lui, qualunque cosa sia ("whate'er I be", V.iv.38), dato che ormai
non lo sa più, né alcun altro uomo "that but man is" (V.iv.39), "With
nothing shall be pleased till he be eas'd / With being nothing"
(V.iv.40-41) – sente risuonare quella musica di cui dicevamo ("Music
do I hear", V.iv.41).

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[24]   Immanuel Kant, *Critica della facoltà di giudizio*, Torino, Einaudi, 1999, p. 84.

Questa musica che non va a tempo, che non ne rispetta le misure, sembra giocare a commento del tentativo disperato e paradossale di Riccardo di trovare la via alla pluralità e all'alterità proprio quando non è più in condizione di farlo, dell'ennesimo insuccesso a cui va incontro nel tentativo di popolare il regno della sua solitudine di finzioni che si rivelano subito incapaci di generare vere differenze, capaci solo di duplicarsi e di duplicare lui stesso. Richiama anche però – e qui a rovescio – quella "music at the close" (II.i.12) evocata da John of Gaunt, ormai alla fine dei suoi giorni, nella speranza di indurre Riccardo alla prudenza, quando c'era ancora tempo per evitare la catastrofe:

> O, but they say the tongues of dying men
> Enforce attention like deep harmony. (II.i.5-6)

Ed era con quella "deep harmony" – con il racconto ("tale", II.i.16) della sua fine anticipata, anzi rappresentata da lui stesso *come se fosse già avvenuta* – che il Duca di Lancaster sperava, come abbiamo già detto, di aprire le orecchie del nipote con un richiamo alla saggezza ("Thy state of law is bondslave to the law", II.i.113), con la profezia dell'auto-deposizione inscritta nella sua medesima investitura ("possess'd now to depose thyself", II.i.108) e, perfino, con la premonizione *della sua morte in corso* ("O, no. Thou diest, though I the sicker be", II.i.91): tutto inutile, dato che allora 'moribondo' o 'morituro' egli si illudeva di non essere. Ma, ora…

>   Music do I hear.
> Ha, ha; keep time! How sour sweet music is
> When time is broke, and no proportion kept.
> So is it in the music of men's lives;
> And here have I daintiness of ear
> To check time broke in a disordered string;
> But for the concord of my state and time,
> Had not an ear to hear my true time broke. (V.iv.41-48)

Interrompo qui la citazione. Ci ritornerò alla fine del mio testo, richiamando le parole che nel corso di questo monologo *in interiore homine* Riccardo fa seguire immediatamente a quelle che ho appena citato. Dedichiamoci qui per qualche istante ancora a quella "music at the close" (II.i.12) *che ora è la sua*, a quella musica – venuta *come un miraco-*

lo di realtà da chissà dove, inviata da chissà chi – a cui il sovrano sta prestando attenzione. Perché Riccardo è così attento al risuonare di quella musica che non va a tempo? Perché lo infastidisce, certo, ma anche perché nelle sue disarmonie risente il disaccordo che regnava tra il suo "state" e il tempo, come egli stesso ci dice. Forse, però, non si tratta solo di questo.

Se, come diceva Nietzsche, la musica è, parla "la lingua della volontà stessa" (*die Sprache des Willens selbst*), Riccardo che durante il suo regno non ha avuto orecchio che per la musica della *sovranità* potrebbe non averne per la "*sovranità* della musica" (Souveränität *der Musik*)?[25] Perché, come la musica, la volontà sovrana consiste – o non è ciò che dice di essere – nell'"attimo' in cui fa sorgere il tempo da un inizio assoluto, dallo sgorgare di un''ora' che non è preceduto da nessun altro 'ora'. E non era forse questo *il solo* 'tempo' per cui Riccardo aveva orecchio, e di cui si illudeva di disporre a piacimento?

Certo. Il fatto è che di questa dimensione del tempo, che Husserl descriveva in termini di "generazione continua" – dove ogni "ora" consiste in un'"impressione originaria" (*Urimpression*) come "assoluto inizio" (*absolute Anfang*), come *Urquell* di quella produzione incessante, ma che non viene "prodotta a sua volta, non nasce come qualcosa di generato, ma per *genesis spontanea*: è genesi originaria. Non cresce (non ha alcun seme). È creazione originaria" – di questa dimensione originaria del tempo – che Husserl chiamava "*soggettività assoluta*", ma per dirla, precisava, "ci mancano i nomi"[26] – nessun soggetto, anche se accade *in lui*, proprio perché *accade* in lui, può essere e dirsi padrone.

Ciò che è possibile *alla* musica (o alla poesia o all'arte in generale), ciò che è possibile e benefico (solo) *come* musica (dato che la musica non performa nulla, o non performa altro che se stessa) è impossibile *come* performazione politica, perché quel 'come' non è davvero un 'come' (*als*) ma un 'come se' (*als ob*), non è che una finzione, un privilegio dell'arte che si trasforma in maleficio quanto traduce la sovranità *della musica* in musica *della sovranità*, quando traduce quel darsi del *tempo* nel *dare* tempo di una performatività che – credendosi e volendosi assoluta e sovrana – rischia continuamente di degenerare

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[25]   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogia della morale*, Milano, Adelphi, 1984, p. 95.

[26]   Edmund Husserl, *Per la fenomenologia della coscienza interna di tempo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1998, pp. 124, 102.

in una pura pulsione di potere, una pulsione di appropriazione o di padroneggiamento (*Bemächtigungstrieb*, con una parola di Freud) – se non proprio una pulsione di morte.

Ciò che Nietzsche chiamava "Souveränität *der Musik*", e che non è che il tempo nella sua *genesis spontanea*, puro sgorgare e tramontare di 'ora', senza 'ritenzione' e senza 'scrupoli', tempo senza coscienza di tempo (come con altre parole diceva anche Kierkegaard nella sua analisi del *Don Giovanni* di Mozart[27]), rappresenta ora a Riccardo l'ultimo e più forte richiamo a quel potere sovrano definitivamente perduto, deposto e sconsacrato a opera di se stesso; ma è al tempo stesso il riconoscimento che quel potere o quella potenza non appartiene a nessuno, se non alla musica e al tempo, al tempo della musica e alla musica del tempo. Ed è per questo che irritato, come sempre, ai limiti della follia ("This music mads me. Let it sound no more", V.iv.61) *alla fine – e siamo proprio alla fine* – Riccardo non può che dare la sua *benedizione* ("blessing", V.iv.64) al *cuore* di *chi* (quale 'cuore'? quale 'chi'?) quella musica gli ha *dato*: "For 'tis a sign of love, […] a strange brooch in this all-hating world" (V.iv.65-66), perché quella musica ora gli rivela tutto, proprio tutto ciò che c'era da rivelare.

Ma, abbandoniamo per il momento questa strada e richiamiamo rapidamente qualche sequenza scenica e verbale che ci mostrerà come, passo dopo passo, *il* tempo rivendicherà, e alla fine riconquisterà i suoi diritti e il suo potere nei confronti di quel potere *sul* tempo che la decisione sovrana si illudeva di poter contenere nel presente assoluto della sua performazione.

5. *The breath of kings*

La sovranità come potere sul tempo ci viene incontro fin dalle prime battute della tragedia di Riccardo II e, già dalle prime scene, si mostra nelle prerogative che tradizionalmente la caratterizzano: il diritto sulla vita e sulla morte, il bando, la facoltà di punire e quella di condonare la pena (più tardi, questa volta a opera del nuovo monarca, si tratterà anche della grazia e del perdono). Tale potere del *flatus vocis*

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[27] Sul rapporto tra la musica e il tempo nel celebre saggio di Kierkegaard, mi permetto di rinviare al mio testo "Abramo e la filosofia", in *Il sacrificio*, a cura di Renata Ago, Roma, Biblink, 2004, pp. 199-251.

del sovrano verrà riconosciuto (e accettato) da Bolingbroke (che si
appresta a trascorrere sei anni di esilio per effetto del bando sovrano)
con queste parole:

> How long a time lies in one little word!
> Four lagging winters and four wanton springs
> End in a word – such is the breath of kings. (I.iii.213-15)

Eppure, nel volgere di pochi versi e nel ricorrere degli stessi ter-
mini (la parola, il respiro…), questo potere assoluto sul tempo e sulla
totalità del possibile, comincia a incrinarsi, a mostrare dei limiti, anzi,
in un certo senso a rivelarsi *impossibile*. A Riccardo che tenta ipocrita-
mente di consolare lo zio (dato che in realtà sta aiutandolo a raggiun-
gere al più presto la sua tomba) per il dolore che gli ha provocato la
sua decisione di esiliarne il figlio ("Why, uncle, thou hast many years
to live", I.iii.225), John of Gaunt risponde:

> But not a minute, King, that thou canst give.
> Shorten may days thou canst with sullen sorrow,
> And pluck nights from me, but not lend a morrow. (I.iii.226-28)

Tu hai il potere ("canst") di accorciare ("shorten") i giorni del mio
tempo, tu puoi ("canst") strapparmi le notti, puoi privarmi di esse
come si coglie un frutto ("pluck"), ma non puoi *darmi* ("give") un
solo minuto, non puoi prestarmi, non puoi farmi dono ("lend") di
un solo mattino. Puoi aiutare ("help", I.iii.229) il tempo a solcar-
mi come un aratro, ma non puoi *arrestare* il suo cammino, il suo
"pilgrimage" (I.iii.230). Il potere dell'inizio come potere *sul* tempo
si scopre già qui una finzione impossibile. Ancorché sovrano,
Riccardo, come qualunque altro uomo, non dispone affatto di una
simile possibilità. Non ha la facoltà, non ha il potere di *dare* tempo
ma unicamente di *toglierlo*: una capacità ben diversa che limita di
principio il senso stesso della sovranità. Quel potere si rivela come
una possibilità di *dare la morte togliendo la vita*, ma mai e poi mai
di *dare la vita togliendo la morte*. Ciò che mostra come la signoria del
delegato di Dio *sia resa tale e subito contraddetta* dal potere che il
tempo ha su di lui:

> Thy word is current with him for my death,
> But dead, thy kingdom cannot buy breath. (I.iii.231-32)

Presso il *tempo*, la tua parola ha valore *per la mia morte* ma, una volta che io sia morto, il tuo regno *non può* ricomprare il mio respiro.

Prima ancora che inizi la tragedia vera e propria, la sovranità si scopre una potenza cupa, negativa, una vicenda di sottrazioni senza il minimo dono. Il potere di quella "little word" (I.iii.213) che nel suo eterno presente si presentava come un "respiro" capace di contenere in sé ogni misura del tempo, il potere sovrano sul tempo e sulla totalità del possibile, si rivela per quello che è: può dare la morte, certo, ma *come tale* non può regalare neanche un minuto di vita. Ci vuole altro per questo.

E saranno di nuovo le parole di rimprovero che il Duca di York rivolgerà a Riccardo, che si appresta a spogliare il suo rivale Bolingbroke, Duca di Hereford, dell'eredità che legittimamente gli spetta, a rivelarci come il suo gesto sia un sopruso nei confronti *del tempo e di se stesso*, sovrano per "sequence and succession" (II.i.199), e cioè *grazie* al tempo: quel tempo che dovrebbe invertire il suo corso per impedire una catastrofe che già si annuncia irrimediabile; quel tempo che, scena dopo scena, presenterà il conto aggiungendo via via nuove somme alla lista dei suoi crediti, rivendicando i suoi diritti nei confronti della pretesa di Riccardo di esserne sovranamente padrone:

> Take Hereford's rights away, and take from time
> His charters and his customary rights.
> Let not tomorrow then ensue today.
> Be not thyself; for how art thou a king
> But by fair sequence and succession? (II.i.195-99)

Richiamandomi a Kant, ho già accennato al fatto che la sovranità non è che un'"idea", un "concetto dell'incondizionato", un "come se": la finzione di una performatività che si vuole – appunto – *senza condizioni* (al di sopra delle istituzioni, delle tradizioni, dei costumi, delle convenzioni), senza condizioni e, anche, *senza finzioni* e, proprio per questo, un'assoluta finzione. E, in effetti, le "idee" kantiane, vale a dire l'anima (e cioè l'io che si interpreta come sostanza), il mondo e Dio, sono "concetti dell'incondizionato", paradigmi di sovranità[28].

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[28]   Sul concetto di "sovranità" in rapporto alle "idee" kantiane, cfr. Jacques Derrida, *Stati canaglia*, Milano, Cortina, 2003, p. 129 e, più in generale, Id., *La Bestia e il Sovrano*, vol. I (2001-2002) e vol. II (2002-2003), Milano, Jaca Book, 2009 e 2010, le cui formulazioni hanno a tal punto guidato la composizione di queste note da rendere impossibile richiamarle anche solo indirettamente.

Ed è in riferimento all'idea di "mondo" che Kant mette in luce le antinomie (mi riferisco qui alla terza) del cominciamento, esemplificandola sul carattere di una volontà che si presume dotata di una "spontaneità assoluta", e quindi sovranamente capace "di dare inizio assoluto a uno stato" (di cose). E significativamente indica anche *che cosa o chi* faccia resistenza e renda "una vuota finzione del pensiero" l'idea di un inizio assoluto. Richiamo qui il celebre esempio di Kant: se io ora mi alzo dalla sedia, posso ben dire, in termini di "causa", che questo evento darà inizio a un nuovo stato e potenzialmente a una nuova serie di eventi ma, "quanto al tempo", quel primo evento, quell'inizio che si pretendeva "assoluto" *non è che* "la continuazione di una serie precedente"[29]. È dunque il tempo che entra in conflitto e rende auto-contraddittoria l'idea di una spontaneità in grado di compiere un'"azione" capace di dare inizio *assoluto* a uno stato – insomma l'idea stessa di sovranità. Ed è proprio il tempo – quel tempo che per lui sta ormai per scadere – che comincia a far breccia nell'"ipseità" sovrana o nella sovranità dell'"ipse" di Riccardo II:

> Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs;
> Make dust our paper […]
>   talk of wills –
> […]
> For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings
> […] For […] (III.ii.145-60)

Non analizzerò questa sequenza memorabile a cui ho già fatto abbastanza violenza con le mie omissioni. Mi limito a sottolineare, nel dettato di questo monologo di Riccardo, l'improvviso (anche se non in ogni senso nuovo) *mutamento* della melodia e dell'affetto: il registro corale, il tono elegiaco[30], il richiamo al passato, il significato testamentario, il carattere narrativo. Come se, discesi dalla sublime altezza della Corona in cui erano incastonati come una giostra di diademi, quei Re morti si sedessero anche loro sulla nuda terra per partecipare al compianto, per scrivere insieme sulla polvere un'elegia del tempo e della condizione umana che il primo alito di vento

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[29]   Immanuel Kant, *Critica della ragione pura*, Milano, Adelphi, 1995, pp. 506-8.

[30]   Sul "linguaggio elegiaco" cfr. la premessa di Agostino Lombardo, intitolata "L'elegia di Riccardo", alla sua traduzione di *Richard II*, cit., p. 8.

cancellerà. Ed è appunto *il tempo che passa* e che come *passato*, come passione, come affetto, come affezione, come ferita, sta aprendo una breccia destinata a farsi sempre più profonda nell'eterno presente della sovranità.

6. *Hollow crown*

Riprendo la citazione dei versi che poco più su avevo lasciata appesa a un "For…":

> For within the hollow crown
> That rounds the mortal temples of a king
> Keeps death his court; and there the antic sits. (III.ii.160-62)

Interrompiamoci ancora. Osserviamo ciò che Riccardo vede ora *di colpo*. Vede ciò che fino a quel momento non aveva visto, abbagliato dalla luce del ritorno a sé di quel piccolo anello, vede l'*interno* della corona, vede il suo immenso vuoto, simile al cavo di una bara o a una buca nella terra. E si rende conto che ciò che *fa* di un sovrano un sovrano è ancora più sovrano di lui: è quel "signore assoluto" (*absolut Herr*), come Hegel chiamava la morte. Si rende conto che quel corpo immortale che, secondo il linguaggio giuridico del tempo, gli era stato conferito con la sua elezione a vicario di Dio, e che assorbiva per così dire in sé il suo corpo mortale, non è che una finzione e cioè, ancora una volta, un 'come se' ("As if this flesh which walls about our life / Were brass impregnable", III.ii.167-68): una finzione e, appunto, un dono della morte.

Se infatti da un lato la morte (in quanto *decesso*) sembra indicare il punto di 'separazione' e di 'scissione' tra il corpo immortale e quello mortale del sovrano, così come l'insinuarsi anche di un solo istante temporale nel trasferimento della Corona da un re defunto al suo successore sembra interrompere la perennità del potere sovrano (ciò che rappresentava la croce, più o meno brillantemente risolta, della teoria giuridica dei due corpi del Re), dall'altro è *proprio* e *solo* la morte che (intesa in senso 'proprio') può sorreggere l''idea' o la 'finzione' di quella congiunzione e di quella perennità – essendo infatti la morte, con parole di Heidegger, la sola "proprietà" che non si può né dare né ricevere, né cedere né acquistare: la sola cosa *inalienabile*, *indivisibile* e *incondivisibile*. Per quanto ciò sembri paradossale, è pro-

prio il carattere *intransitivo* della morte a sostenere l'"idea' o il dogma del 'corpo immortale' del Re, e della continuità senza interruzioni del suo *transfert*. È la sua assoluta *indemissibilità* a giustificare l'idea della morte come *demise*, come un passaggio o una cessione di diritti da un capo a un altro capo di re. Proprio come più in generale è nel suo carattere *incondizionato* che risiede l'idea di un potere *incondizionatamente* sovrano. L'"immortalità' del corpo politico del sovrano è un dono della morte: come se, vivo, egli già fosse il suo monumento marmoreo, come se la sua 'altezza', la sua 'maestà' sublime, eretta, gli *giacesse* già accanto, deposta, disposta, distesa come il *gisant* che lo attende – pietra sopra la pietra. Come se l'istante indiviso e indivisibile in cui la Corona si posa sul capo del sovrano fosse già l'istante della sua morte.

Se infatti quel cerchio d'oro[31] è il simbolo del carattere *incondizionato* del potere sovrano, nelle vite degli uomini c'è soltanto una possibilità che sia *incondizionata*, e perciò indivisibile, incondivisibile, impartecipabile, intrasferibile. Incondizionata, *unbezügliche*, come scriveva Heidegger[32], e cioè senza relazioni, senza possibili transazioni, non ricevuta o non percepita da altri che da se stessi: la possibilità della morte. Solo la morte, il potere della morte, fa la sovranità del sovrano: un potere che non per caso, dunque, rientrava nelle prerogative, anzi definiva il tratto saliente dell'esercizio della sovranità.

Soltanto una possibilità, dicevo. Ora, senza temere di ricorrere a una formulazione antinomica, autocontraddittoria, Heidegger chiamava quella possibilità: "possibilità *dell*'impossibilità" o "possibilità *in quanto* impossibilità"[33]. La morte è infatti indifferente alla contraddizione perché ne è all'origine, e non si nutre che di essa. Indifferente alla differenza tra l'affermazione e la negazione, tra il "sì" e il "no": "Ay, no. No, ay; for I must nothing be" (IV.i.200), risponde Riccardo a Bolingbroke che gli chiede se sia contento di cedere a lui la sua Corona (Sì–no. No–sì). La morte è indifferente all'alternativa, che perciò non è alternativa, tra essere e non-essere, perché il suo *niente* d'essere è il suo *essere* niente. Proprio come la differenza

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[31]   Cfr. Rossella Ciocca, *Il cerchio d'oro. I re sacri nel teatro shakespeariano*, Roma, Officina, 1987.

[32]   Heidegger, *Essere e tempo*, cit., p. 394.

[33]   Ivi, p. 393.

indifferente del tempo che insieme *è* e *non è*, che *è* perché *non ha essere* e *non è* perché *ha l'essere del niente*. Origine di quei paradossi in 'e-e' (e l'uno e l'altro) e in 'né-né' (né l'uno né l'altro) dello scettico[34] che nega validità logica al principio del 'terzo escluso', o di quell'"antic" (e, in effetti, uno è la figura o la controfigura dell'altro), quel Matto o quel Buffone che ha stanza ("sits") nel vuoto della Corona dove la morte tiene la sua corte ("Keeps […] his court", III.ii.162). Da dietro il sipario, Amleto spia la scena.

7. The cares I give, I have

> The cares I give, I have, though given away.
> They 'tend the crown, yet still with me they stay. (IV.i.197-98)

Queste espressioni sono contenute nella risposta che Riccardo rivolge a Bolingbroke qualche istante prima di cedergli la sua Corona. E si tratta anche qui di un paradosso. Di un paradosso scettico, di un paradosso che viola il principio del terzo escluso: "I give, I have" – insieme, nello stesso tempo. Oppure… Oppure, forse, quel dare/avere (così come quell'andare/restare) tagliato da quella virgola marca una diacronia che tuttavia non siamo in grado di sentire e di capire, e che forse la sequenza di un brevissimo incontro che precede di qualche istante la conclusione della vicenda terrena di Riccardo potrebbe indicare.

Anche se si esprimono in molte forme, anche se si dicono in molti modi, gli innumerevoli paradossi che attraversano il testo rinviano a una cellula originaria che è sempre la medesima, e che qui ci appare in modo particolarmente efficace. Si tratta sempre di quella *inalienabilità* di cui ho parlato nel precedente paragrafo e che ora, commentando le parole di Riccardo che ho appena citato, si potrebbe formulare così: quali che siano e per quante siano le "cares" che io cedo o che mi vengono sottratte, fossero pure quelle che accompagnano la Corona, fossero pure tutte, ma proprio tutte quelle che ho, restano tuttavia con me ("yet still with me they stay"), dato che

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[34] Sul tema dello scetticismo, in un senso ben più ampio di quello preso qui in considerazione, cfr. Stanley Cavell, *Il ripudio del sapere. Lo scetticismo nel teatro di Shakespeare*, Torino, Einaudi, 2004.

finché vivo niente e nessuno potrà sottrarmi la *cura* che "I have" (e uso l'espressione latina *cura* perché è alle *Confessiones* di Agostino che penso, anche se avrei potuto impiegare la parola heideggeriana *Sorge*, che comunque proviene da quella fonte).

Prepariamoci dunque ad assistere alla scena in cui Riccardo disfa se stesso e, *sconsacrando* il suo "state", ci offre un ultimo, estremo squarcio sulla sovranità. Si tratta anche in questo caso di una scena famosissima e studiatissima, durante la quale il sovrano, scrive Kantorowicz, "lascia che il suo corpo politico si sciolga nell'aria": una scena di "sacramentale solennità" che "lascia lo spettatore senza fiato"[35]. Non è dunque il caso di insistervi, se non forse per sottolineare come nello squarcio di questa scena si mostri l'iperbole dell'autorappresentazione sovrana di Riccardo: *da* sovrano, *in quanto* sovrano, *mettere sovranamente fine* alla propria *sovranità*. Questa è almeno l'impressione spettacolare che la sua recita vuole offrire (cercando di farci dimenticare che dopotutto si tratta di una rinuncia forzata) e che in fondo non fa che confermare come la sovranità – in quanto 'idea' di una volontà incondizionata, in quanto 'finzione' di una spontaneità assoluta – non sia che un potere distruttivo e auto-distruttivo.

Nell'apprestarsi a compiere quel gesto, Riccardo ritiene in ogni caso di non cedere al suo rivale altro che la Corona, continuando a rimanere interamente sovrano del suo regno interiore, fosse pure quel regno popolato soltanto da dolori:

> You may my glories and may state depose,
> But not my griefs. Still am I king of those. (IV.i.191-92)

Ma anche questa si rivelerà ben presto un'illusione.

Ritorniamo dunque al carcere di Pomfret e lì raggiungiamo Riccardo prima che venga ucciso da un sicario di Bolingbroke.

8. *Numbering clock*

L'avevamo lasciato solo, sconfitto dalle sue impossibili fantasie di ripopolamento del regno della sua immensa e definitiva solitudine,

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[35]   Kantorowicz, *op. cit*., pp. 35-36.

intento a meditare sul suo tempo spezzato ("time broke", V.iv.48). Ormai non ha più nulla da aspettarsi o in cui sperare. Eppure – come già era avvenuto con il risuonare di quella musica stonata e misteriosa – capiterà ancora qualcosa, capiterà che *qualcuno* passi la soglia di quel limbo, penetrando in quel suo regno provvisorio. Ci ritornerò più avanti, come è giusto, dato che questa visita seguirà immediatamente la benedizione che Riccardo tributerà al cuore di chi (chiunque fosse) gli aveva *dato* quella musica che infine egli aveva *accolto* come un segno d'amore, e precede di pochi istanti la sua morte.

Abbiamo in precedenza ricostruito alcune delle fasi in cui si andavano via via squilibrando i rapporti di forza tra il tempo e la sovranità – i veri protagonisti, in un certo senso, della tragedia o della favola di Riccardo II. Ora, nel castello di Pomfret, assistiamo a un rovesciamento completo che investe, per così dire, il nucleo generativo della struttura soggetto-oggetto. Come ci appare nel verso che nel monologo interiore di Riccardo segue quelli che avevo lasciato in sospeso nel corso del quarto paragrafo:

I wasted time, and now doth time waste me. (V.iv.49)

Ho sciupato, ho fatto scempio, ho sprecato, ho devastato – ho svuotato il tempo, e ora il tempo svuota me. Come se la devastazione del tempo compiuta da Riccardo si rovesciasse ora contro di lui, svuotando il suo 'sé' di ogni minima traccia di *Selbständigkeit*, di 'mantenimento di sé' (e quindi dello stesso 'sé'), svuotando perfino il proprio "I am": quell''io sono" che, come diceva Kant, "accompagna tutte le nostre rappresentazioni" e tiene uniti gli istanti di tempo che fluiscono e si succedono. Tanto poco può dirsi ancora sovrano (almeno) dei suoi "griefs" (IV.i.192) – come per qualche tempo si era illuso di poter essere – che ora:

    sighs, and tears, and groans
  Show minutes, times, and hours. (V.iv.57-58)

Qui stiamo assistendo all'ultima metamorfosi di Riccardo, o meglio alla sua definitiva *metabolé*. Ora, *ormai*, Riccardo non appare spogliato soltanto della sovranità di quell''istante' estatico (di quell'*Augenblick*) in cui consisteva il suo potere sul tempo. Ora, *ormai*, non ha

smarrito soltanto la sovranità sul suo regno interiore. Ora, *ormai*, è come se avesse perduto perfino la più elementare capacità di tenere uniti, e di dare un qualunque senso, al succedersi incessante degli istanti. Ora, *ormai*, quegli istanti può solo *contarli*:

> For now hath time made me his numbering clock.
> My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar
> Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch
> Whereto my finger, like a dial's point,
> Is pointing still in cleansing them from tears.
> Now, sir […]. (V.iv.50-55)

Come lo specchio che Riccardo aveva gettato a terra dopo aver tentato inutilmente di *vedersi vedere* il suo volto sovrano, anche il suo 'sé' si è "cracked in an hundred shivers" (IV.i.288), e il vero signore delle sue "cares" (IV.i.197) lo ha trasformato in una *cosa*, in un *arnese* che misura il tempo, *restituendolo* così, in un certo senso, *a se stesso*. Lo ha trasformato in un "numbering clock" dove gli istanti defluiscono a sciami uno dopo l'altro, in una successione che nessun *presente sovrano* e nessuna *presenza a sé* è più in grado di trattenere, di ritenere, di mantenere uniti. Scisso in se stesso, l'"ora' unico e indivisibile della sovranità si è definitivamente diviso in una successione di 'ora' che nessun 'io sono' è più in grado di trattenere, di padroneggiare.

Ed è alla fine di questo soliloquio che entra in scena il misterioso visitatore a cui più su facevo cenno, e che si presenta così:

> I was a poor groom of thy stable, King. (V.iv.72)

Questo stalliere che è riuscito "With much ado" (V.iv.74, trambusto? fatica? pena? difficoltà?) a ottenere il permesso di visitare e di alzare lo sguardo ("look upon") sul viso ("face", V.iv.75) del suo antico Signore – per l'*ultima*, e perciò anche la *prima* volta, *e forse perfino il solo ad averlo fatto* – penetra in quel regno di solitudine "Where no man never comes" (V.iv.70), come un messia o un angelo della morte.

L'apparizione enigmatica di quello sconosciuto, un tempo *famulus* al focolare del re, ha luogo mentre Riccardo si risolve a benedire la musica come "a sign of love", come "a strange brooch in this all-hating world" (V.iv.65-66); accade come l'evento unico, inatteso,

miracoloso, umile e realissimo di un *face to face*. La visitazione di quel povero stalliere, estraneo e misteriosamente familiare al tempo stesso, messaggero dell'alterità assoluta dell'altro e della morte, è scandita dal tempo di una parabola, di una favola o di una *ballad*, dall'evenienza di un passato che non si è mai dato al presente, dal passato di "una volta" ("sometimes", V.iv.75), del 'c'era una volta' di un povero mozzo e del suo re ("I was a poor groom […], King, / When thou wert king", V.iv.72-73). Tutto si compie nel volgere di un breve scambio di battute tra un "was" e un "wert", di un dialogo accorato e semplicissimo durante il quale, sulle note di quella musica disaccordata e benedetta, Riccardo trova il tempo di chiedere perdono al suo cavallo ("Forgiveness, horse!", V.iv.90) per avergli augurato di trascinare nella sua rovina l'usurpatore Bolingbroke: un accadimento di ospitalità che ripiega il presente sul segreto della promessa e dell'addio:

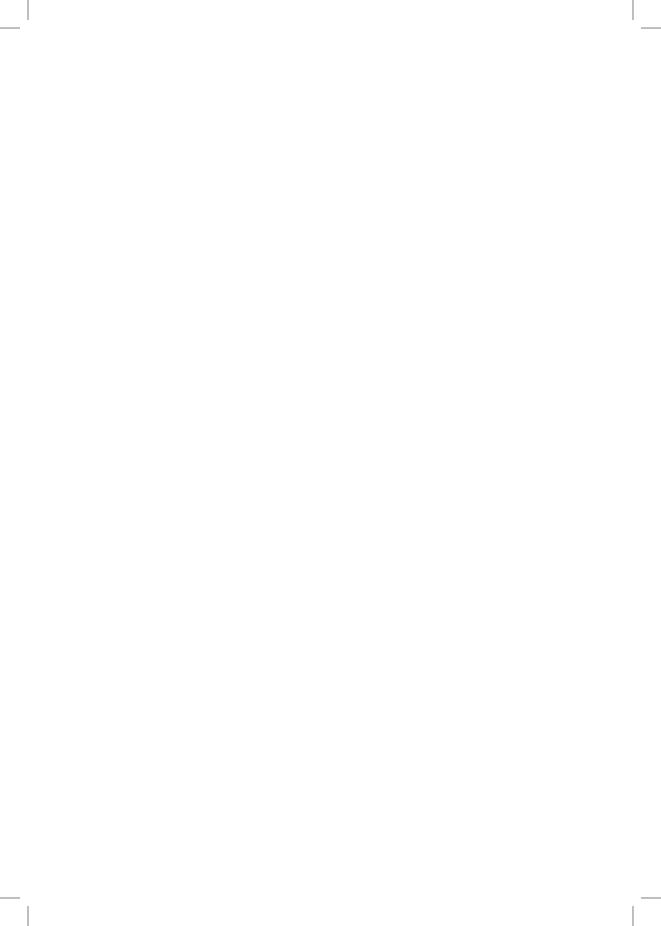> Richard
> If thou love me, 'tis time thou wert away.
> Groom
> What my tongue dares not, that my heart shall say. (V.iv.96-97)

Riccardo ha oltrepassato ormai l'ultimo confine di sovranità, quel confine del dolore e della sofferenza dove – scriveva Levinas – "acculé à l'être, je le saisis encore, où je suis encore sujet de la souffrance", signore dei miei "griefs" (IV.i.192). *Ora*, invece, nel parossismo di quella sofferenza, "sighs, and tears, and groans" (V.iv.57) accadono a Riccardo come "minutes, times, and hours" (V.iv.58) che non è più in grado di padroneggiare, perché nel pianto e nel singhiozzo "la suprême responsabilité de cette assomption extrême tourne en suprême irresponsabilité, en enfance. C'est cela le sanglot et par là précisément il annonce la mort". L'ultima diga del potere sovrano cede nell'istante stesso in cui si disfa il dominio sull'istante, sull''ora', sull''adesso' ("maintenant"), perché se quell'adesso "c'est le fait que je suis maître, maître du possible, maître de saisir le possible", la morte "n'est jamais maintenant", la morte "déserte tout présent"; perché "entre le présent et la mort, entre le moi et l'altérité du mystère" si scava un abisso incolmabile. Nell'annunciarsi della morte "nous ne *pouvons plus pouvoir*", siamo di fronte a "un événement" assolutamente inconoscibile, di cui "le sujet n'est plus sujet". Ma questa "fin

de la maîtrise" indica "que nous sommes en relation avec quelque chose qui est absolument autre", "quelque chose dont l'existence même est faite d'altérité". L'annunciarsi della morte *non conferma* la solitudine del soggetto, *ma la spezza*. E così comprendiamo forse un po' meglio come, scusandosi di abusare del nome del poeta, Levinas scrivesse: "Il me semble parfois que toute la philosophie n'est qu'une méditation de Shakespeare"[36].

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[36]   Levinas, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-63, 73, 60.

"To Save the Honor of Reason":
Quasi-Antinomial Conflict in *Troilus and Cressida*

Andrew Cutrofello

In the final pages of the last book published in his lifetime, Jacques Derrida put forth "a terribly ambiguous hypothesis", namely, that under certain circumstances, and in a certain manner, it might be incumbent upon us "to save the honor of reason" (*sauver l'honneur de la raison*): "Someone in me whispered to me: 'Perhaps it would be a matter of saving the honor of reason'"[1]. Underscoring the conditional character of his 'abyssal' hypothesis with qualifiers such as 'perhaps' (*peut-être*), 'what if' (*si*) and 'as if' (the Kantian *als ob*)[2] – Derrida continues:

> The honor of reason – is that reason? Is honor reasonable or rational through and through? The very form of this question can be applied analogically to everything that evaluates, affirms, or prescribes reason: to prefer reason, is that rational or, and this is something else, reasonable? […] What authorizes one to inscribe again or already under the authority of reason a particular *interest* of reason (*Interesse der Vernunft*), this interest *of* reason, this interest *in* reason, this interest *for* a reason that, as Kant reminds us, is at once practical, speculative, and architectonic, though *first of all architectonic*? […] That is what motivates Kant in the antinomies to privilege the moment of the thesis over against an antithesis that threatens the systemic edifice and thus disturbs the architectonic desire or interest, most often so as to take into account, antithetically, themes that should be important to us today, namely, divisibility, eventfulness, and conditionality[3].

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, Engl. transl. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 118.

[2] Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 119.

[3] Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 120.

In taking up the themes of divisibility, eventfulness, and conditionality, Derrida seeks not to defend the Kantian antitheses but to acknowledge the irreducible heterogeneity of "plural rationalities" that resist architectonic integration with one another[4]. Observing that the Kantian antinomies call into question both the unity of the world and the unity of reason, he contrasts the architectonic interest in preserving reason's unity with a desire to save reason's honor at the moment it verges on "running aground" (*échouement*). Reason threatens to run aground when it becomes incapable of grounding (*échouage*) the totality of discourse. Derrida characterizes this threat as that of reason's autoimmunity, a paradoxical, last-ditch effort to resist disintegration through self-annihilation[5].

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant discerned a similar danger in the antinomies, the dialectical conflicts that arise when reason attempts to determine the world as a totality. The discovery of reason's "natural antithetic"

> leads reason into the temptation either to surrender itself to a skeptical hopelessness or else to assume an attitude of dogmatic stubbornness, setting its mind rigidly to certain assertions without giving a fair hearing to the grounds for the opposite. Either alternative is the death of a healthy philosophy, though the former might also be called the *euthanasia* of pure reason[6].

To avert this danger Kant seeks a critical solution to the antinomies. Instead of simply defending reason's dogmatic metaphysical theses against its skeptical antitheses, he attempts to do justice to interests on both sides of each conflict. He does so by showing that the conflicts are only apparent. Reason generates its antinomies by striving to complete the regressive series of conditions of appearances in either of the two ways available to it: by positing a first term in the series, and by representing the series as an infinite whole. The critical insight that successively given appearances can never comprise a completed totality in either of these ways shows that the theses and antitheses don't really contradict each other after all[7].

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[4]   Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 120.

[5]   Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 123. Cf. the reference to "transcendental autoimmunity" on p. 125.

[6]   Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Engl. transl. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 460 (A407/B433-34).

[7]   Here I omit complications having to do with the different ways in which Kant resolves the mathematical and dynamical antinomies.

By resolving the antinomies Kant saves the honor not only of reason but of metaphysics. In the preface to the first edition of the *Critique* he compares pre-critical metaphysics to the dishonored Hecuba at the fall of Troy:

> There was a time when metaphysics was called the *queen* of all the sciences, and if the will be taken for the deed, it deserved the title of honor (*Ehrenname*), on account of the preeminent importance of its object. Now, in accordance with the fashion of the age, the queen proves despised on all sides; and the matron, outcast and forsaken, mourns like Hecuba: *Modo maxima rerum, tot generis natisque potens – nunc trahor exul, inops* – Ovid, *Metamorphoses*[8].

The noble (mobled?) queen of the sciences has been supplanted by "*indifferentism*, the mother of chaos and night in the sciences"[9]. That saving the honor of the good mother is equivalent to saving the honor of reason is underscored on the final page of the *Critique* when Kant uses the term "misology" (*Misologie*) to characterize the indifferentistic attitude. Hecuba reappears in the chapter on the "Discipline of Pure Reason", where Kant observes that to resolve the antinomies it is sufficient to recognize that the argumentative weapons deployed by each of the two rival parties are "apagogic" rather than "ostensive": instead of directly defending their own positions, each side indirectly does so by attacking the other. This critical insight makes it possible to discern a third position the truth of which the two indirect attacks jointly establish, namely, that human cognition is restricted to spatiotemporal appearances and so cannot resolve any of the problems of speculative metaphysics[10]. This time invoking the words of Virgil's Hecuba rather than Ovid's, Kant admonishes any would-be dogmatist tempted to resume the old battles: "*non defensoribus istis tempus eget*" ("the time does not need these defenses"): Hecuba's words to Priam as he arms himself during the fall of Troy[11].

Why does Kant twice personify metaphysics as Hecuba? What's Hecuba to Kant, or Kant to Hecuba? Although he doesn't say so

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[8]   Kant, p. 99 (Aviii).

[9]   Kant, p. 100 (Ax).

[10]   Strictly speaking, this argument itself comprises an indirect defense of transcendental idealism, buttressing the direct arguments advanced in the "Transcendental Aesthetic".

[11]   Kant, pp. 670-71 (A793-94/B821-22).

explicitly, the answer would seem to have to do with the fact that Kant's Roman sources point in the direction of Aeneas' founding of a new Troy. The *translatio imperii* would serve as an apt metaphor for Kant's ambition to found a philosophical republic in which rational disputes could be adjudicated by law. It would be interesting to look closely at the contexts of the passages Kant quotes from Ovid and Virgil to see how they work for, and possibly against, this critical metaphor. Contexts are conditions. Since reason demands unconditioned conditions, we would ultimately have to go back to Homer and (to the extent possible) earlier sources of the Trojan myth. By reading all of the relevant texts side by side with the *Critique of Pure Reason* we would be able to consider whether they can be architectonically unified or whether they would collectively generate a quasi-antinomy in which reason's architectonic pretentions would be challenged by the very sources of its guiding metaphor. Derrida identifies, or constructs, such a quasi-antinomy in *Glas*, a two-column text whose juxtaposed readings of Hegel and Genet 'problematize' Hegel's dialectical version of Kantian architectonics[12]. With some such larger reading project in mind, in this modest paper I would like to highlight the special relevance of *Troilus and Cressida* to Derrida's challenge to the Kantian enterprise.

Troilus and Cressida is a 'problematic' play in more senses than one. It was explicitly dubbed a "problem play" by Frederick Boas at the end of the nineteenth century. This generic term was used at the time to characterize dramas in which social problems figured in a prominent way. Boas applied it to three plays that Shakespeare wrote at the turn of the seventeenth century, namely, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*:

> All these dramas introduce us into highly artificial societies, whose civilization is ripe unto rottenness. Amidst such media abnormal conditions of brain and emotion are generated, and intricate cases of conscience demand a solution by unprecedented methods. Thus throughout these plays we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain[13].

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[12]   Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, Engl. transl. by John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

[13]   Frederick S. Boas, *Shakspere and His Predecessors*, London, John Murray, 1896, p. 345.

Troilus and Cressida meets all of these criteria. It doesn't end in marriage, so it isn't a conventional Shakespearean comedy. Like *Romeo and Juliet* it deals with the unhappy fate of two star-crossed lovers, but Cressida's betrayal of Troilus is more sad than tragic. Conversely, the death of Hector at the hands of Achilles' Myrmidons is more sordid than tragic given the unscrupulous manner in which Achilles takes advantage of the unarmed Hector and then takes credit for having killed him himself. As we will see, Troilus associates each of these emotional climaxes with Hecuba.

When Troilus sees Cressida give his sleeve to Diomedes, his initial response is one of complete denial. "Was Cressid here?" he asks Ulysses, "She was not, sure" (V.ii.131-32). When Ulysses retorts: "Most sure she was […] Cressid was here but now" (V.ii.133-34), Troilus exclaims:

> Let it not be believed, for womanhood!
> Think, we had mothers. Do not give advantage
> To stubborn critics, apt, without a theme
> For depravation, to square the general sex
> By Cressid's rule. Rather think this not Cressid. (V.ii.135-39[14])

Puzzled, Ulysses replies: "What hath she done, Prince, that can soil our mothers?", Troilus: "Nothing at all, unless that this were she" (V.ii.140-41). Without explicitly naming Hecuba, Troilus seeks to save her honor. His reasoning appears to run like this: if Cressida has given my sleeve to Diomedes, then every woman must be false; and, since Hecuba is a woman, she must have been false to Priam. Ulysses "cannot conjure" (V.ii.131) either Troilus' denial or his reasoning.

Ulysses could be said to personify the architectonic interest in, of, and for reason. "By an *architectonic*", Kant writes, "I understand the art of systems"[15]. Ulysses is a master practitioner of this art. We first meet him when the Greek generals are in council during a lull in the seventh year of the Trojan War. Their commander, Agamemnon, and their elder statesman, Nestor, attribute the protracted length of the war to the greatness of the task and the trial of the gods. Respectfully disagreeing,

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[14]   All citations from the play are to the third edition of the Arden series: William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. David Bevington, London, Thomson Learning, 2006.

[15]   Kant, p. 691 (A832/B860).

Ulysses argues that the walls of Troy would long since have fallen had it not been for the Greek army's violation of *rule* and *degree*:

> The specialty of rule hath been neglected;
> And look how many Grecian tents do stand
> Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions. (I.iii.78-80)

>   O, when degree is shaked,
> Which is the ladder to all high designs,
> The enterprise is sick. (I.iii.101-3)

> Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets
> In mere oppugnancy. (I.iii.109-11)

Ulysses blames the general oppugnancy – discord or conflict – on the pride of Achilles. His insubordination – his neglect of the specialty of rule and disdain for degree (i.e., rank) – has spread like an infection throughout the Greek camp, prompting even "blockish" Ajax to emulate him (I.iii.376). ("Emulation" is another one of Ulysses' diagnostic terms, I.iii.134.) The result is a kind of general indifferentism and – what especially galls the rational Ulysses – contempt for those who, by virtue of their intelligence, deserve to command those who are physically strong but lacking in intelligence. With a hint of the *ressentiment* that consumes the equally intelligent but servile Thersites, the prince of Ithaca complains about the misologistic attitude of Achilles and Patroclus:

>   The still and mental parts,
> That do contrive how many hands shall strike,
> When fitness calls them on, and knows by measure
> Of their observant toil the enemy's weight –
> Why, this hath not a finger's dignity.
> They call this bed-work, mapp'ry, closet war;
> So that the ram that batters down the wall,
> For the great swinge and rudeness of his poise,
> They place before his hand that made the engine
> Or those that with the fineness of their souls
> By reason guide his execution. (I.iii.200-10)

For much of the rest of the play, Ulysses uses his architectonic skills to get Achilles back into line in order to restore the unity of

rule necessary to defeat the Trojans. In this endeavor he is unexpect-
edly aided by a "roisting challenge" that Hector sends to "[t]he dull
and factious nobles of the Greeks" to rouse "their drowsy spirits".
Having heard that "their great general slept / Whilst emulation in the
army crept" Hector expects to "wake him" by offering to fight any
Greek soldier who professes to have a mistress more beautiful than
his (II.ii.208-13). This apparently open-ended challenge is perceived
by the Greek generals to be aimed at Achilles, but for the sake of
restoring rule and degree Ulysses advises Nestor to arrange a false
lottery so that Ajax will fight Hector instead.

Meanwhile, in a parallel council scene in Troy, Priam reports that
Nestor has "once again" (II.ii.2) pledged that the Greeks will end
their campaign if the Trojans will restore Helen to Menelaus. Hector
recommends that they do so. The outcome of the war is uncertain, he
observes, and a great deal of Trojan blood has already been spilt for
the sake of keeping "a thing" (II.ii.22) they have stolen. Even if Helen
were rightfully theirs she would not have the "value" (II.ii.23) of any
one of the Trojan soldiers' lives lost in her defense. Concluding that
all prudential reasoning is on the side of accepting Nestor's offer,
Hector ends his argument with a rhetorical question: "What merit's
in that reason which denies / The yielding of her up?" (II.ii.24-25).

Troilus indignantly replies to Hector that the "worth and honour"
of their "dread father" cannot be measured by "fears and reasons"
(II.ii.26-27, 32). This remark prompts their brother Helenus, a priest,
to come to reason's defense:

> No marvel though you bite so sharp at reasons,
> You are so empty of them. Should not our father
> Bear the great sway of his affairs with reason,
> Because your speech hath none that tell him so? (II.ii.33-36)

Troilus will have none of this. Ridiculing his brother's prudence he
drives a wedge between reason and honor:

> You are for dreams and slumbers, brother priest;
> You fur your gloves with reason. Here are your reasons:
> You know an enemy intends you harm;
> You know a sword employed is perilous,
> And reason flies the object of all harm.
> Who marvels, then, when Helenus beholds

> A Grecian and his sword, if he do set
> The very wings of reason to his heels,
> And fly like chidden Mercury from Jove,
> Or like a star disorbed? Nay, if we talk of reason,
> Let's shut our gates and sleep. Manhood and honour
> Should have hare hearts, would they but fat their thoughts
> With this crammed reason; reason and respect
> Make livers pale and lustihood deject. (II.ii.37-50)

This withering rebuke silences Helenus, who (if we can believe Pandarus) can but "fight indifferent well" (I.ii.215). But it doesn't satisfy the valiant Hector: "Brother", he admonishes, "she is not worth what she doth cost / The keeping" (II.ii.51-52[16]). Troilus retorts: "What's aught but as 'tis valued?" But Hector, who has evidently read Plato's *Euthyphro*, replies that "value dwells not in particular will; / It holds his estimate and dignity / As well wherein 'tis precious of itself / As in the prizer" (II.ii.53-56). Troilus, however, still isn't persuaded. With dramatic irony he illustrates the binding character of an honorable commitment:

> I take today a wife, and my election
> Is led on in the conduct of my will,
> […]
> Two traded pilots 'twixt the dangerous shores
> Of will and judgement. How may I avoid,
> Although my will distaste what it elected,
> The wife I chose? There can be no evasion
> To blench from this, and to stand firm by honour. (II.ii.61-68)

Suddenly, Cassandra breaks in to warn that if the Trojans don't give Helen back to the Greeks, Troy will burn. Yet Troilus remains unmoved by even "these high strains / Of divination" (II.ii.113-14). Paris now concurs that they should continue to fight to keep Helen. When Priam admonishes him that he has "the honey" (II.ii.144) of "her fair rape" (II.ii.148) but his brothers "the gall" (II.ii.144) Paris protests that Helen is a common cause of honor. At this point Hector chides both Paris and Troilus, revealing, albeit anachronistically, that he has actually read Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*:

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[16] Here I follow the Quarto. The Folio, which Bevington follows, has "holding" for "keeping".

> Paris and Troilus, you have both said well
> And on the cause and question now in hand
> Have glozed – but superficially, not much
> Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought
> Unfit to hear moral philosophy.
> The reasons you allege do more conduce
> To the hot passion of distempered blood
> Than to make up a free determination
> 'Twixt right and wrong. (II.ii.163-71)

Hector clinches his defense of the moral interests of reason by observing that Helen is Menelaus' lawful wife. To have stolen her in the first place was wrong, and "to persist / In doing wrong extenuates not wrong, / But makes it much more heavy" (II.ii.186-88). After reaching this conclusion through sober practical reasoning in which he all but invokes Kant's categorical imperative, Hector unexpectedly flip-flops, forsaking the honor of reason in favor of the reason of honor:

>   Hector's opinion
> Is this in way of truth; yet, ne'ertheless,
> My sprightly brethren, I propend to you
> In resolution to keep Helen still;
> For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence
> Upon our joint and several dignities. (II.ii.188-93)

Delighted with this reaffirmation of the "goodness of a quarrel / Which hath our several honours all engaged" (II.ii.123-24), Troilus applauds his older brother for "touch[ing] the life of [their] design" (II.ii.194). A "theme of honour and renown" (II.ii.199), Helen trumps all prudential and moral interests of reason.

Just as Ulysses personifies the Greeks' architectonic interest in the unity of reason, so Troilus personifies the Trojan ideal of pure honor. By 'pure' honor I mean the kind of honor that adheres to a cause simply for being identified as a cause. Aeneas uses this word to characterize the "praise" (I.iii.243) that worthiness earns from "the repining enemy" (I.iii.244): "That breath Fame blows; that praise, sole pure, transcends" (I.iii.244). The debate in the Trojan council scene represents a kind of antinomy or quasi-antinomy between the claims of pure honor and the claims of pure practical reason. This conflict is replicated by the war itself, with Troilus and Ulysses representing,

respectively, its dogmatic thesis and skeptical antithesis. Ulysses is a skeptic rather than a dogmatist because his architectonic interest in rule and degree supports no genuine moral or metaphysical ideal. In what George Wilson Knight calls the play's "metaphysical universe" Troilus personifies Trojan idealism, Ulysses and Thersites Greek cynicism[17]. The Greeks' open mockery of Menelaus makes it difficult for them to sustain any enthusiasm for the war. To the extent that they are motivated to fight at all it is less by the notion that Helen is a theme of honor than by a competitive desire to best the Trojan soldiers in man-to-man combat. (Even this motivation is lacking in Thersites, who would, however, prefer beating Ajax to railing at him.)

While older critics such as Knight tend to idealize the idealistic Trojans, more recent critics, influenced by feminism, have had more sympathy for the skeptical Greeks and less respect for the dogmatic Trojans, who openly conflate chivalry with the commodification of women (representing Helen as the ultimate 'trophy wife'). As in a good Kantian antinomy, each of the two camps does best when it is on the attack, apagogically deriving performative contradictions from the other side's guiding principles. They do less well when defending their own positions directly, which fact suggests that their conflict cries out for a critical solution. Cressida, a theme of honor for Troilus, highlights the play's quasi-antinomial character when she warns Troilus that "[b]lind fear, that seeing reason leads, finds safer footing than blind reason, stumbling without fear" (III.ii.68-69). Somewhat like the Thracian maiden who laughed when Thales fell into the ditch, Cressida realizes that Troilus is prone to stumbling because he runs headlong into dangerous territory without letting himself be guided by reason. Like Helenus, Cressida knows that it is more reasonable to be guided by reason, even if this involves the acknowledgment of fear: "To fear the worst oft cures the worse" (III.ii.70). Troilus, however, is not entirely fearless. At first he fears the physical consummation of his desire for Cressida. Then, after learning that she must be handed over to the Greeks in exchange for Antenor, he fears that she will prove false to him. In this case seeing reason leads blind fear when for once it would be better to let blind reason stumble without fear. When

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[17] George Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy* [1930], New York, Routledge, 2001, p. 51. Knight discerns "an antinomy between 'individualism' and 'social order'".

Ulysses, who cynically classifies Cressida among the "sluttish spoils of opportunity / And daughters of the game" (IV.v.63-64), enables Troilus to witness her flirtation with Diomedes, the Trojan prince succumbs to a quasi-antinomial shock:

> If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
> If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
> If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
> If there be rule in unity itself,
> This is not she. O, madness of discourse
> That cause sets up with and against itself!
> Bifold authority, where reason can revolt
> Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
> Without revolt! This is and is not Cressid.
> Within my soul there doth conduce a fight
> Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate
> Divides more wider than the sky and earth,
> And yet the spacious breadth of this division
> Admits no orifex for a point as subtle
> As Ariachne's broken woof to enter. (V.ii.145-59)

Echoing Ulysses' earlier representation of the cosmic and social disorder that follows the loss of respect for degree and rule, Troilus exclaims that "The bonds of heaven are slipped, dissolved and loosed" (V.ii.163). But the loss of "rule in unity" means something for the traumatized metaphysical dogmatist that is different from what it means for the architectonic skeptic. By "rule in unity" Troilus means not hierarchical unity but self-identity. Were there rule in unity, Cressida would be Cressida. But Cressida is not Cressida. Coming to terms with this metaphysical and even logical contradiction involves coming to terms with the loss of the unity of reason. In the opposition between Ulysses and Troilus, Shakespeare has portrayed not just a quasi-antinomy but a kind of meta-antinomy between two different ways of responding to antinomial conflicts. On one side stands Ulysses' salvific effort to restore rule in unity; on the other, Troilus' disillusioned farewell. The difference between these two attitudes is nicely captured by Derrida:

> Between running aground and grounding, we would endure the desperate attempt to save from a disastrous shipwreck, at the worst moment of an admitted defeat, what remains honorable at the end of a

battle lost for a just cause, a noble cause, the cause of reason, which we would wish to salute one last time, with the eschatological melancholy of a philosophy in mourning. When nothing more can be saved, one tries to save honor in defeat. To save honor would thus be not the salvation [*salut*] that saves but the salutation [*salut*] that simply salutes or signals a departure, at the moment of separation from the other[18].

Thrust into an experience of eschatological melancholy, Troilus bids farewell to rule in unity. Yet it isn't reason that threatens to run aground in the final scenes of *Troilus and Cressida*. It is honor. Troilus personifies the autoimmunity of honor when he chides Hector for showing mercy to his defeated enemies rather than ruthlessly slaughtering them. Without explicitly naming Hecuba, he dissociates himself from her: "Let's leave the hermit Pity with our mother" (V.iii.45[19]). Hector's response – "Fie, savage, fie!" (V.iii.49) – sums up the danger posed by honor's autoimmunity. After he has been savagely slaughtered by the ruthless Achilles, and Troilus has suffered the personal ignominy of losing his horse to Diomedes, the only remaining task is to save the honor of honor. On the verge of defeat, Troilus cries to the heavens: "I say at once: let your brief plagues be mercy, / And linger not our sure destructions on!" (V.xi.8). When Aeneas objects: "My lord, you do discomfort all the host" (V.xi.10), Troilus replies:

> You understand me not that tell me so.
> I do not speak of flight, of fear, of death,
> But dare all imminence that gods and men
> Address their dangers in. Hector is gone.
> Who shall tell Priam so, or Hecuba? (V.xi.11-15)

Earlier I suggested that *Troilus and Cressida* is a problematic play in more than one sense. For Kant, a problematic concept is one

that contains no contradiction but that is also, as a boundary, for given concepts, connected with other cognitions, the objective reality of which can in no way be cognized. The concept of a *noumenon*, i.e., of a
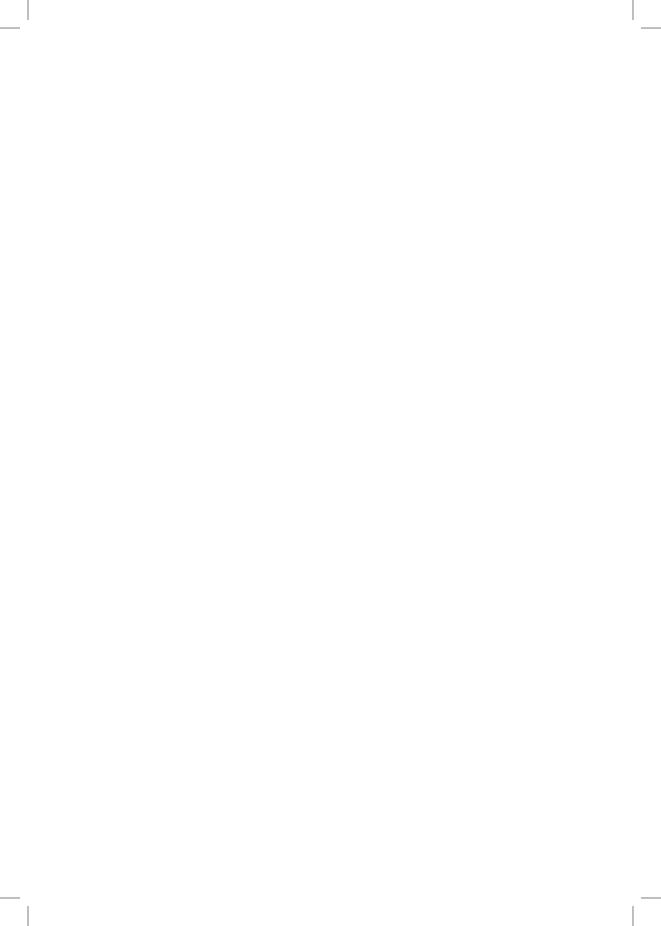
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18   Derrida, *Rogues*, pp. 122-23.

19   Here again I follow the Quarto's singular "mother" rather than the Folio's plural "mothers".

thing that is not to be thought of as an object of the senses but rather as a thing in itself (solely through a pure understanding)[20].

Kant's critical solution to the antinomies consists in recognizing that ideas of reason pose unresolvable metaphysical problems. Critique saves reason's honor by highlighting its own problematicity. If Derrida goes further than Kant it is by problematizing this very conception of problematicity. At the heart of the experience of deconstruction is not just the fracturing of the world of appearances, but the fracturing of the "unity of the regulative Idea of the world"[21]. That there isn't "rule in unity itself", that a "thing inseparate does divide more wider than the sky and earth", is the melancholy truth to which Derrida, like Troilus, bears witness. Whether saving the honor of reason is a sufficient response to this predicament, or whether it might be necessary to save the honor of honor itself, is one of the questions with which *Troilus and Cressida* leaves us. Perhaps, at the very moment when honor threatens to succumb to autoimmunity, we should say to ourselves: "Let's save honor's honor", or, as Troilus puts it: "Strike a free march to Troy! With comfort go. / Hope of revenge shall hide our inward woe" (V.xi.30-31). But this rhyming couplet is a false ending that hints at the lingering problem of autoimmunity. No wonder Pandarus reappears, bequeathing to us the play's final problematic word: "diseases" (V.xi.56).

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[20] Kant, p. 350 (A254/B310).

[21] Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 121.

Sucking the Sweets of Sweet Philosophy: Shakespeare's Dramatic Use of Philosophy

Erik W. Schmidt

> TRANIO
> Glad that you thus continue your resolve
> To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy.
> Only, good master, while we do admire
> This virtue and this moral discipline,
> Let's be no Stoics nor no stocks, I pray,
> Or so devote to Aristotle's checks
> As Ovid be an outcast quite abjur'd.
> Balk logic with acquaintance that you have,
> And practise rhetoric in your common talk;
> Music and poesy use to quicken you;
> The mathematics and the metaphysics,
> Fall to them as you find your stomach serves you.
> No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en;
> In brief, sir, study what you most affect.
> (*The Taming of the Shrew*, I.i.27-40[1])

The challenge of philosophical bardolatry

The works of Shakespeare provide a special opportunity to explore the connection between literature and philosophy since the plays were written during a period of significant philosophical upheaval. Epistemic questions about the limits of human understanding, met-

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[1]   Unless otherwise stated, all quotations throughout the essay refer to *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, *et. al.*, New York-London, Norton & Company, 1997.

aphysical questions about the intelligibility of causal relations, and ethical questions about the existence of an underlying moral order and the divine right of kings all dominate the early modern philosophical landscape and they shape many of Shakespeare's plays. So it is natural to think about the plays from a philosophical perspective.

Such a connection between philosophy and literature is not unique to Shakespeare; we find it in several other English Renaissance writers. As Sir Philip Sidney writes in his *Defence of Poesy*, reflecting a common sentiment of the time, "philosophers offer us rules or precepts; historians give us examples, and poets provide us with both"[2].

We need to be careful, however, since Shakespeare's relationship to philosophy is quite different from other writers of the period. His appeals to philosophy are far more fragmented than the unified vision found in writers like Edmund Spenser and John Milton. Unlike those writers, Shakespeare is not attempting to forge the great English epic or develop a mythology for a pure Protestant England. He is writing entertainment and he incorporates philosophy in ways that are fragmented, rather than fully or systematically developed, and the philosophical elements he includes are frequently misrepresented. Shakespeare is simply not as careful in this regard as other writers of the period because his goals as a dramatist are different.

For example, the version of stoicism we find in *Julius Caesar* is an inaccurate caricature of unemotional narcissistic pessimism that bears little resemblance to the perspective advocated by Seneca or Marcus Aurelius[3]. When Cassius abandons his Epicurean ideals to follow Brutus's stoicism in the final act of the play (*Julius Caesar*, V.i.95), for example, he promptly gives in to premature pessimism and commits suicide the moment he hears the rumour that Titinius has been surrounded (V.iii.28-45).

This misrepresentation of the principles of stoicism matters little to Shakespeare, however, since he is using stoicism largely to reveal Brutus's nobility and humanity, through his consistent failure to fully live up to his stoic ideals. Since a mistaken caricature

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2   Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, London, Thomson Nelson, 1965, pp. 106-7.

3   A. D. Nuttall offers a convincing description of this difference. A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008, rpt. 2008, pp. 171-220.

of stoicism works just as well, if not better, for this purpose than a more accurate or nuanced account, Shakespeare has little incentive to get stoicism right.

We must be careful, therefore, to avoid what I will call philosophical bardolatry[4]. The fear is not that we will attribute too much knowledge and foresight to Shakespeare, but that we will attribute an explicitly philosophical intention that his plays lack. We simply cannot derive a unified philosophical vision that lies behind the plays, whether we attach that vision to Shakespeare or to some set of Renaissance conventions and beliefs he might have drawn from the culture around him. We don't even see Shakespeare making an effort to use philosophical themes or material to cultivate the sort of intellectual wit found in plays written by Marlowe, Greene, Nashe and other University Wits.

From a historical perspective, therefore, a philosophical exploration of Shakespeare may seem unpromising, especially if we are searching for philosophical elements that have been developed in a complete or systematic way. For Shakespeare uses philosophy to follow what will affect us, to use the words of Tranio that open this essay, and not to pursue some independent intellectual goal. In what follows, I argue that while this is certainly true, he nevertheless uses philosophy to accomplish various dramatic goals in ways that are sophisticated and insightful.

The essay breaks down into three sections. First, I provide an overview of the way Shakespeare uses philosophy to pursue three kinds of dramatic goals in the plays. Next, I outline the way our study of those effects contributes to philosophy. Finally, I explain how focusing on the issue of dramatic contribution enables us to address three important concerns about any effort to link literature to philosophy. By the end, I hope to show how thinking about the dramatic role philosophy plays in Shakespeare's dramas can help us develop a more complete account of the relationship between philosophy and Shakespeare while avoiding the spectre of philosophical bardolatry.

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[4]   It's interesting that the first use of the term 'bardolatry' can be found in George Bernard Shaw's criticism of Shakespeare's failure to engage seriously with social and philosophical issues. George Bernard Shaw, *Three Plays for Puritans*, New York, Brentano's, 1901, p. xxxi.

What is the dramatic contribution of philosophy to the plays?

Shakespeare incorporates philosophical elements in many of his plays. In some cases we find philosophical material taken from texts and positions floating around London during the time when he wrote. In other cases, we find various forms of philosophical method, including the varieties of reasoning, logic, and rhetoric Shakespeare would have learned in his Latin grammar school education. Both types of elements make distinct contributions to the dramatic worlds Shakespeare creates on stage. This inclusion of philosophy fits into a larger pattern of metaleptic layering found in his writing[5]. Shakespeare layers his plays by introducing extra-diegetic elements or references to the broader world offstage to fill out or enhance the world created through a performance.

The inclusion of philosophy, therefore, joins other innovations in his plays, like the various references to acting that we see or the staging of plays within the plays. Sometimes Shakespeare uses this layering for comic or political effect, like the reference in *Hamlet* to the boy acting troupes that were putting London theatre companies out of business around the time of that play's performance (II.ii.325-36). At other times, he uses it as a grander gesture, as in Antonio's statement at the start of *The Merchant of Venice* that "I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano; / A stage where every man must play a part, / And mine a sad one" (I.i.77-79). This line, which paraphrases a line written by Erasmus[6], is repeated again in Jacques's famous "all the world's a stage" soliloquy in *As You Like It* (II.vii.138-65). At other times, Shakespeare makes explicit references to the Globe Theatre, which creates in the audience a broader awareness of their relationship to the current performance. We see this, for example, in Prospero's lament in *The Tempest* that "The solemn temples, the great globe itself, / Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve" (IV.i.153-54).

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[5]   I use the term 'metaleptic' here in Gérard Genette's original sense of a narrative layering that involves paradoxical references to other, logically distinct, layers in the narrative structure. In this case it is the inclusion of extra-diegetical elements into the imaginative world created onstage. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 234-35.

[6]   "For what else is the life of man but a kind of play in which men in various costumes perform until the director motions them offstage?" Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, Engl. transl. by Clarence Miller, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 44.

We also see metaleptic layering in the way Shakespeare refers to political events, whether references to the rebellion of the Earl of Essex in *Troilus and Cressida*[7] or the Midlands peasant rebellion of 1607 over grain prices in *Coriolanus*[8]. While potentially dangerous (a performance of *Troilus and Cressida* was postponed for several years due to its dangerous political references and satire[9]) these extra-diegetic references to offstage events add depth to the action onstage by recruiting the immediate concerns of the audience. The inclusion of discussions about the ethics of regicide or the justice of war extends and clarifies those concerns[10].

A final example of this layering, one that joins the inclusion of philosophy, can be seen in Shakespeare's use of epilogues that straddles the liminal domain between actor and character. We see this clearly in Puck's epilogue at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in Prospero's epilogue at the end of *The Tempest*.

In all of these examples, metaleptic layering plays a role within the dramatic world of the play that is partly conditioned by the identity that element has in the extra-diegetic world offstage. That off-stage role informs its meaning or dramatic significance within the play. Such elements are, we might notice, precursors to the longstanding tradition of setting Shakespeare's plays in the contemporary world, where contemporary references fill out the meaning of what happens

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[7] For a full discussion of the connection between Achilles and the Earl of Essex, see David Bevington's introduction to the Arden edition, Third Series, of *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. David Bevington, Walton on Thames, Nelson, 1998, pp. 398-429.

[8] "Let us kill Coriolanus, and we'll have corn at our own price" (*Coriolanus*, I.i.8-9). George David offers a full discussion of the connection between this scene and the Midlands rebellion of 1607. George David, "Plutarch, Insurrection, and Dearth in *Coriolanus*", in *Shakespeare and Politics*, ed. Katherine Alexander, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 110-29.

[9] David Bevington makes a convincing case that the play was further delayed not only because of its reference to the Earl of Essex but also because of the connection between Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, and the character of Ulysses. Outside of the production of *Richard II* for the Earl of Essex and his supporters on the eve of his attempted rebellion, *Troilus and Cressida* is arguably Shakespeare's most politically dangerous play. The fact that it displays a wide range of approaches to political philosophy only adds to its clear relevance to philosophical discussions about Shakespeare.

[10] We might think here, for example, of the changes in the way Richard II, Bolingbroke, and Henry V reason about the wars they engage in and the way those shifting patterns throughout the 'Henriad' dramatize the emergence of a more modern conception of the crown.

on stage. We might think here, for example, of a recent staging of *Hamlet* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in which Polonius places a wiretap on Ophelia before her encounter with Hamlet. This completes the image of the court as a surveillance state, and it dramatically reinforces Ophelia's lack of self-determination. Even her body is not her own. While in some cases contemporary staging distracts audiences for no clear purpose, in other cases such a staging contributes to the play in a way that is meaningful and perfectly in keeping with Shakespeare's own use of metaleptic layering.

What I want to suggest is that Shakespeare's use of philosophy performs a similar dramatic role within the plays, and while that appeal arises through language, rather than props or sets, part of the modern feel of the plays and part of their ability to fit so well on the modern stage is a result of the range of ways Shakespeare develops multiple metaleptic layers, including a layer of philosophy.

In all of these instances of layering, the world beyond the stage intersects the onstage world in ways that connect the events being staged to the concerns we, as an audience, bring to the play. Shakespeare is a master of this layering, and he uses philosophy in this process to accomplish three dramatic goals: (i) broaden the context, (ii) clarify character, and (iii) highlight the role of choice in action. I will start with the way Shakespeare uses philosophical elements to deepen or broaden a play's context.

Since drama in Elizabethan and Jacobean England relied heavily on verbal rather than physical stagecraft, Shakespeare uses philosophical elements to increase the scope of the action that takes place in a way that is similar to his consistent references to an unspecified backstory to the play. Consider Lady Macbeth's reference to nursing children (I.vii.54-55[11]) or Beatrice's reference to her earlier romantic relationship with Benedick (*Much Ado About Nothing*, II.i.242-45[12]). Shakespeare does something similar with the role nihilism plays in *Macbeth*. To demonstrate this I turn to the three arguments Macbeth offers against killing King Duncan.

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[11] L. C. Knight offers an influential discussion of this point. L. C. Knight, "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism", in *Explorations: Essays in Criticism Mainly on the Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, New York, New York University Press, 1964, pp. 15-54.

[12] Joost Daalder provides a discussion of the significance of this point within the play. Joost Daalder, "The Pre-History of Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*", *English Studies*, 6 (2004), pp. 520-27.

He begins by offering the prudential argument that killing Duncan would not be in his own interest since he is likely to be killed in return:

MACBETH
But here upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor. (*Macbeth*, I.vii.6-10)

Next, he offers an argument based on his duties to Duncan as his host and kinsman:

MACBETH
                    He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. (I.vii.12-16)

Finally, he offers an argument based on the idea of a personified moral order:

MACBETH
                    Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
The deep damnation of his taking-off,
And pity, like a naked newborn babe
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on th' other. (I.vii.16-28)

There are three orders of argument in this soliloquy. The first is the pragmatic argument that the murder cannot succeed, because "even-handed justice" will instruct others to murder the murderer, and the

people who will take up arms against him will succeed, since they will be driven by the political need to restore order rather than blind ambition. The second argument is based on the duties and obligations inherent to Macbeth's social position. If he violates those duties, he will remove himself from the social order, which foreshadows Macbeth's isolation and abandonment later in the play. The final argument goes beyond political and social order to appeal to an abiding moral structure that can be personified by angels. This set of three arguments is the most comprehensive response to the issue of regicide that we find in any of Shakespeare's plays[13].

How does Lady Macbeth undo this line of reasoning? Her principal argument is that it would be unmanly of Macbeth to "break this enterprise" to her (I.vii.47-51). But what is this contract? Macbeth has not explicitly promised to kill Duncan. He simply shares Lady Macbeth's commitment to the goal of his becoming king. To see where this contractual language of an implied promise comes from, we must look earlier in the play where Lady Macbeth says that Macbeth is not without ambition, but lacks the "illness should attend it":

Lady Macbeth
Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'ldst have, great Glamis,
That which cries 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
And chastise with the valour of my tongue

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[13]   It is important here, as it is in every case, to avoid the temptation of attributing any one character's position to Shakespeare himself. While Macbeth offers a strong argument against regicide in this passage in the sense that it reveals a threefold structure, the strength of that argument does not imply that Shakespeare was pro-monarchy or complacently in favour of any particular social order. For a thorough exploration of Shakespeare's avoidance of moral and political absolutes with respect to questions of authority, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2010.

> All that impedes thee from the golden round
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crown'd withal. (I.v.13-28)

Ambition, in Lady Macbeth's view, should be attended by release from moral restraint, a claim that might remind us of the claims put forward by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, where Socrates maintains that the worst fate to befall a human being is not to become the victim of a tyrant but to become a tyrant, because the soul of the tyrant makes a person the enemy of everyone and forces him to perform acts that are not his own.

Lady Macbeth, like Callicles, looks upon morality not as natural, but as a conspiracy of the weak against the strong – a conspiracy to deprive the strong of the goods that should naturally belong to them. Looking more carefully, Lady Macbeth says that what Macbeth "wouldst highly" he would also "holily". So Macbeth does not share the views of Callicles and Lady Macbeth. But, she goes on to say, Macbeth "would not play false, and yet would wrongly win". The problem, as she sees it, is that he does not abandon the end, even as he recoils from the means that are necessary to gain that end. He fears to do what must be done even though he would not wish it undone, if it were done.

This inspires Lady Macbeth to develop an ingenious response that anticipates Hobbes' strategy a few decades later in *Leviathan*. She uses the language of a promise or a contract to create a moral veneer over the self-interested or instrumental means to becoming king (I.vii.48-51). Lady Macbeth is able, in other words, to help Macbeth re-envision the strong moral arguments of his soliloquy by translating them into language of a Hobbesian contract, providing him with a gateway that converts him into the nihilist that his ambition demands of him. Lady Macbeth's contractarian language makes the move possible despite his clear vision of the moral arguments against killing Duncan.

For an audience dealing with the uncertainties of their current monarch and the possibility of a civil war, a king who dabbles with nihilism in this way would be every bit as unsettling as a king who dabbles in witchcraft. Shakespeare uses nihilism, therefore, to deepen the play's context by drawing on one of the period's deepest fears in a powerful and subtle way. This inclusion of nihilism,

presented under the guise of a contract, creates a powerful sense of offstage depth. The sophisticated character of the pattern of reasoning he uses to accomplish that depth is reinforced by the way it anticipates a line of reasoning offered by Hobbes just thirty-six years later. Shakespeare's sense of dramatic tension seems to have taken him straight into a surprisingly sophisticated use of ethical reasoning. This line of reasoning leads us to a second way Shakespeare uses philosophical material to enhance the play's performance. He uses it to highlight the role of choice in action.

Looking again at *Macbeth*, the sophisticated arguments offered by the two Macbeths enhances our experience of Macbeth's choice to kill Duncan. His action is not determined by character or context, as it would have been in a medieval morality play. His choice and his subsequent actions matter and we experience them as being up to him. The ethical argument we experienced earlier gives us a clear sense of this and as a result those scenes build the play up to the famous dagger scene (II.i.33-64).

What is important to see in the dagger scene is that the element of choice, enhanced through Macbeth's earlier use of ethical reasoning, has a profound and important impact on us, the audience. It splits our experience into two parts. On the one side is our ethically motivated sympathy for Macbeth, which hopes he does not proceed with Duncan's murder. On the other side is our interest as theatregoers to experience a thrilling drama, hoping he kills Duncan. The clear discussion of the ethics of regicide, in other words, reinforces our dual allegiances to what will make for a good and ethical life versus what will make for a good play. The dagger scene, therefore, becomes a moment in which we collude with Macbeth and this partly implicates us in Duncan's murder. Our physical presence sitting in front of Macbeth, anticipating of the drama that will unfold, makes us accomplices to murder[14]. We are, or at least parts of us are, encouraging or egging him on in this critical moment of choice,

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[14] We might argue that in this case, as in several others, our physical presence in front of the stage is necessary for the dramatic device's full success. This provides one reason to think that in some cases the performative role of philosophy within the plays can be tied to an actual performance rather than our thoughts or observations about a performance. While that stronger version of my thesis is supported by some of what I argue in this essay, it is not necessary to the position I defend here.

a moment that is made all the more real as a result of the ethical arguments we have been offered as witnesses or members of the audience.

This accomplishes two important things within a performance of the play. First, it ensures that we remain connected to Macbeth as an audience even when his actions threaten to alienate us. This is a problem that must be addressed in any performance of *Macbeth*. On this reading, Shakespeare builds one important solution to that problem into the heart of the play. The second purpose this split accomplishes, something arguably of greater philosophical value, is that our tacit collusion with Macbeth connects us with darker elements within our own psyches. This adds to the power of the play as well as to its ultimate significance for philosophy.

The ethical arguments we hear in Macbeth's earlier soliloquy, therefore, make a significant dramatic contribution in this overall sequence. This effect only becomes clear within the context of a performance, because it is our physical presence before Macbeth that transforms our eagerness for a good play to become an act of collusion, an act that is reinforced by Macbeth's earlier rehearsal of the ethical arguments against Duncan's murder.

Such a use of philosophy or philosophical patterns of reasoning is not uncommon in the plays. Shakespeare frequently turns to expressed patterns of reasoning, some more explicitly philosophical in content and character than others, to enhance a dramatic moment of choice in a way that enhances our sympathy and connection to the characters, no matter how far removed they are from us through their ugly or immoral acts. The pattern is so consistent that acting texts on how to perform Shakespeare frequently emphasize the importance of effectively portraying the patterns of reasoning found within the plays[15].

This focus on the moment of decision leads us to a third and final way in which Shakespeare uses philosophy to enhance the performance of his plays. He uses it to shape character. We can see this most clearly, I think, in the various ways he uses reasoning in both love and

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[15]   See, for example, the acting manual written by the famous American Shakespeare director Barry Edelstein, which uses the role of arguments within the play as a central devise that actors must master. Barry Edelstein, *Thinking Shakespeare: A How-to Guide for Actors, Directors, and Anyone Else Who Wants to Feel More Comfortable with the Bard*, New York, Spark Publishing, 2007.

war. Turning first to love, Shakespeare uses reasoning to extend the roles that wit and verbal sparring commonly played in Elizabethan drama to heighten the romantic tension between a couple. His use of reasoning became more sophisticated over time and it became more effective and philosophically interesting as a result.

We can see this, for example, by examining the reasoning found in *As You Like It*, where a character like Touchstone makes explicit references to philosophy (III.ii[16]). While those references are largely comic in their effect, the play marks a shift in Shakespeare's style, a shift that most likely reflects a change in the acting company. For shortly before Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It*, the actor Robert Armin replaced Will Kemp in the company. Kemp was a physical actor famous for his jigs and his ability to perform the sort of physical humour we associate with roles like Costard in *Love's Labour Lost*, Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. With *As You Like It*, Shakespeare begins to use more wit and wordplay as he starts writing for Robert Armin. He creates characters that resemble such 'allowed' or 'licensed' royal fools as Richard Tarleton, who was a favourite in Queen Elizabeth's court.

As just one indicator of the importance of this shift for philosophy, it is easy to see how this move eventually paves the way for characters like Feste in *Twelfth Night* or even the Fool in *King Lear*. Such characters carry greater philosophical weight than the earlier, more physical comedies, and it is interesting to notice that this move was initiated by the demands of performance. The key to thinking about this move in philosophical terms, however, is to recognize the way Shakespeare begins to appropriate reason and the language of philosophy in order to shape his characters rather than simply to achieve some comic effect.

Perhaps the clearest example of Shakespeare using patterns of reasoning to dramatize character within a comedy, one that has clear implications for discussions of feminist philosophy and ethics, can

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[16] Touchstone offers a wonderful parody of philosophy in this scene when Corin asks him how he likes the country, making arguments first on one side then the other while hassling Corin to back up his claim that the manners of the court would make no sense in the woods. The scene sounds like nothing more than a parody of the *elenchus* found in Plato's early dialogues. At one point Touchstone even teases Corin, asking him whether he has any philosophy in him (III.ii.20).

be found in *Much Ado About Nothing*[17]. In this play, patterns of reasoning and barbs of wit dramatize not only character differences but also the differences between male and female patterns of thinking within an honour culture. More importantly, as Carol Cook argues, it does so in a way that highlights the pervasive anxieties and the potential for violence that can be found in such a culture[18]. We might compare, for example, the pattern of reasoning Benedick's friends use to trick him into revealing his love for Beatrice with the pattern of reasoning Beatrice's friends use to trick her.

Benedick enters his scene daydreaming about the ideal wife (II. iii.23-30). His friends then sing a song about the way women fear men's infidelity (II.iii.56-71) before starting a conversation where they explain that Beatrice is in love with Benedick but can't bring herself to tell him and may kill herself as a result (II.iii.136-38). They wonder what she sees in Benedick and they end with a series of compliments about Beatrice.

Beatrice enters her scene walking silently. Her friends start by saying Beatrice is too proud, followed by the observation that Benedick is in love with her and that they have convinced Benedick not to confess his love because Beatrice, though witty, is incapable of love (III.i.42-45). They wish they could tell her about her character defects (III.i.49-58) but she will only use her wit to dismiss them (III.i.75-80). Hero then says that she should therefore tell a lie to Benedick about Beatrice so that he will fall out of love with her (III.i.84-86). This is followed by praise of Benedick.

The line of reasoning used by the women is more sophisticated and dark, and her reaction to what she overhears is importantly different.

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[17] Since *Much Ado About Nothing* was most likely written one or two years before Armin joined the company, we must conclude that its combination of physical humour and verbal wit shows that Shakespeare was already moving in the direction of more sophisticated forms of verbal wit and reasoning around that time. We might notice, for example, that Dogberry's scenes are largely isolated from the world of wit found in Messina.

[18] Carol Cook, "'The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor': Reading Gender Difference in *Much Ado*", *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 101 (1986), pp. 186-202. We find a similar reflection on the dynamics of an honour culture in Montaigne's essay "On Some Verses of Virgil". Questions remain over the extent of Shakespeare's familiarity with John Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essays*. For a helpful discussion of Shakespeare's relationship to Montaigne's essay see Stephen Greenblatt's forthcoming introduction to his edited collection of Montaigne's *Essays*. Stephen Greenblatt and Peter Platt, eds, *Shakespeare's Montaigne*, New York, New York Review of Books Press, 2014.

While Benedick believes what he overheard simply because Leonato is part of the conversation (II.iii.196), Beatrice believes what she over-hears because her friends say that her poor character prevents them from being able to speak with her about her flaws. Beatrice leaves the scene bent on taming her character, viewing a marriage to Benedick as a means to reform and a way to be brought more fully into the life of Messina. She ends the scene in sonnet form, minus the final cou-plet, a plaintive note that reinforces the veiled threats of her friends (III.i.108-17). Benedick, meanwhile, leaves his scene flattered and after their next encounter he engages in a wonderfully comic bit of prose reasoning that reveals his change in attitude when we compare it to the cynicism of his earlier patterns of thought:

> Benedick
> Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner'; there's a double meaning in that 'I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me'. That's as much as to say, Any pains that I take for you is as easy as thanks. If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain; if I do not love her, I am a Jew. I will go get her picture.
> (*Much Ado About Nothing*, II.iii.227-32)

Whatever ethical insights we might gain into the power dynamics between men and women within an honour culture of courtly love by experiencing an effective staging of *Much Ado*, much of what we learn will be derived from Shakespeare's careful use of patterns of reasoning to fill out his characters.

Similar passages show up throughout the other plays. We only have to think, for example, of the contrast between Richard II, Bolingbroke, and Henry V that is created by their varying patterns of reasoning about the justification and costs of going to war. Reasoning in all of these cases contributes to characterization by articulating a point of view or by drawing contrasts in perspective, values, and background commit-ments. It clarifies a motivating vision of the world and spurs a person to action. In this way, Shakespeare uses patterns of reasoning throughout the histories and the tragedies for dramatic effect. He has a distinct sense of the way reasoning develops character in a way that is theatrically ac-tive, especially in an age that focused on techniques of verbal staging. Speaking the lines in these passages, we might say, is closer to climbing a ladder than following a chain. It is active rather than passive and per-fectly suited to the early modern stage.

Of course the reasoning itself, from a philosophical perspective, is frequently unexceptional, but the plays expose a character's process of decision-making in ways that make us care about him in part because the reasoning behind the decision engages many of our own concerns. As a result, Shakespeare's use of patterns of reasoning gives us a sense of intimacy with a character even when they are contemplating regicide or some other wholly foreign decision. Our experience of the reasoning that takes place within the plays generates what we might call a paradoxical proximity of intimacy and detachment that is one of the clear contributions philosophy makes to their dramatic success. This success provides one reason to think about them as philosophical, a reason that uses philosophy to think carefully about the sources of each play's dramatic innovations.

What contribution does Shakespeare make to philosophy?

Having explored the dramatic contribution of philosophy and reasoning to Shakespeare's plays, I would now like to explain how thinking about the performance of Shakespeare's plays contributes to our work as philosophers. First, I will argue that this approach expands the way philosophers already think about the relationship between literature and philosophy. I will then argue that it can help us develop new ways to think about the relationship between drama and philosophy, ways that are tied more explicitly to our thoughts about performance.

There are several ways philosophers have thought about the contribution literature can make to philosophical reasoning. Most of those contributions are enhanced or extended by focusing on questions of performance. I will examine three examples, one from each stage of philosophical reflection.

First, literature is thought to function as a source of inputs to philosophical reflection. For example, following Aristotle's discussion of the way we arrive at our first principle through experience and reflection, some philosophers argue that literature and literary imagination play a special role in the formation of our first principles[19]. This is extend-

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[19]   Tzachi Zamir develops and defends this approach to Shakespeare in *Double Vision*, where he argues that our experience of the plays makes a sub-doxastic contribution to the formation of our first principles. Tzachi Zamir, *Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007.

ed by a recognition of the contribution that patterns of reasoning and other forms of philosophical elements make to the dramatic success of the plays because it reveals the way that Shakespeare designs the plays to explicitly draw on the processes that enter into the formation of our first principles. If I am right, for example, that Shakespeare uses philosophical elements as part of a broader process of metaleptic layering and if I am right that he does this by drawing on the concerns we bring to a performance by highlighting the patterns of reasoning that connect with those concerns, then Shakespeare's plays and his use of philosophy connects directly with the way we form first principles. A study of the contribution philosophy makes to the dramatic success of the plays, therefore, can provide us with a more expansive window on how we form first principles and how that process is connected with the concerns and patters of thought that animate our lives.

Second, literature has been thought to aid the process of philosophical reflection. For example, some argue that it provides a laboratory for the imagination to probe our intuitions on specific questions in the context of an extended thought experiment[20]. The literary dimensions of the thought experiment are considered to be important because it insures that the experiment is fully realized and because the literary success of that realization can act as an independent check or confirmation of our intuitions[21].

Thinking carefully about the way philosophy figures into the dramatic success of Shakespeare's plays expands this approach to the link between philosophy and literature by introducing a set of considerations that move beyond the imagination. The performance of a narrative increases the number and range of independent checks that are placed on a thought experiment. While this increases the difficulty of establishing our intuitions about the coherence or possibility of ideas or claims, it also increases our confidence that we will detect inconsistencies or an incoherence that we might have missed in a purely verbal or linguistic description of a scenario. A performance also makes a thought experiment public and therefore open to public inspection.

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[20] For a clear account of the recent literature on thought experiments, see Tamar Gendler, *Thought Experiment: On the Powers and Limits of Imaginary Cases*, New York, Routledge, 2000.

[21] Elizabeth Camp articulates an account of this use of literature. Elizabeth Camp, "Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 33 (2009), pp. 107-30.

This important limit on what can be presented as conceivable should increase our confidence in any conclusions we might draw.

In this way, at least two features of a performance expand the understanding that literature provides us with a laboratory of the mind: the requirement that it is enacted in a physical space in real time and the presence of an audience, which collectively responds to a performance's plausibility. Both features make an important contribution to the idea that literature provides us with a rich set of thought experiments in which we can test our intuitions in a process of reflective equilibrium. This provides a second reason to believe that thinking carefully about the philosophical dimensions of the performance of Shakespeare's plays can expand the insights we might gain from the plays.

Finally, some philosophers approach the literature/philosophy connection as part of the output of philosophical reflection rather than part of the inputs or the reasoning itself. In one such approach, literature provides a way to explore the 'ramifications' or impact that certain philosophical positions might have on our lives. It asks what would it mean to experience our lives through certain conclusions?[22]

We can expand this approach to the connection between literature and philosophy if we focus on the connection between philosophy and performance. I say this for two reasons. First, when we experience a performance of one of Shakespeare's plays we are experiencing the world as part of a public experience as a member of an audience. This enables us not only to experience a world defined by a set of positions or commitments, it enables us to experience that dramatic world publicly, allowing us to know what it would be to experience those commitments more broadly. Second, because Shakespeare uses philosophy to enhance the way we experience the play through the extra-diegetic concerns that we bring to the performance and because he uses philosophy to help the play escape the boundaries of the world onstage, our experience of the ramifications or impact that certain philosophical positions or approaches might have on our life is expanded because it engages a deeper and wider range of responses. In other words, because of the role played by metaleptic layering, Shakespeare's plays bring our world into the theatre and they send the world onstage out into our lives. If the hope of literature is to explore an experience of

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[22] David Wood defends an account of this approach to literature. David Wood, *Philosopher's Poets*, New York, Rutledge, 1990.

the implications of our philosophical commitments, thinking carefully about the relationship between philosophy and performance in Shakespeare's plays can only expand that process.

In addition to the expansion of these three roles that philosophers have identified for the way literature might figure in the inputs, process, and outputs of philosophical reflection, there are also contributions to philosophy that are unique or specific to a focus on issues of performance. We can divide these contributions into two categories. First, the plays can bring out performative dimensions of philosophical topics that are easily missed. Second, some topics are inherently performative and therefore can be better understood through the context of a play. An example of the first contribution is the topic of deception. For instance, focusing on the theatrical devices that Iago uses to deceive Othello can help us identify an important species of deception that philosophers generally overlook.

An example of the second sort of topic is the topic of forgiveness. Forgiveness is inherently performative and it is a performance that Shakespeare first turns to in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as a device for ending a comedy. He returns to the act of forgiveness several times over the course of his plays and I believe there is a great deal of insight to be gained by looking at the way Shakespeare alters the narrative role of forgiveness over time to achieve an ending that works on stage[23]. To illustrate that general claim here, I will focus on *Othello* and the topic of deception rather than forgiveness.

Shakespeare's *Othello* provides a philosophically rich account of deception that focuses more on careful staging than on outright lies. Shakespeare introduces the template for Iago's actions in Act II, when Iago offers an account of the fight between Cassio and Montano that leads to Cassio's demotion (II.iii). The scene is central to the plot of the play because it sets in motion the basic features of Iago's plan and because of the way in which an audience experiences Iago's power through his clever use of dramatic irony.

The scene is built around exits and entrances. It starts with Iago privately encouraging Cassio to drink more wine for the sake of his soldiers despite the fact that Cassio admits he can't handle alcohol.

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[23]   Sarah Beckwith develops an insightful account of forgiveness in Shakespeare's later plays. Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011. On this book see the section "Selected Publications in Shakespeare Studies (2011-2012)" in this issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare*

After a period of drinking, Cassio exits and the party breaks up, leaving Iago and Montano onstage. Roderigo appears but Iago tells him privately to leave and find Cassio. He then tells Montano that he is worried about Cassio's drinking problem. Cassio and Roderigo enter the stage fighting and Montano, worried now that Cassio may be drunk, attempts to protect Roderigo, a person he doesn't know, by stepping in and telling Cassio to stop. The two of them fight; Cassio injures Montano, and Othello comes back with the partygoers and asks why there is so much noise.

What follows is an inspired bit of staging that reveals Iago's impact. There are two audiences present: the theatre audience and the onstage audience consisting of Othello and the people who returned with him. Iago offers a masterful summary of what everyone has seen while leaving out important pieces of information that the theatre audience knows but the onstage audience does not. He tells the truth but not the whole story. He starts by telling Othello that he is committed to Cassio and has no intention of incriminating him. He then reports that he was speaking with Montano when Cassio entered the room chasing a strange man. Montano asked Cassio to stop; the stranger fled, and Iago chased him. When he returned, Cassio and Montano were fighting. He ends by saying that certainly the stranger who ran away must be responsible. He leaves out the fact that he knows Roderigo, that he prompted Roderigo to taunt Cassio, that he led Cassio to drink, and that Montano admonished Cassio because he was misled into believing Cassio has a drinking problem. Othello thinks Iago is trying to protect his friend and Montano thinks Iago is trying to cover up his friend's drinking problem. It's clear to Othello that Iago isn't telling the whole story, but given Iago's friendship with Cassio, Othello thinks that any missing pieces must clearly incriminate Cassio. So he rules Cassio responsible for the fight and demotes him.

In less able hands, such dramatic irony, where the audience knows something the hero does not, can lead a theatre audience to feel superior to the characters. The audience believes that if they were in the protagonist's shoes they wouldn't be duped. In this case, the theatre audience, watching the stage audience, clearly sees how they too would have fallen into Iago's trap. The stage audience emphasizes this because it dramatizes the way that incomplete information can distort the ability to properly interpret the meaning or significance of what you actually do see or experience. After all, Iago doesn't lie to Othello.

His story fits everything the stage audience saw. Iago simply doesn't tell the whole story. This move forms the template for Iago's plan, which is precisely what he tells us in the scene's closing soliloquy:

> Iago
> And what's he then that says I play the villain,
> When this advice is free I give, and honest,
> Probal to thinking, and indeed the course
> To win the Moor again? (*Othello*, II.iii.310-13)

The advice he will give will be free and honest. The deception will lie in the significance of what is left out rather than any explicit false-hood. From this scene onward, Iago can say things that are factually true and offer sound advice to trap Othello.

This starts in Act III when Iago suggests to Othello that Cassio looks guilty about the conversation he was having with Desdemona when he's simply nervous about asking for her help (III.iii.38). Shortly after this, Iago echoes back Othello's speech, leading Othello to think that he is trying hard to hide something damning about Desdemona (III.iii.110-12). This is important. For the plan to work, Othello must think that any missing pieces of information are damning rather than excusing. Iago then warns Othello that while Desdemona is pure, it can be hard to tell what is in the heart of a Venetian woman because of their aristocratic manners and dress (III.iii.205). Othello assures Iago he isn't suspicious at all (III.iii.230) but then mutters to himself that Iago must know more than he is willing to let on and he experiences his first doubt, suspecting that he's too old, too coarse, too black, and too far removed from common life as a military commander to be able to interpret what is going on (III.iii.247; 267-78).

Iago reinforces those doubts through another trick. Othello confesses that he is starting to doubt Desdemona's fidelity and he explains that the only way to fix his doubt is to get certain proof. "Make me to see't, or at the least so prove it that / That the probation bear no hinge nor loop / To hang a doubt on, or woe upon thy life" (III.iii.369-71). Iago responds by asking him how he could ever be certain. Would he "grossly gape on, behold her topp'd?" (III.iii.400). He goes on to describe what he might see in lurid detail just as he did in the opening act with Brabantio. Would he be satisfied if he saw them "as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys" (III.iii.408)? What Othello misses is that this act of imagination threatens to alter the way he thinks of Desdemona.

Suggesting that Othello imagine Desdemona and Cassio having sex, therefore, is just as effective for Iago's purposes as a false accusation. What is ingenious is that he slips this into a claim that no evidence can function as proof of infidelity.

Throughout this long central scene Iago introduces patterns of thought that bypass Othello's empiricist demand for clear evidence. By talking about dreams and asking Othello to imagine the porno-graphic scenes he *could* witness, Iago distorts the lens through which Othello interprets his situation without triggering any demand for clear evidence.

So how might this inform our understanding of deception? One standard account of deception, most fully developed by Kant, is that deception undermines human agency by causing us to develop and rely on false beliefs about the world. If our beliefs are false then our ability to self-govern through reasoning about the world will be limited. Deception, therefore, compromises our autonomy. It works because we trust the sincerity of a speaker to be a reliable indicator that they intend us to take the content of a stated proposition as true and we do that because we trust that the speaker's belief in the truth of the statement is the source of his motivation to speak[24]. The central example of deception, on this account, is an explicit falsehood stated as the truth.

In *Othello* we find a different form of deception. What Iago says is not explicitly false but suggestive, incomplete, or misleading. The faulty beliefs that results from Iago's plan do not involve false descriptive propositions as much as inapt characterizations or inter-pretations of the meaning or significance of what someone sees or hears. This undermines autonomy not by severing the person who has been deceived from the world through false belief but through a distorted picture of the world and such a distortion can be achieved through a prompted act of imagination as well as telling an explicit truth but not the whole story.

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[24]   This account of deception is amplified by Lycan's version of Grice's account of mean-ing. By uttering x (to an audience A), S meant that P if and only if: (a) S uttered x in-tending that A form the belief that P, and (b) S intended that A recognize that (a), and (c) S intended that A form the belief that P (in part) because of A's recognition that (a). Paul Grice, "Utterer's Meaning and Intention", *Philosophical Review*, 78 (1969), pp. 147-77 and William Lycan, *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, New York, Routledge, 2008, pp. 86-97.

Shakespeare's use of scepticism to develop a powerful instance of dramatic irony in *Othello*, therefore, can help us distinguish two modes of deception. The first, more standard variety, involves statements that are explicitly false but stated in a way that the speaker's motivation appears to be her belief that the statement is true. The second involves statements that are true as descriptions but are put forward in a way that distorts our interpretation or understanding of the significance or meaning of the facts they describe. This second sort of deception arises in cases where the act you perform with your language differs from the act suggested by the content of your language. The split is not between your statement and the world but between what you say and what you are doing with your statement. Two simple examples here are the common refrain, "Are you certain?" which serves to reinforce Othello's doubt and Iago's consistent use of apparent restraint. He claims, for example, that he would rather have his tongue ripped out of his mouth than to implicate Cassio, but that statement itself does much of the work to condemn him.

In order to get a handle on this second type of deception we need to clearly distinguish between the content of what we say and the act we are performing through a speech, between the dramatic act of what the speaker is doing through a speech and the content of that speech. Dramatic deception is not a slip between the truth or falsehood of the propositional content of one's speech but rather between the expressive and illocutionary acts that the speech is engaged in. It is fundamentally a performance, a performance that fails to pay the same respect to the truth as an outright lie.

There are at least two ways we might think about the implications this has for the way we think about the relationships among truth, belief, and deception.

First, it is common to attack Kantian accounts of deception by pointing out that in some cases a person may not have a legitimate claim to the truth and so it may be permissible or even, in extraordinary cases, obligatory to lie. My reading of *Othello* points to the opposite problem. By emphasizing the act of assertion, Kantian accounts of deception may well overemphasize the moral significance of deceiving someone through an explicit falsehood[25]. In some cases saying what is true may be

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[25]   Bernard Williams develops a related criticism of what he calls the fetishizing of assertion. Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 100-110.

more damning than saying what is false. This is the chilling realization we have when Iago confronts the audience by saying: "And what's he then that says I play the villain, / When this advice is free I give, and honest" (II.iii.310-11). The very fact that a statement is literally true can make it a greater danger to autonomy. It distorts while it avoids the obstacles of evidence that might surely trip it up. It engages in slander under the guise of assertion. It brings chaos rather than falsehood.

Second, this reading of the play, which starts with the way Shakespeare uses the problem of deception to enhance its dramatic irony, reveals a particularly potent form of unethical language. People can make claims that are true in content but malicious in intent or effect. We might draw a clear parallel here between Iago and certain potent forms of hate speech. Statements of fact, even when those statements are true, may not be innocent because of the way they are caught up in a larger human action and the way they connect with human vulnerability, isolation, and manipulation. So even if a jealous or controlling man's wife has been unfaithful in some of the ways he alleges, such a charge or assertion might be deceptive because the motivation behind the assertion or the way in which the assertion is being used or the effect it has on the people who hear or utter it is abusive, racist or in some other way false[26]. This is something we miss if we fail to see the distinction between the two modes of deception that become clear once we attend to the specific ways in which Shakespeare uses the philosophical problem of deception to enhance the dramatic tension of *Othello.*

Overcoming philosophical challenges

In this third and final section of the essay I argue that thinking about the dramatic dimensions of Shakespeare's plays helps address three general concerns that have been raised over recent efforts to connect

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[26] Slavoj Žižek makes a similar claim. He writes: "Even if all the reports on violence and rapes had proven to be factually true, the stories circulating about them would still be 'pathological' and racist, since what motivated these stories were not facts, but racist prejudices, the satisfaction felt by those who would be able to say: 'You see, Blacks really are like that, violent barbarians under the thin layer of civilization!'". Slavoj Žižek, "The Subject Supposed to Loot and Rape: Reality and Fantasy in New Orleans", *In These Times*, 20 October 2005.

literature and philosophy. My goal with respect to each of these concerns is to explain how focusing on performance provides new ways of responding to them. All three concerns attack the idea that a work of imaginative literature or a play can be thought to possess philosophical insights.

I will call the first challenge the Archimedes problem. If Archimedes did, in fact, come to an important insight about the relationship between volume and mass while bathing in a tub and if part of the reason for that inspiration was that the tub provided a clear and dramatic instance of that principle, we would not conclude that bathtubs are mathematically or philosophically interesting or valuable. They may have been valuable to a mathematician or a philosopher because they played a role in their insight, but that does not entail that bathtubs possess philosophical or mathematical value. While a pleasant soak may have been a source of inspiration to Archimedes, all we need to know about the relationship between mass and volume can be fully and completely described without any reference to that experience. The tub is, at best, a memorable but mathematically irrelevant object.

The same problem threatens to arise for the philosophical insights we might gain from an experience of a work of literature or a play. The fact that we can state the lesson in an essay, or the fact that we can provide reasons to defend the truth of a claim a literary work inspires, demonstrates that the work is not, strictly speaking, necessary. And since nothing about a literary work compels our assent and since most works do not attempt to develop the claim that something is entailed by premises that the audience holds as true, a literary or dramatic work cannot count as a sufficient condition for recognizing the truth of a claim that it is held to support. Imaginative works, even when they are richly philosophical, are not arguments. They make no attempt to provide the necessary or the sufficient conditions for establishing the truth of a general claim or insight.

It is important, however, not to overstate this potential challenge. The central question is whether the literary features of a work are separable from the message or insight the work is thought to communicate. My argument in this paper is that this problem becomes less acute if we focus on the dramatic or performative dimension of Shakespeare's plays. I say that because I have not suggested that we can simply read the philosophical lessons off the text. The insights

become apparent only when we apply the text to a possible perform-ance and think carefully about the work that the philosophical mate-rial does in creating that performance.

For example, I argued that it's our physical presence as an audi-ence in the dagger scene of *Macbeth* that brings out the relevance of Macbeth's earlier ethical arguments against regicide. With *Othello*, it was experiencing the dramatic irony of Iago's patterns of decep-tion that made us aware of a second kind deception. To be clear, I am not arguing that we could never have come to those truths in any other way. What I am arguing is that the literary features of the performances do real philosophical work in producing the insights we draw from a performance. It is the performative dimension of the included philosophy which does that work. Therefore, the con-tent of the insight is not separable from the dramatic value.

It's important to remember that the key question raised by the Archimedes problem is whether the literary or dramatic features of the play do real philosophical work, not whether that work could have been accomplished in some other way. The answer to that cen-tral question, at least in the case of Shakespeare, seems to be yes, because the presence of the philosophical elements contributes to the dramatic success of the plays. From what we have seen the connec-tion moves in both directions. The dramatic performance of the play does real philosophical work and the philosophical dimensions of the play makes a real contribution to the dramatic or literary suc-cess of the play. So the thesis I defend here *can* establish a genuine connection between the literary or dramatic value of a work and the philosophical insights that works might generate, since the connec-tion works in both directions.

I will call the second problem the exclusivity problem. The na-ture of a literary work is that it supports numerous interpretive ap-proaches. This is especially true when it comes to Shakespeare. As Keats famously points out, Shakespeare's greatest intellectual virtue is his negative capability, or the fact he "is capable of being in uncer-tainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"[27]. But if we think that a work can hold or possess an insight then we exclude those interpretations that are at odds with

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[27]   John Keats, *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats*, New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899, p. 277.

the philosophical insight we believe lies within the work[28].

I think we can partly overcome this concern within the context of Shakespeare's plays because any philosophical insight we might gain from them is not predetermined or independently determined by the text because the relationship between the text and our world is mediated by a performance. Just as one staging of a play does not exclude other stagings, one approach to the philosophical material we find in a play need not exclude others.

This brings us back to my earlier observation that the philosophical dimensions of Shakespeare's plays contribute to a general pattern of metaleptic layering. The fact that the philosophical dimensions to the plays involve the introduction of extra-diegetic features of the world implies that the philosophical content is not exclusively a feature of the play. That is part of the point in distinguishing between a play and its performance.

So nothing in the account I have offered suggests the exclusion of other interpretive schemes. Quite the opposite. What makes the plays philosophically fruitful in many instances is precisely the flexibility of the interpretive schemes they encourage and the multitude of ways we can connect the plays with our ongoing interests and concerns offstage.

A third challenge might be called the problem of verification. Some philosophers view literature as a thought laboratory where we try out new ideas or conceptual schemes. The problem that is sometimes raised for this analogy is that there is no clear counterpart to a method of confirmation or disconfirmation. We might think that the dramatic or literary success of a work reveals something true about a claim that is explored in a literary work, but that success is largely a product of forces that are blind to truth. Nothing in the success of the work indicates the truth of the claims that work entertains. To put this in the strongest terms available, the act of philosophy or philosophical inquiry is foreign to, or even hostile to, literary value[29].

Once again, I believe that focusing on the performance of Shake-

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[28]   Katherine Thomson-Jones has articulated the most complete discussion of this criticism. Katherine Thomson-Jones, "Art, Ethics, and Critical Pluralism", *Metaphilosophy*, 43:3 (2012), pp. 275-93.

[29]   Peter Kivey offers a description of this concern based on the difference between philosophical inquiry and the appreciation of literary value. Peter Kivey, *Philosophy of Arts: An Essay in Differences*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 125.

speare's plays addresses this concern by introducing an additional entity. On the approach I have been defending it is not simply a philosopher facing a work of literature and it is not simply a case of attempting to represent a certain philosophical position or claim that might be found within that work. In the approach I defend there is a middle or mediating entity, a performance that lies between the text and our response.

As we have seen, this performance can often provide an interesting blend between the diegetic world of the play and the real world offstage. So the act of critical receipt parallels the act of directing the play more than it does the act of witnessing it. But given what we have seen, Shakespeare's plays have an essentially dramaturgical character and so to address the performance issues that are inherent to a proposed production we must address the various problems that arise out of the play's metaleptic layering. In many cases, therefore, questions about philosophy will be essential to a proposed production and the truth or consistency of the reasons we apply to those questions will be constrained or shaped by the features of the world that layering appeals to.

And so we find that thinking carefully about the relationship between philosophy and the performance of Shakespeare's plays enables us to address three important concerns that have been raised concerning the role literature might play in philosophical reflection.

Conclusion

It is exciting to see the many ways that philosophers are thinking carefully about Shakespeare's plays. The primary conclusion I draw in this essay is that philosophers need to think more carefully about their performance. I think that for many philosophers there is a fear that the performance elements, while interesting, stand in contrast to the philosophical richness of Shakespeare's plays. Their attitude toward the performance is not unlike Lucentio's servant Tranio in *The Taming of the Shrew,* who might tell us in this context that the purpose of theatre is pleasure and bringing in too much philosophy simply ruins it. Philosophy might be appropriate to a literary exploration of the plays, but the performance elements are oriented toward the pleasures of the theatre and so they don't carry any real

philosophical significance on their own. My argument has been that this is simply not true when it comes to thinking about Shakespeare since his interest in philosophy, especially before the later romances, was oriented by his dramatic goals. As a result, the intersection between philosophy and performance in the context of Shakespeare's plays provides us with rich material for philosophical thought. In enables us to recognize the contribution that philosophy makes to the dramatic success of the plays and it enables us to recognize the contributions the plays make to philosophy.

Selected Publications in Shakespeare Studies (2011-2012)

Jonathan Bate and Dora Thornton, *Shakespeare*: *Staging the World*, London, British Library Press, 2012, 304 pp., £ 39.95.

Conceived to accompany the 2012 British Museum 'Olympic' exhibition, the volume combines catalogue text and literary criticism, using artifacts to illustrate London life in 1612 (chapter 1). The authors aim at creating "a dialogue between Shakespeare's imaginary worlds and the material objects of the real world of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century" (p. 10). As a matter of fact, the nine chapters (which analyze, among other things, London, Venice, the countryside, rebellion, witchcraft, explorations, the legacy of Rome and the Monarchy) offer a breathtaking proliferation of objects and a fascinating global perspective. Learned and beautiful, the text itself becomes a simulacrum, a writing of the object. Welcome back, Baudrillard.

<div align="right">Davide Crosara, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2011, 228 pp., $ 45.00.

Beckwith presents a learned and penetrating study of the grammar of forgiveness in Shakespeare's late, "post-tragic" (p. 2) plays: *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*. This grammar originates from Shakespeare's reworking of the themes of penance, repentance and confession in his late phase. The shift from the Catholic to Protestant conception of forgiveness affects language in the first instance, namely in "the relation between the inherited ritual languages of the Middle Ages and their transformation in post-Reformation England" (p. 8).

Part 1 ("Penance to Repentance") explores the nature of this transformation in detail. In accordance with the Reformation, Elizabethan Eng-

land abandons the sacrament of penance. No longer a rite presided by a visible authority, forgiveness is turned radically inward. While Catholic sacraments had been "signs that caused what they signified" (p. 29), in Protestant theology ritual language lost the power to create shared realities (such as the reality of forgiveness). *Hamlet* perfectly exemplifies this split between a lost, impotent ritual world and a modern, isolated consciousness. Hamlet expresses "epistemological anxieties" (p. 37) that, in Beckwith's opinion, tend not only to eradicate human agency, but to eradicate the human per se.

Part 2 reads *Measure for Measure* as a comedy that mirrors "a society which […] had lost the institutions, understandings and capacities for confession" (p. 80), while part 3 illustrates the recovery of a sense of community through rites of forgiveness in the late plays. Beckwith applies Stanley Cavell's concept of acknowledgment to trace a distinction between romances or late plays and mature tragedies. All these plays (from *Hamlet* to *The Tempest*, from *King Lear* to *The Winter's Tale*) revolve around themes such as identity or faithlessness, but in *Hamlet* the prince experiences identity as loneliness and in *Lear* faithlessness cannot be mended. Ending in isolation and impotence, the tragedies stage a failure of acknowledgment.

The so-called romances are, on the contrary, post-tragic plays, because they offer a recovery from tragedy through a renewed possibility of mutual acknowledgment. Beckwith sees acknowledgment as a metamorphosis of forgiveness. *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* recreate a version of the forgiven community while transforming the inherited grammar of confession and penance by recovering the voice (*Pericles*), a speech embodying forgiveness (*Cymbeline*), resurrection narratives (*The Winter's Tale*) or a relationship with the audience (*The Tempest*). With deep philosophical insights and a convincing mastery of history, Beckwith traces in the late Shakespeare the reinvention of a post-sacramental theatre.

<div align="right">Davide Crosara, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

David Bevington, *Murder Most Foul:* Hamlet *Through the Ages*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, 256 pp., £ 25.00.

Following Gary Taylor's *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History, From the Restoration to the Present* (1989) and Stanley Wells' *Shakespeare for All Time* (2003), this book is committed to the cultural history of *Hamlet*, with a view to providing new insight and perspective on the play. The central argument is that staging, criticism and editing of *Hamlet* have always gone hand in hand over the centuries, from 1599-1600 to the present day, to such a remarkable extent that the history of *Hamlet* can be seen as a paradigm of the cultural

history not only of the English speaking world, but of Western Civilization as a whole. Bevington's study, however, rather than merely focusing on the play's afterlife, also includes the prehistory of the Scandinavian Saga. This is widely investigated in the first chapter together with a number of other significant sources.

Chapter 2 discusses several adaptations and transformations enacted in the following centuries, thus highlighting the textual instability of Shakespeare's *corpus* as a feature shared by Shakespeare's times and all other ages down to post-modernity. All in all, the seven chapters make up a comprehensive historical map in which *Hamlet* stands out throughout the centuries as a kind of mirror, a touchstone, a key to understanding both the collective and individual self (p. viii).

The empirical cultural historical approach, however, in the end engages with the history of literary criticism and drama rather than tackling a hermeneutic vision of *Hamlet*'s many reincarnations through the ages.

Bevington questions the ideological 'errors' imposed on the play by critics and players especially when dictated by Romantic sensibilities – with regard to the psychological dimensions of the characters – at the expense of the 'wholeness' of the text. In this challenge he is particularly indebted to Margreta De Grazia's 2007 Hamlet *without Hamlet*, which he acknowledges as an invaluable contribution to Shakespearean studies after the relativism of the post-modern wave. Notwithstanding, his pages tend to be descriptive, recalling sometimes Polonius's representation of drama. The conventional conclusions about the play's universal appeal are somewhat disappointing after the promised launch of a fresh critical discourse, especially when compared to the writer's many authoritative contributions to Shakespeare studies.

<div align="right">Rosy Colombo, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Brian Boyd, *Why Lyrics Last: Evolution, Cognition and Shakespeare's Sonnets***, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2012, 227 pp., € 17.61.**

A sequel to *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition and Fiction* (2009), Brian Boyd's new book shifts the evolutionary lens from the study of narrative to that of poetry. The rationale behind the ambitious enterprise undertaken by Vladimir Nabokov's sensitive biographer is to demonstrate the evolutionary origins of literature. Like art in general, Boyd argues, literature derives from the human disposition to play, particularly with pattern. Narrative and poetry are supposed to be radically different mental forms: the former, a sort of "default task orientation of the human mind" (p. 3), likes to

put things in order; the latter craves openness and free play. Unfortunately, this "bio-cultural approach", as Boyd calls it, does not live up to the promises of refreshing his beloved classical texts (see George Levine's well-founded objections concerning Boyd's evolutionary account of fiction: www.bsls. ac.uk/reviews/general-and-theory/brian-boyd-on-the-origin-of-stories/).   In the first place, the radical difference between story and poetry is rather weak the way it is seen here. Despite recognizing that story and poetry go hand in hand until, after Byron, they become irreconcilable, Boyd does not ask himself why after Byron historical explanations scarcely fit universal arguments. Secondly, the interesting things the author has to say about Shakespeare's sonnets depend more on solid close-reading than on the evolutionist mode. What is advertised as reinvigorating novelty turns out to be good work in the well-established tradition of textual analysis. It is when evolutionary justifications are offered that indeed Boyd's writing becomes banal. For example, the 'real' motivation behind Shakespeare's sonnets is sexual selection, which amounts to the fact that females produce "resource-rich eggs", while males produce "massive numbers of cheap but highly motile sperm to increase the chance that some will reach the far fewer available eggs" (p. 57). And this should explain why "males produced far more sonnets in the English Renaissance than did women, and the same holds true for rap music now" (p. 58)! Social cooperation however intervenes to soften the crudeness of sexual selection: our ultra-social species is equally motivated by "a unique and deep desire" (p. 63) of winning the appreciation of all, even our own competitors. Like Casaubon's key to all mythologies, Boyd's bio-logic seems determined to unlock every mystery and perform miracles, witness the solution to the dilemma of human nature. Humans are naturally both hierarchical and egalitarian, as shown by the history of mankind which Boyd condenses in one and a half page (pp. 124-25). One wonders whether Boyd really needed such pseudo-Darwinian scaffolding to contest the psychologist of art Colin Martindale's prophesy concerning high literary verse's self-extinction and the poet Don Paterson's view that Shakespeare's sonnets make sense only as a narrative of love. On the one hand, Carol Ann Duffy's splendid sonnet illuminating the final pages of Boyd's book stands alone as an intimation of immortality for poetry. On the other hand, Boyd's original insight that centuries of narratives generated by Shakespeare's sequence of sonnets prove *e contrario* the poet's intention of frustrating story would have gained more from literary than biological interpretations. From Nabokov's refined critic one would expect a clear and detailed demonstration in support of his claim that narrative is precluded by the kind of 'doubleness' found in many of the most memorable among the first 126 sonnets – rather than, as another reviewer wittily puts it, compare the Earl of Southampton (Shakespeare's patron) to a silverback gorilla.

Daniele Niedda, UNINT – LUSPIO, Rome

David Carnegie and Gary Taylor, *The Quest for Cardenio*, **Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, xiv+420 pp., £ 35.00 / € 63.73 / $ 58.50.**

The Quest for Cardenio, published by Oxford University Press in 2012 and edited by David Carnegie and Gary Taylor, is a collection of twenty-six essays by twenty-one different authors, mostly academics, but also men of the theatre. The text is divided into five sections, each of them including essays about similar or related subjects, so that, as a whole, the book encompasses many if not all the different problems raised by the play: composition; linguistic analysis, authorship attribution, transvestism, homosociality, the role of women in *Double Falsehood*; palaeography, recent staging and several others.

This editorial enterprise originates both from the craze for Gary Taylor's reconstruction of *Cardenio*, successfully staged in New Zealand in 2009, and from some subsequent initiatives such as the *Cardenio* colloquium, held at the University of Indiana. Thence the idea of bringing together again all scholars that had already gathered for the colloquium. However, the book is also the most recent result of the discourse about *Cardenio* that has been going on in the last two decades. In its pages some of the most prominent *Cardenio* scholars – such as Gary Taylor, Brean Hammond, Tiffany Stern, MacDonald P. Jackson, among others – seem to dialogue with each other in order to provide precise details, recently discovered information, new interpretations and meanings.

All in all this miscellany is a milestone in the *Cardenio* cultural debate; scholars who take an interest in Jacobean theatre, Shakespeare's collaborative plays or in the Shakespearean canon should really not miss it, although it may make for very enjoyable reading for the general public, too.

The Quest for Cardenio's elegant style, lively language and almost fictional sense of detection connected with the effort of discovering or recreating the lost Jacobean play contribute to convey the strong sense of community that characterises the contributors; in addition, these very same elements give the volume a mesmerising power, to the extent that even the reader interested in only one of the different essays won't be able to put the book down until its last page.

<div align="right">Giuliano Pascucci, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Paola Colaiacomo, *Le cuciture dell'acqua*, **Roma, Bulzoni, 2012, 168 pp., € 10.20.**

Le cuciture dell'acqua [*The Seams of the Waters*] is, in essence, a study on Shakespeare and the origin of the modern body, in which Paola Colaiacomo highlights the playwright's superb interaction with the multifarious changes oc-

curring in his times. Among them, the rise of the merchant class that forced its way out of rigid feudal rule, epitomized also by the most luxurious apparel reserved for the monarch and a few higher ranking nobles. It was no coincidence, as Colaiacomo points out, that Elizabeth I put into effect a number of Sumptuary Laws in order to contain the "outrageous excesse of apparel" (p. 24) of her subjects and protect the use of local textiles against the "superfluitie of unnecessary forreyne wares" (p. 25), which pertained to the aristocracy only.

Through a careful analysis of costumes and props, understood not just as the object of plain stage directions, but rather as evidence of the still liquid mutations affecting the structure of social classes in late sixteenth-century England, Colaiacomo succeeds in unveiling the propulsive strength of clothing within Shakespeare's body of work. From Macbeth's "borrowed robes" (I.iii) to Hamlet's "glass of fashion" (III.i), from Julius Caesar's mantle to Rosalind's male attire, it is evident and – according to Colaiacomo – was evident also to his contemporaries that Shakespeare did not simply dress his characters for the stage, but invested specific garments with a powerful visual and symbolic impact.

Colaiacomo unfolds her argument by discussing four topics: the invention of the modern body, deformity, nudity, and mutability. Each chapter deals with several Shakespearian texts, which are contextualized in the mutable culture of their times, revealing page after page the transition from the constraints of the Middle Ages, through the classical models of the Renaissance, to the Machiavellian perspective of the baroque period.

Among the characters discussed by Colaiacomo, Pericles is a paramount example of her thesis, because his armour retrieved from the deep waters by fishermen, even though rusted by the corrosive power of sea waves, still enables him to participate in the tournament and win the love of Thaisa. "Le cuciture dell'acqua" of the title refer to this very armour, to its being re-assembled, 'made up' by the fishermen's efforts and through "the rough seams of the waters" (II.i); therefore, transformed from a rigid object of nobility into a recycled garment intended for a new beginning.

In Shakespeare's plays apparel has its own language, words which effectively shape the modern body (p. 23). As Colaiacomo highlights, in Shakespeare the ancient figurativeness and the new technology of silence, inscribed onto the printed page, coexist through the plasticity of the word; making the body on stage a visible word and the garment its signifier.

<div align="right">Laura Salvini, University of Cambridge</div>

Rocco Coronato, *La mano invisibile. Shakespeare e la conoscenza nascosta*, Pisa, Pacini, 2011, 169 pp., € 25.00.
Laury Magnus and Walter W. Cannon, eds, *Who Hears in Shakespeare? Auditory Worlds on Stage and Screen*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012, 249 pp., € 81.94.

The sensory universe of Shakespeare's plays is the focus of two stimulating recent studies: Rocco Coronato's *La mano invisibile. Shakespeare e la conoscenza nascosta* [*The invisible hand. Shakespeare and hidden knowledge*] and the collection *Who Hears in Shakespeare?*

Drawing on early modern and medieval theories of vision and imagination, Rocco Coronato argues that Shakespeare's plays entail an epistemic shift from knowledge conceived as the result of the right interpretation of what is visible, to a form of knowledge that must be achieved through an immersion into the invisible and the unrepresentable. Coronato traces how, initially a metaphor for enlightening intellect, the faculty of vision is increasingly called into question in the modern era, while a different notion of invisibility emerges. The inscrutability of the divine order gives way to the opaque chaos of the modern self, of which nothingness constitutes a fundamental part. In this way, the book maintains, Shakespeare's characters do not question the visible world as that which manifests the invisible macrocosm through its every microscopic sign; however, once that correspondence is broken, vision must acknowledge the blurring interposition of desire and passion. The six plays that Coronato analyses – *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet* – present the invisible of modern subjectivity under three main forms: the individual self grappling with fleshly desire and with the unruliness that precedes the law; the self dominated by the will to live, all too eager to kill the Other in order to achieve self-fulfilment; a self that accepts the darkness of mortality and the possibility of non-existence, and confronts the problematic call to action that springs from it. A leitmotif throughout the book is the theme of confrontation with the shocking reality of mortal flesh. Shakespeare is able to 'produce bodies' which irrevocably consign man to destruction and loss, yet not before the motion and the contortions of fleshly passions have consumed him. In Coronato's reading, *Hamlet* enacts a meeting with the double, in which the prince confronts the spectre of his own non-existence, and, like the invisible Lamord, becomes 'demi-natured' and 'incorpsed', exploring with the invisible eye of the mind the darkness of non-being that devours his very life.

The aural complexity of Shakespeare's plays is under scrutiny in *Who Hears in Shakespeare?*, a study stemming from recent scholarly work on the auditory dimension of early modern drama. Part 1 outlines a poetics of hearing for the early modern stage. The second section, "*Metahearing*",

investigates how different modes of hearing – such as eavesdropping, or eavesdropping on an eavesdropper's aside – may create conflicting responses in the audience and produce original interpretations. Part 3 tackles several directorial styles in the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays from the stage to other media, in which the sense of hearing is no longer tied to the actor's body and is governed by different conventions. Andrew Gurr opens the collection by investigating the auditorium disposition of all playhouses built before 1660, in which the expensive seats were often situated at angles where good viewing was impossible, poles apart from the cinematic arrangement of modern theatres. Only late in Shakespeare's productions did a shift occur from a circular disposition conceived for hearing to a frontal orientation based on viewing. James Hirsh, then, reviews the main conventions that governed the reception of soliloquies, challenging the assumption that they were addressed to playgoers as privileged hearers. Instead, Hirsh suggests, soliloquies were self-addressed speeches that could be overheard by other characters, so that they could be intentionally misleading. In chapter 3, Walter Cannon investigates moments when the act of hearing is doublefold, such as when the audience listens through the ear of a disguised character. From another perspective, Jennifer Holl theorizes gossip – surprisingly, *male* gossip – as the model for a transgressive communication, in which truth circumvents the controlling strategies of the official channels. Laury Magnus, next, analyses the implications of the Ghost's supernatural speech in *Hamlet*, and David Bevington investigates the connection between hearing, overhearing, hallucinatory states and the creation of conceptual spaces in *The Tempest*. J. Anthony Burton proposes a new reading of Shylock's asides, introducing the gestural dimension into the discussion. Kathleen K. Smith's contribution brings to the fore the interplay of internal and external audiences, and, in chapter 9, Bernice Kliman arrives at a convincing reading of *Measure for Measure* based on aural considerations. In the last essay in part 2, Nova Myhill theorizes the opposite of the aside – the inaudible whisper – as a mode of communication that excludes the audience from the dramatic world. In part 3, Kenneth Branagh's adaptations of eavesdropping scenes are analysed, both in the comedies and in the tragedies; in chapter 12, Gayle Gaskille reviews Trevor Nunn's film adaptation of *Twelfth Night*; Erin Minear concentrates on the act of overhearing in *Othello* in different filmic adaptations. The book closes with an afterword by Stephen Booth, who ponders the rare moments in Shakespeare's theatre when the intended audience does not listen.

Maria Grazia Tonetto, Sapienza University of Rome

David Crystal, *"Think on my Words": Exploring Shakespeare's Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, reprint edition 2012, 254 pp., £ 13.99.

David Crystal once again offers an incredibly learned overview of linguistic issues in an accessible, engaging, and thought-provoking book on Shakespeare. While potentially irritating to extreme bardolaters in its aim to debunk some of the myths that have surrounded the dramatist's use of language for centuries, the book manages to persuade the reader that taking into account historical linguistic facts not only does not subtract from his greatness, but rather highlights that he was a man perfectly at ease with a language that afforded him certain freedoms.

Integrating both the semantic and pragmatic approach to answer the fundamental question of "what language does" (p. ix), Crystal sets out in his first chapter to clear up the "spider's web of myths" (p. 2) that has been woven around Shakespeare's language, which, he argues, hinders a true encounter with it. Such a web includes the idea that Shakespeare had the largest vocabulary of any English writer of all time (the 'quantity myth'), or that he invented a sizeable percentage of the words now in use in English (the 'invention myth'), or that the English spoken in Shakespeare's time was fundamentally different to ours, thus inherently difficult and in need of translation into modern terms (the 'translation myth'); or even that the distinctiveness of Shakespeare's style may be understood as homogenous, rather than subject to variation (the 'style myth') – which, of course, if it were true, would not explain why authorship disputes are still raging on in Shakespearean studies.

Having dispelled some of these myths to paint a more coherent picture of the English language of Shakespeare's time, Crystal goes on to examine the material conditions of textual transmission that have a bearing on any reading that aspires to pay close attention to language (chapter 2); while long-standing issues in Shakespearean textual studies are addressed, this is done in a comprehensive yet compact way, enabling wider audiences to familiarize with them. The following chapters deal with "Shakespearean graphology" and print conventions, as well as the complexities of early modern English spelling and pronunciation (chapters 3-6). It is when reflecting on metre and rhyme that Crystal's argument for a better understanding of the linguistic and historical context of Shakespeare's writing gives way to considerations on the nature of poetic language, which hinges precisely on "something [that] has to be done to language to make it special" (p. 117); it is only through a full understanding of the conventions of poetic language of the age that it is possible to appreciate the foregrounding of a departure from convention.

In the closing chapters of the book (7, 8, 9), Crystal delves into the depths

of Shakespeare's vast vocabulary. And it is in these chapters that Shake-speare's greatness as a "creator of language" (see Nadia Fusini's editorial piece in this issue) is fully displayed: for Crystal shows effectively that it is not the number of words used or invented by Shakespeare that counts, but rather *what* he did with the words he did have at his disposal. Not only in the sense of creating new words, Crystal points out, but especially by "cre-ating new senses from existing words" (p. 164) – see his use of unconven-tional collocations, for example, which break normal patterns of speech to create new and strikingly unfamiliar effects, making him "one of the greatest rule-breakers the language has seen" (p. 173) – and thus, one might add, one of the greatest poets. The same kind of appreciation can come from a deeper knowledge of the grammar of early modern English, which frees us from naive ideas about Shakespeare's language, allowing us to avoid read-ing more into what is merely a convention of the age, but at the same time helps us fully comprehend nuances of style in crucial passages, such as the ones which hinge, for example, on the ye/you distinction or word order. Fi-nally, the same attention to the complexities of speech interaction – we *are* at the theatre, after all – is paid, again by contextualizing pragmatic strategies within the linguistic conventions of the age.

The book is invaluable, in that it is accessible, highly enjoyable both to the specialized reader and the broader audience; and in that it argues persua-sively that it is impossible to get very far in appreciating Shakespeare if his language is not looked at *within* the context of early modern linguistic prac-tices. Only then is it possible to begin to understand the marvellous things he did with words.

<div align="right">Iolanda Plescia, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Janette Dillon, *Shakespeare and the Staging of English History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, 150 pp., € 60.28.

Janette Dillon's book is an innovative, challenging study within the field of critical studies of Shakespeare's history plays – a brilliant example of how a structural approach may be fruitfully integrated with strong hermeneutic overtones.

Swerving away from the classic empirical tradition of E. M. W. Tillyard's historical criticism focused on Shakespeare's political commitment in his early phase, Dillon looks at the plays through the lens of early modern stag-ing, conducting a close analysis of stage practice as constitutive of dramatic action.

Apart from drawing attention to stage directions and stage pictures, Dil-lon highlights the symbolic relevance of objects in their setting on the scene,

focusing on the use of stage properties, particularly the use of the chair of state developed in *Henry VIII*. A number of chapters interestingly explore the semantics of space with special focus on the interdependence between a vertical and a horizontal axis. Accordingly, she draws a link between the recurring theme of discord enacted in the events of the civil war and the linguistic and rhetorical patterns of Shakespeare's dramaturgy, which "explicitly put a divided perspective on show" (p. 39). With a difference, however, between the First Tetralogy – in which the stage is built as a unitary picture, by means of symmetrical balance and analogy – and the reversal of the same paradigms in the uneven frame of the Second Tetralogy. With perceptive insight, Dillon probes into Shakespeare's shaping of history on the stage as a development from the harmonious (and sometimes static) architecture of the early compositions to a more dynamic setting, which questions not only history but also the significance of its representation, thus foreshadowing the mature experiments in the metatheatrical mode.

Chapters on the relevance of bodies on stage, as well as their location and posture, alternate with chapters on strategies of staging of the self, particularly soliloquies: "moments when stagecraft forcefully scripts an intensity of engagement between actor and audience which has similarities to the close-up" in films (p. 82). In this light, Dillon's most compelling pages deal with Richard II's soliloquy as a mode of speech. Each soliloquy is analysed in its own specificity: from the early ones, in which tragic emotion is part of a spectacle mounted for public consumption, to the last one, when the fallen king, alone on stage, speaks about himself to himself alone, and drama shifts into monodrama.

<div style="text-align: right">Rosy Colombo, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Michael Dobson, *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, paperback edition £ 19.99 / $ 29.99.

This is indeed a groundbreaking monograph, which effectively ushers in a new field of research on amateur stagings, making up for its marginalization in academic studies. Professor Dobson's argument is that in some cases amateur performance deserves more attention than professional production, which is often conventional and devised as a commodity in the British cultural market. The book starts by shaping a tradition of private, domestic theatricals, examined from the seventeenth century on, with careful attention paid to women's productions: from the very first recorded one, an excerpt of *The Winter's Tale* (1774) analysed within the context of the morality debate on the supposedly shameful display of women on stage.

As for Shakespeare in public (chapter 2), the book accounts for the rise of amateur dramatic societies, which Dobson tackles in two directions: first focusing on the burlesque performances in London as a result of (and a challenge to) the seventeenth-eighteenth century monopoly on Shakespeare by the Theatres Royal; then shifting to the lower class actors' appropriation of the canon in the nineteenth century; such representations claim resistance to the commercial hegemony of the professional stage.

Chapter 3 is a gem within the cultural historical approach. It provides an analysis of "Shakespeare in exile", highlighting British military performances during such crucial wars as the American Revolution and World War II: in the first case the staging of *Richard III* and *Macbeth* was meant to support the cause against usurpers, whereas the main character of *Coriolanus*, cast by the American soldiers as a lover of liberty, made a strong argument for "the necessity of tyrannicide" (p. 132). However, Dobson's most remarkable pages on this kind of "expatriate performance" concentrate on the ordeal of allied prisoners of war in World War II, who reinvented Shakespeare in the most chilling of environments; for instance, performing *The Merchant of Venice* at a location fifty kilometres from Dachau, which was perhaps a questionable undertaking.

Dobson's final chapter on the twentieth century substantiates his authoritative role in militant Shakespearean criticism as a long-time reviewer for *Shakespeare Survey*, and currently the Director of the Shakespeare Institute at the University of Birmingham, by carrying out research into the British avantgarde production, thereby further developing his claim that the tradition of non-professional performances is central to Shakespeare's inheritance.

The book tends in fact to blur the boundaries between professional and amateur performance: perhaps not always convincingly, but surely with historical accuracy. It deserves a special acknowledgment in the field of cultural studies, since its main issue is the difference of Shakespeare, whose plays are inscribed in a history which, far from being founded on the classical paradigm of a stable ontology, embodies a process of change into multiple identities, each play transformed according to a different cultural context.

<div align="right">Rosy Colombo, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Simon C. Estok, *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia*, **New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, x+182 pp., € 69.00.**
Dan Brayton, *Shakespeare's Ocean: An Ecocritical Exploration*, **Charlottesville-London, University of Virginia Press, 2012, xv+257 pp., € 30.00.**

Applying ecocriticism to Shakespeare studies seems less radical today than

it seemed only a few years ago, when English studies departments in the Western world and beyond had not yet witnessed the recent flood of scholarship in the field. A flood tightly linked with the conference panel sessions organized by institutions such as the International Shakespeare Association, the British Shakespeare Association, the Shakespeare Association of America, but also the Modern Language Association and the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment. This does not mean that a considerable number of these contributions is not motivated by a certain skepticism and even hostility towards ecocriticism, but that still proves the interest and the achievement of its new hermeneutic approach to Shakespeare and to literature in general. As Oscar Wilde once wrote, "there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that it not being talked about".

To date, besides an indeed large number of papers, five books that apply ecocriticism to Shakespeare have been published, two of which are discussed in this review. The latter deal with distinct, though at times convergent aspects of Shakespeare's concern with the natural environment: on the one hand, the primeval and ever relevant human fear of nature's unpredictability, redefined here as *ecophobia*; on the other, the importance of the *sea* and of the *maritime dimension* in early modern England and in the human experience in general. Both works go deep into the inquiry of their specific issues, but they also offer a broad and precious introduction to the ways one can 'do' ecocriticism with Shakespeare.

Estok's book examines a number of Shakespeare's plays and characters such as *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, *2 Henry VI*, *2 Henry IV*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, Caliban, Shylock, Portia and Antonio, but also representations of various phenomena such as weather, night, sleep, gender, race and food, with a special focus on their environmental dimensions. The author's aim is to articulate both a critical methodology and a political theory eligible to reveal how the underlying ecophobic ethics in Shakespeare's plays (supposedly typical of Western thought) determine certain power relationships. The result seems to be a deconstruction of Shakespeare's own ecophobic vision of the natural world, ultimately questioning the traditional idea of the playwright as a universal and timeless literary genius, and opening a new political path towards a post-Shakespearean "ecological humility".

Despite the fact that the book is indeed worth reading, and rich in new and original ecocritical insights into Shakespeare's work, the overall ecophobic theory defended in it appears rather puzzling. Two are the main reasons, the first of which lies primarily in the somewhat naive understanding of environmental fear as anti-ecological attitude. Such an understanding denies the evolutionary process in which the 'struggle for survival' has for thousands if not millions of years been linked with the not only human ability to preserve life against the *dangers* coming from the environment. Thus,

if we substituted the term 'ecophobia' with the term 'hygiene' in its broadest sense, we would come to the conclusion that the truth about ecophobia is that it has been the very motor of the preservation and progression of human life and civilisation in time, and that a literature that stands for this is doing a good job. Only diachronically can we interpret the contemporary *excesses* of ecophobia, which are primarily tied to the development and the demands of a trapping industrial free market economy, as negative for human and non-human life.

The second reason for doubting the ecophobic theory in relation to Shakespeare has more closely to do with Estok's understanding of Shakespeare himself and of Western thought more generally. There is no aspect of his place and time that Shakespeare has not absorbed and returned, even unconsciously, in its purest complexity. One of these is certainly the human attitude towards the natural environment. In stating Shakespeare's ecophobic ethics Estok avoids calling into question the wide-spread, well-established and opposite influence of the hermitic and Franciscan model in early modern Europe, which is one of declared *ecophilia.* We clearly find this influence in a central and in the end humbly triumphant Shakespearean character such as Edgar. In this connection it would be important for ecophobic theory to increase the spectrum of its inquiry. Nevertheless, ecocriticism is by all means a discipline in the making, and Estok's book on Shakespeare remains a fundamental pioneer work in the vast field indeed.

Brayton's book belongs to, or even initiates in its own way, a whole new branch of ecocriticism now called 'blue cultural studies' as in opposition to the 'green' ones. At the center of his exploration – containing some at times excessive apocalyptic tones – lies the literary and cultural history of the seas covering seventy percent of the Earth's surface applied to Shakespeare's work, with the aim to rethink the relationship between man and sea in the face of our contemporary global environmental crisis. It is undeniable that the material and not merely metaphorical presence of the sea and of the maritime dimension is a recurring one in Shakespeare. Brayton, like many serious ecological literary scholars, combines his knowledge of letters with an in-depth knowledge of a scientifically based marine environmental history, and a long personal experience of life at sea and with the sea, which creates a unique 'terraqueous' atmosphere. It is a beautiful book opening completely new horizons in the comprehension of Shakespeare's plays as "a counterexample to the culture of plunder" of the natural environment, and of the sea in particular. Differently from Estok, Brayton sees in Shakespeare's environmental imagination an exception in Western thought (being understood that such a summary judgement is problematic), and a model for what our own should be.

Caterina Salabè, Sapienza University of Rome

Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, eds, *Posthumanist Shake-speares*, **Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 261 pp., £ 50.00.**

Deliberately engaging with Harold Bloom's celebrated study, this volume investigates Shakespeare's "invention of the posthuman" (p. 220). Starting from the assumption that in our society "the human can no longer be taken for granted" (p. 5), Herbrechter's Introduction draws an interesting paral-lel between early and late modern cultures: they share a deep awareness of technological change and the same "ambiguity about the distinction between nature and culture, the boundaries of the body, biology and spirituality, ma-terialism and idealism" (p. 12). Shakespeare is at the core of this redefinition of the human.

The first part of the book ("Reading Shakespeare 'after' Humanism") provides, among other things, a poststructuralist interpretation of the hu-man/inhuman dichotomy in *The Merchant of Venice* (Stefan Herbrechter) and a study of the blurring of distinctions between human and non-human ani-mals in *Titus Andronicus* (Bruce Boehrer). Part 2 ("'Posthumanist' Readings") offers an analysis of *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, *The Merchant of Venice* and the late plays. Lear's "humanisms" in contention (Andy Mousley, p. 103) embody an existential and philosophical enquiry about identity and the fate of the human, while the "cyborg god-thing" Coriolanus (Mareille Pfannebecker, p. 124) incarnates (via Hobbes) Derrida's conception of sovereignty as his-torical prosthesis, simultaneously providing a chance to refigure the politi-cal in the tragedy. Part 3 ("Hamlet, 'Posthumanist'?") reads *Hamlet* from a Heideggerian (Laurent Milesi) and a Deleuzian (Marie-Dominique Garnier) perspective. The last essay examines the graveyard scene as a culminating point in Hamlet's "accommodation to the idea that, in Hegel's words, 'the ac-tuality and existence of man is his skull-bone', and our awakening to the idea that the posthuman may be nothing more than that" (Ivan Callus, p. 229). That skull is the orb we inhabit, the globe around which both the humanist and posthumanist perspective revolve. The volume brilliantly embraces this perspective, suggesting challenging and thought-provoking reflections.

In the afterword, Adam Max Cohen describes how his personal experi-ence with cancer forced him to reread the relationship between technology and identity in Shakespeare's age. Shakespeare has never been so human.

Davide Crosara, Sapienza University of Rome

Ton Hoenselaars, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Contemporary Dramatists*, **Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, xxii+298 pp., $ 90.00, paperback edition $ 29.99.**

This collection of essays on playwrights from John Lily to Richard Brome covers the whole gamut of Elizabethan to Caroline dramatists till the closing of the theatres, with a final essay on the history of performance covering most of the authors of the period. It is a well-informed and variously interesting survey on the Elizabethan theatre, often analysing Shakespeare's contemporaries in the light of their relationship to the Bard – or of his to them.

The essays are all up-to-date to the latest findings of criticism, though they differ as to the level of originality: some are little more than a survey of the various works of a particular author (offering the reader also the plot and the characteristics of individual plays), and some work on a higher level. Often they try to oppose the received ideas about a playwright, as Matthew Steggle does in his "Urbane John Marston", where he disputes the traditional image of a Marston who is solipsistically aggressive towards audiences and towards the idea of performance itself, and establishes him as a playwright creatively enmeshed in the theatrical culture of his time, frequently collaborating with fellow authors, and becoming a sort of postmodern, sophisticated professional; or as Carvalho Homem does, in his essay on Massinger, trying to redeem him from the scathing and influential dismissal T. S. Eliot carried out in his essay written in 1920. Most critics start from the most known platitudes about their author (the contraposition between 'natural' Shakespeare and classic, cold Jonson in Chernaik's essay on the latter; the famous, proud claim by Heywood – stated by Jean H. Howard to be the only fact about him known to most scholars of the period, which would be worrying – to have had "an entire hand, or at least a maine finger" in 220 plays); they examine those clichéd remarks, find them wanting and identify new angles from which the playwrights' work can be seen. This certainly happens, though implicitly, in "Thomas Middleton and the Early Modern Theatre", by Michelle O'Callaghan, where the critic, who in the past produced a rather commonplace volume on *Thomas Middleton: Renaissance Dramatist*, uses the results of Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino's *Thomas Middleton: Collected Works and Companion* (only neglecting the little known tragedy *Hengist, King of Kent*), and repeatedly employs unusual though certainly justified words like metaphor, metonymy, symbol as key words fit to describe Middleton's production: a rare phenomenon for a writer who, up to the 1970s and 1980s, was described as a kind of English Zola, with a flair for 'photographical realism' as his main characteristic: certainly a reductive vision of the great author.

In some essays, though they veer on pure information and are therefore not so thrilling for the specialist, an interesting perspective is reached: as in

Lisa Hopkins's "John Ford: Suffering and Silence in *Perkin Warbeck* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*", where, though no exciting new ideas are proposed, the portrait of the playwright comes out effectively from the deep knowledge the critic shows of his work.

Three more essays certainly deserve mention, rising as they do above others in originality and insight: Richard Wilson's "The Words of Mercury: Shakespeare and Marlowe", where the critic takes his start from Bloom's recent *Anatomy of Influence* (2011) and proceeds to depict Shakespeare as distancing himself from Marlowe's histrionic manifestations of his persona in his plays and from his aggressions to the public. Shakespeare's famous dissolution of his personality is referred to the contrary attitude in Marlowe, his sadistic and predominant presence in his characters; Shakespeare's approach to his audience, a literary system "in which playgoers were kingmakers" (p. 39), is again seen as distancing his output from the Marlovian one.

Ton Hoenselaars's "Shakespeare: Colleagues, Collaborators, Co-authors" is a dense survey of Shakespeare's relationship to the playwrights of his time, investigating the question of authorship, and ending with a quotation of Lukas Erne's provocative idea which sees modern editors and producers as partners in the creation and the echoing of the various works: "there is no reason to exclude ourselves as collaborators" (p. 114).

Finally, Robert Henke's essay on Webster dwells on the "generative paradox" (p. 181) according to which the playwright is divided between his deep involvement with the urban networks both of his father's work and of his collaborators in the theatre, and the individuality and independence of an 'author' who mistrusted the audiences of public theatres and cured his manuscripts with the devout attention and the intertextual creativity of 'learned authors' such as Jonson and Chapman.

Daniela Guardamagna, Univeristy of Rome Tor Vergata

Ton Hoenselaars, ed., *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation,* **revised edition, Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury, 2012, 357 pp., £ 16.99.**

This successful edited collection of essays, which originally came out in 2004, has been newly updated and re-published by the Arden Shakespeare series, a welcome example of continued attention paid to an area of studies that has tended to be marginalized in the past, and which the collection has done much, then as now, to promote and bring to the fore of Shakespeare studies. In fact, as Hoenselaars, editor of the collection, persuasively argues in his Introduction; "Translation is not simply another subdiscipline within

Shakespeare studies […]. [It] marks an area of interest which overlaps with every imaginable Shakespearean subdiscipline, thus deserving the status of an equal partner in the academic debate" (p. 2). Hoenselaars goes on to detail the various facets of Shakespearean translation to be taken into consideration: from the role of translation in the Renaissance, to early translations of Shakespeare, to the neoclassical and Romantic traditions, and finally to the living language of Shakespeare in present-day translations and adaptations, in which the intersemiotic aspect of translation takes centre stage, giving rise also to the controversial, and appropriative, phenomenon of 'tradaptation' – translation *cum* adaptation.

The individual topics of the essays are worth detailing here for anyone who may have missed the book the first time around. They are divided into three sections, the first of which reflects on the relationship between Shakespearean texts and different cultures (Dirk Delabastita, Susan Bassnett, Tetsuo Kishi, Alexander Shurbanov and Boika Sokolova, Shen Lin, Rui Carvalho Homem); translation practices and the figure of the translator (Jean-Michel Déprats, Maik Hamburger, Alessandro Serpieri, Werner Brönnimann, Peter Llewellyn-Jones); and the tradaptation/adaptation issue, with a special focus on the post-colonial perspective (J. Derrick McClure, Alfredo Michel Modenessi, Leanore Lieblein, Martin Orkin). An extremely well-informed fourth section by Dirk Delabastita offers suggestions for further reading on Shakespeare and translation, which has been updated especially for this re-edition and is thus of invaluable use to anyone working in the field or simply wishing to re-approach Shakespeare from the angle of what he has meant to peoples and cultures the world over.

Reading this volume one is reminded more than once of the claim made by Giorgio Melchiori, a scholar for whom, being Italian, the translation of Shakespeare was vital: translation, to him, is the very answer to the question of "What to do with *Hamlet*", a question which he pondered in a short essay published in *La traduzione di Amleto nella cultura europea* (ed. Maria Del Sapio Garbero, Marsilio, 2002). What is one to do, then, first and foremost, with *Hamlet*? Translate it, is Melchiori's straightforward answer. And it is the only possible answer, he goes on to explain, if we are truly aware that Shakespeare wrote his plays to be translated, in every possible sense of the word – translated on stage first of all; translated by the flesh and blood and gestures of actors; translated by the audience; and yes, of course, translated by translators.

<div align="right">Iolanda Plescia, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Sujata Iyengar, *Shakespeare's Medical Language: A Dictionary*, Continuum Shakespeare Dictionaries, New York, Continuum, 2011, xvi+416 pp., £ 150.00.

One can easily see how a long-standing interest in Shakespeare and in cultural representations of the human body prompted Renaissance literature scholar Sujata Iyengar to compile this ambitious reference book. Organized in dictionary form (though not according to the most accessible layout), this is a very useful collection of medical-related terms in Shakespeare's oeuvre, from Abhorson to zany. Anyone looking for a traditional dictionary of early modern medicine will nonetheless be disappointed. As the author points out in her Introduction, early modern concepts of embodiment are at the core of this investigation of both diseased and healthy bodies in Shakespeare's works: "this book maintains that the experience of health and disease in the early modern world is experiential, phenomenological, embedded in everyday life rather than restricted to a sector designated discretely 'medical'" (p. 6). At the same time, Iyengar clarifies that this is not a book about retrospective diagnoses of characters or an evaluation of Renaissance medicine vis-à-vis contemporary practice. The overall impression nonetheless is that this book does not provide the encyclopaedic worth its title promises. Far from advocating a rigid approach to compiling dictionaries, I am not persuaded that a number of entries summarizing medical textbooks of the time and some close reading of relevant Shakespearian extracts will satisfy the reader who wants to learn more about "what it means to be an embodied being in a still-mysterious material and metaphysical world" (p. 9). By way of an example, the entry on epilepsy does not mention that Shakespeare's derogatory use of "epileptic visage" in *King Lear* is the first recorded instance of the adjective 'epileptic' in an English text. I would finally recommend Iyengar's dictionary as a valuable starting point for researches on bodies in Shakespeare, but it cannot supplant the wealth of previous studies on human anatomy or single pathologies in the Bard's works.

<div align="right">Maria Vaccarella, King's College London</div>

Christa Jansohn, Lena Cowen Orlin, Stanley Wells, eds, *Shakespeare Without Boundaries*: *Essays in Honor of Dieter Mehl*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2011, 393 pp., £ 50.00.

This *Festschrift* pays homage to Dieter Mehl, the well-known Renaissance and medieval scholar and first President of the reunited German Shakespeare Society. The volume conveys the idea of Mehl as a "boundary crosser" (Ann Jennalie Cook, p. 15). In political terms, Mehl crossed the border between the two Germanies, trying to bring together scholars from both sides of the Wall and

negotiating an end to the division of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft that arose during the Cold War. In aesthetic terms he advocated the crossing of boundaries (which he envisaged as always artificial and ideologically oriented) between genres, languages and media. The numerous essays included in the volume are consistent with this attitude: they investigate the proliferation of Shakespearean objects and illustrations as a way of producing meaning "beyond the boundaries of page and stage" (Caterine M. S. Alexander, p. 320); theatrical blogs and websites as an attempt to go beyond the pass-door (Peter Holland); poetic drama as a specific genre in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *As You Like It* (Alexander Shurbanov); "The Limitations of the First Folio" (Paul Edmonson and Stanley Wells); and the collapsing boundaries between faith and skepticism in Shakespeare's use of the Bible (Piero Boitani). This is a book full of voices that resonate with freedom and intellectual curiosity.

<div align="right">Davide Crosara, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Jeremy Lopez, ed., Richard II*: New Critical Essays***, Milton Park-New York, Routledge, 2012, special Indian edition 2013, £ 75.00.**

The book is a collection of essays by eleven contributors of different nationalities and uneven critical interests, distinct in themes as well as methods, yet all sharing the editor's project of answering the call launched in John Russell Brown's workshop on *Richard II* for a change which might give Shakespeare's Histories a more permanent and relevant place, both in the scholarly and in the popular imagination. What is *new*, as the title suggests, is first of all the structure of the book, built on the pairing of the essays along two principles: on the one hand, essays which clearly diverge from each other are positioned one after the other; on the other hand, pieces which complement each other respond to one another even from opposite sides of the collection. A telling example is the relationship/interconnection between the Introduction – with its concern with historical criticism based on long-standing, static literary critical conventions, which, the author warns, have become unproductive – and the last chapter on the deposition scene, engaged as it is with performance studies.

Lopez's Introduction is itself a chapter in its own right. It provides a multifarious, analytical survey of the history of criticism on *Richard II*, developing from the "peculiarly homogeneous character" of historical criticism of the last century, persistently engaged in analogy and opposition as "the explicit and central concern of most critical responses to most theatrical engagements" encouraged by the play, and a modern performance approach, featuring new historicist criticism towards a refashioning of Shakespeare's vision of English national history.

The essays move from political history to theatre history; from genre to gender issues; particularly engaging is Roslyn L. Knutson's claim that in transforming and perfecting the history play matrix, Shakespeare in fact kills it. Others contemplate the dialectic relationship between stage performance and publication (with interesting implications for the authorship question); Bridget Escolme challenges the press and scholarly responses to 1995 Fiona Shaw's controversial *Richard II*; Melissa Sanchez focuses on the female characters of the play, and drawing upon the work of Judith Butler argues that Ernst Kantorowicz's well-known study on *The King's Two Bodies* has "helped to produce a view of political process and identity that occludes, or cannot accommodate, female bodies" (p. 39). In conclusion what makes this volume *new* is the way critical voices intersect, engaging in discourses which, like politics, transcend the borders of the text as well as the borders of England; thus reinvigorating the old-fashioned image of Shakespeare as a chronicler of the past.

<div align="right">Rosy Colombo, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

David Lucking, *Making Sense in Shakespeare*, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2012, xiv+233 pp., $ 71.16 / € 52.00.

David Lucking's book focuses on the way Shakespeare's characters "make sense of experience through the medium of words" (p. xi). Some of them inquire into the reasons why things happen, especially when they lose their certainties, as in *King Lear*, where the question about the cause of thunder contains a philosophical dilemma that stems from ancient times. Once again, this book stresses the playwright's interest in notions of causation and motivation, which are related to knowledge and meaning. In line with his previous study on names in Shakespeare (*The Shakespearean Name: Essays on* Romeo and Juliet, The Tempest, *and Other Plays*, 2007), Lucking here delves into the function of a number of words (for instance, "cause") that occur in Shakespeare more often than others. In so doing, he touches the terrain of both philosophy and narrative theory, because it's through words that the characters account for the reason and the way things happen.

After an introductory chapter on "The Cause of Thunder", each section is dedicated to one of the plays written around the turn of the sixteenth century, when Shakespeare was arguably involved in the issue of knowledge. Lucking's analysis shows how the true determinants of human actions, which can greatly influence the succession of events, remain obscure despite the rationale laid out by some protagonists, for example Henry V and Brutus. George Lakoff's theory of metaphor as a cognitive tool and the famous statement that "metaphors can kill" are interestingly applied to *The*

Merchant of Venice, especially to the metaphoric narratives told by a Shylock who starts perceiving Antonio's body as something that can be divided and weighed. While showing that the narrative construction of reality takes on different forms in *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus*, the volume's own narrative is fluid and engaging. Shakespeare, Lucking reminds us, greatly contributed to phrase the question as to whether the motives of human actions can ever be understood.

<div style="text-align: right">Stefania Porcelli, City University of New York</div>

Michele Marrapodi, ed., *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theories: Anglo-Italian Transactions*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, 321 pp., € 81.72.

Dedicated to the memory of Giorgio Melchiori (1920-2009), this book collects both the mature versions of contributions presented at the 4th International Shakespeare Conference held at the University of Palermo in 2006, and original chapters. It is part of the Ashgate Anglo-Italian Renaissance Studies series, which aims to trace the connections of early modern English drama with Italian culture and dramatic tradition. Accordingly, the book focuses on the manifold appropriations of Italian culture in Shakespeare and early modern English drama, maintaining that, to the contemporaries, Italian Renaissance culture held the status that Marx and Freud held in the twentieth century: no one could escape the influence even in the absence of a proven philological link. The circulation of 'theatregrams' and 'fictograms' from Italian *novelle* constitutes the basic theoretical principle of the whole collection. Italian literary theories are read alongside the Elizabethan dramatic conventions, and compose the background against which Elizabethan innovations often become patent. The essays of part 1 ("Art, Rhetoric and Style") are devoted to formal and theoretical issues. Stephen Orgel insists on the meaningfulness of incoherence in Shakespeare's plays: on the one hand, this is evidence that Shakespeare sometimes changed his mind; on the other, it is puzzling that incoherence has remained a feature of the texts for centuries. Robin H. Wells addresses the much debated topics of subjectivity, authorship and writing, claiming that Renaissance poets had a clear concept of what it meant to be an author. John Roe analyses the role of Italian rhetoric in fostering Elizabethan poetics, as well as the discourse of patronage and the interplay of Petrarchan conventions in the *Sonnets*. Mariangela Tempera shows how the outdoing of Senecan and Italianate theatregrams works in *Titus Andronicus*, and Adam Max Cohen reads *The Winter's Tale* alongside the treatment of wonder in early modern Italian literary discourse. Part 2 ("Genres, Models, Forms") opens with a contribu-

tion by Frances K. Barasch, who sketches the *Commedia dell'Arte* milieu in which Shakespeare completed his apprenticeship and identifies Italianate patterns in *Hamlet*, such as the Pantalone family as a model for the garrulous Polonius and his sexual obsession. Next, Hugh Grady adopts a Machiavellian theoretical stance to read *Julius Caesar*, whose 'neutrality', he argues, is crucially indebted to the Machiavellian amoral outlook of political behaviour. In chapter 8, Anthony Ellis writes about the comic *senex*, comparing Shakespeare's *As You Like It* to Ruzante's *L'Anconitana* to identify common strategies for the investigation of specific social problems. Without claiming identifiable genetic ties between the two playwrights, Robert Henke tackles technical and thematic homologies in Shakespeare's and Ruzante's works. Next, Michele Marrapodi traces the genre of the Shakespearean *tragedia mista* back to Giraldi Cinthio's writings and identifies the *commedia grave*, in which the *topos* of the wondrously virtuous and constant woman proves dominant, as one of the genres that inspired Shakespeare's *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*. The ambivalence of the Italian Carnival, especially as it used to take place in the cities of Venice and Verona, is central in François Laroque's essay. In his reading, the Italian Carnival offers both a thematic unity and an aesthetic principle of hybridity and subversion. Focusing on *Richard II*, Susan Payne links the play's insistence on optical and horticultural paradigms to the Italian Renaissance perspective theories and especially to anamorphosis. English courtesan drama is the subject of Keir Elam's contribution, which connects it to Italian courtesanship and to Venice as its symbolic centre. Duncan Salkeld analyses the sixteenth-century debate of the *paragone* between two arts, which found in Leonardo da Vinci one of its illustrious practitioners and left its mark not only on Shakespeare's poetry but also on the plays, especially on *Timon of Athens*. The closing essay, by Michael Wyatt, sketches a conspicuous Italian presence in the Stuart court culture. The Italian community in London, he notices, contributed to the financing of the welcoming ceremony held for King James I. An afterword by Louise George Clubb reinforces and clarifies the theoretical standpoint that sustains the collection, insisting on the natural circulation of cultural elements by which the contamination between Renaissance Italy and Elizabethan/Jacobean England can be claimed to have taken place even in the lack of traceable links, on which, however, research has recently been developing.

<div align="right">Maria Grazia Tonetto, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Unhae Park Langis, *Passion, Prudence and Virtue in Shakespearean Drama*, **New York, Continuum, 2011, x+180 pp., $ 95.16 / € 69.54.**
Kathryn Schwartz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space*, **Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, xii+304 pp., $ 57.09 / € 41.72.**
Kaara L. Peterson and Deanne Williams, eds, *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, **New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, ix+272 pp., $ 62.85 / € 45.93.**

Three volumes recently published in the United States discuss Shakespearean female characters in depth, as well as the representation of women's virtue and passion in Shakespeare. Unhae Park Langis links an ethical and philosophical approach to an interest in cognitive issues and body studies. Her volume *Passion, Prudence and Virtue in Shakespearean Drama* examines the early modern concept of virtue in the light of a philosophical tradition that stems from Aristotle. The values of prudence and moderation are crucial to the period, when such notions are clearly divided along gender lines. However, the author argues (against Aristotle) that the Aristotelian concept of virtue is better embodied in Shakespeare's female characters (that Park Langis calls *viragos*) than in men's *virtus*. Moral action occurs at the confluence of prudence, rational will (that entails choice), and virtuous desire (p. 22). Langis's compelling analysis crosses various theatrical genres (comedy, tragedy and romance), and different human spheres of interaction (domestic, courtly, and civil). The tragedy often occurs in the imbalance between the genders, when passions are not ruled by prudent strategy, or because both sides tend to hypervirtue (as in the case of Othello and Desdemona). On the contrary, passions controlled by women's willful reason are directed towards well being (Helena in *All's Well* is a case in point).

Women's agency is also the hub of Kathryn Schwartz's *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space*. The volume considers women characters that conform to their time's conventions, in a way that challenges the heterosocial hierarchy of the society they live in. It analyzes the theoretically dense concept of will as the female counterpart of masculine reason. Ideally divided into two parts, the book focuses first on the philosophical aspects and rhetorical construction of gender and misogyny in the early modern period (chapters 1-3). Secondly, it analyzes Shakespearean texts that engage and subvert conventions of gender, through women that consciously reiterate the social role imposed upon them. Through their constancy, virtue, and chastity, characters such as Helena, Isabella and Cordelia demonstrate that "wilful conformity confounds distinctions between affective allegiance and appropriate defiance" (p. 11). Through an articulated use of poststructuralist and gender theories, Schwarz discusses the role feminine volition plays in forging dynamic contracts in the "Shakespearean social space".

The last book in this triad, *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, focuses on one specific Shakespearean character. Drawing on Elaine Showalter's essay "Representing Ophelia: Woman Madness and the Responsibility of Feminist Criticism" (1985), the collection of essays edited by Kaara L. Peterson and Deanne Williams examines the way in which the interpretations of Ophelia through the ages mirror the ideology and concerns pivotal to the cultures that represent her. Since the character is already mediated in *Hamlet*, the various representations of Ophelia analyzed in the volume are 're-mediations' in painting, photography, later theatre, cinema, and social networks. A valuable book for those interested in both adaptation and appropriation of Shakespeare's characters and in gender theories, the volume shows the still ongoing process of regeneration and reinvention of Shakespeare's most popular female character. It also features essays by renown scholars such as Lois Potter, fascinating illustrations, and an afterword by Coppélia Kahn, which links together the various chapters of the collection and tells a 'different story' about Ophelia.

Stefania Porcelli, City University of New York

Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare and Contemporary Theory: New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, **London, Bloomsbury, 2012, 240 pp., $ 34.95.**

Not only is this book a history of recent Shakespearean criticism, it is also an effective introduction to relevant strains of contemporary theory, meant for both students and scholars. It provides, moreover, a fully-fledged contribution to Shakespearean studies. Parvini charts crucial turns and changes in the study of Shakespeare. He starts from the character criticism and formalist approaches dominant in the first half of the twentieth century and goes on to trace the rise and hegemony of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, foregrounding their preoccupations, interpretive logic, and style of communication. He discusses a great variety of theoretical concepts, broadening his focus to discuss the thinkers that have inspired or influenced them. Besides showing the ways in which the works of Shakespeare have been understood by twentieth-century critics, this book constitutes, therefore, a concise, useful introduction to thinkers like Gramsci, Althusser, and Foucault. At the same time, moreover, *Shakespeare and Contemporary Criticism* takes its own critical position. In discussing contemporary theory, Parvini historicizes it: in his conclusion, he emphasizes the need to supersede 'anti-humanist' approaches that imply a view of human nature as a blank slate filled by 'culture'. With an eye to evolutionary studies and neurobiology, Parvini invites students of Shakespeare to explore the vital relation between texts and their readers.

Riccardo Capoferro, Sapienza University of Rome

Don Paterson, *Reading Shakespeare's Sonnets: A New Commentary*, **London, Faber & Faber, 2010, paperback edition 2012, 500 pp., £ 9.99.**

Paterson, a poet himself, offers what we may call a non-academic, informal, and in some parts humorous, reading of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. The book is composed of an Introduction, two short final notes on the sonnet form and its metre and an individual commentary on each of the 154 sonnets. What the author is attempting, as he states himself, is to engage with the poem "directly", to see how the poem "works", what it is "saying about us" and "about the author".

The tone – which has irritated some readers – is colloquial, at times chatty, and though Paterson shows himself to be well acquainted with the critical history of the collection, previous scholarly interpretations are thrown in almost as asides, critics are mentioned by their initials, and no footnotes are given which could allow readers to trace the references. This clearly provides a flowing and attractive prose and favours an immediate approach to the sonnet itself, an approach which is never shallow and often fresh, though perhaps more difficult to accept for those used to traditional commentaries. Similarly in the actual comments themselves Paterson does not mince his words, referring for instance to the "procreation sonnets" as a "rather dull run", a "warm up experience", or paraphrasing, for example, the famous first line of *Sonnet 2* ("When forty winters shall besiege thy brow") with "When you are old and look like train-wreck", an undoubtedly original approach aimed at removing the awe which generally surrounds the words of Shakespeare. As for the much debated issue of the relationship with the "fair youth" whom Paterson prefers to call simply "young man" there is no hesitation that the feelings expressed reveal an erotic passion.

It is this direct and simplifying attitude which characterizes the book, the everyday, non-academic jargon has been praised by some as the better way to come into contact with poems; in addition Paterson does provide technical observations which reveal his poetic sensibility and his erudition. This new commentary stands out for wit and humour, for its apparent disrespect for formal criticism and for its ability to decipher some of the more complex verses in the *Sonnets*. It also faces us with the more general problem of the 'correct' way to approach and interpret poetry. Nonetheless, this book alone would not be sufficient for those unfamiliar with the Shakespearian text and its critical tradition.

<div align="right">Maria Valentini, University of Cassino</div>

Eric Rasmussen, *The Shakespeare Thefts: In Search of the First Folios,* **New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 237 pp., $ 17.00.**

This is a most entertaining self-professed "literary detective story", which Shakespeare and Sherlock lovers alike will thoroughly enjoy. It chronicles the adventures of Rasmussen and his team of "First Folio hunters", who set out on a globe-wide journey to embark on the remarkable project of cataloguing each of the 232 known copies of Shakespeare's First Folio, as well as trying to locate copies known to exist but never found. The Folio is a fetish not only for Shakespeareans, it turns out, but especially for the rich, who have variously aspired to its ownership as a status symbol (as the emblematic efforts of Henry Clay Folger, president of Standard Oil, who managed to amass 82 copies, stand to prove).

Rasmussen and his team's main goal was to produce the most comprehensive and detailed descriptive catalogue of all the accessible copies of the First Folio to date, a feat that was accomplished in 2012 (with the publication, again with Palgrave, of *The Shakespeare First Folios: A Descriptive Catalogue*). This impressive scholarly achievement is well complemented by the narrative of the stories behind the Folios presented in the *Shakespeare Thefts*: while the latter appeals of course to a broader, and not necessarily specialized, audience, it is also extremely informative and well-documented.

The book is also a fascinating journey through libraries all over the world, from the Folger to the second largest Shakespearean collection in the world, that of Meisei, Japan; from the Vatican, where a First Folio brought to Rome by the Royal Shakespeare Company to be blessed by the Pope was accepted by Paul VI who mistook it for a gift (it was later returned after diplomatic negotiations), to the library at the University of Padua, which possesses the only copy now held in Italy.

It is impossible to account for all the captivating stories related in the twenty chapters (the book also contains a useful appendix on the material process of making the First Folio). Perhaps the most intriguing of the tales Rasmussen has reconstructed are the ones that cannot be fully told: the stories, that is, about copies that have been destroyed – lost at sea after the sinking of the Arctic in 1854, or gone up in flames in the Chicago Fire of 1871; but mostly, stolen – by servants or specialized literary thieves. Neither is the requisite touch of *noir* – so crucial to any good mystery story – missing here: as the research progressed, the team noticed with some surprise that a good number of First Folio owners met their end shortly after acquiring the coveted book; the most suggestive instance being that of the young Harry Widener, who met his fate only two years after obtaining his copy, when he reportedly missed a seat on a lifeboat on the night of the Titanic disaster in order to save a copy of Francis Bacon's 1598 *Essays*, which he could not bear to leave in his cabin. A cautionary tale against unbridled book lust if there ever was one.

<div align="right">Iolanda Plescia, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

William Shakespeare, *Sonetti*, translation and reading by Pino Co-lizzi, Roma, Società Dante Alighieri, 2012, 331 pp.+2 CDs, € 18.00.

Pino Colizzi has produced a new translation into Italian of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* to which he has added his own reading of them which comes with his booklet on CD. As he asserts in his introductory note, it is the musicality of the verse which he first learnt to appreciate on hearing Sir John Gielgud's reading, which led him to attempt a new translation privileging sound. Colizzi has chosen to translate Shakespeare's iambic pentameter with the hende-casyllable which he considers more suitable for the reproduction of rhythm and metre. He has also interpreted the sonnets not as individual, self-con-tained poems, but rather as a continuous and continuing love story which he feels Shakespeare must have written throughout his life.

The most rewarding experience we draw from this publication is the actual listening to the reading of the sonnets which reproduces the strong musical and rhythmical sense of the original. Clearly, meaning is at times sacrificed for the sake of sound, but Colizzi manages to retain the fundamen-tal content and the imagery of the individual poems.

Two brief prefaces appear in the booklet: one by the critic and poet Elio Pecora who, following Bloom, interprets Shakespeare as the poet who reaches out to us, who cannot be confined to his own historical and cultural context, and commends Colizzi's endeavour for his linguistic choices and particularly for the effect of his performance. The other by Edoardo Zuccato, an expert in translation studies, expresses appreciation for Colizzi's trans-position of metre and rhyme and emphasises the fact that most translation choices can only be fully appreciated by listening to the actual reading, a reading, he states, which is not simply "recited" as it would be in a play, but which is "vocalized" as it should be with lyrical poetry.

This new translation, with its popularizing intent, offers the Italian reader and listener yet another occasion to appreciate Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and at times – through the interpretation which inevitably comes from translating – to understand their complexity more fully.

Maria Valentini, University of Cassino

Stuart Sillars, *Shakespeare, Time and the Victorians: A Pictorial Ex-ploration*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, xxiii+360 pp., £ 50.00.

Shakespeare, Time and the Victorians is another book from the hand of the re-markably prolific Stuart Sillars. His book *Painting Shakespeare* appeared in 2006, *The Illustrated Shakespeare, 1709-1820* in 2008 and now just four years

later this brilliantly researched and fundamentally novel view of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century has been published. Sillars's speciality is the subtle relationship between word and image, and in the nineteenth century, he claims, such was the power of the image that the reception of Shakespeare's plays was determined as much by their representation in visual media (paintings, etchings, drawings, etc.) as it was by performance on the stage. In addition to this the production of Shakespeare in this period was intimately dependent on a kind of historical authenticity that would be incomprehensible to a modern audience. Victorian Shakespeare activity, says Sillars, in performance, editing and painting, is united by bonds ideological, methodological and material, through links both complex and dynamic. At the core of the enterprise was the Victorian idea of history and in Shakespeare the Victorians tried to create a balance between the historical past and the contingencies of the present, but in a context where authenticity was granted a kind of moral seriousness. In the Victorian world there could be no Hamlet in dinner jackets!

Summing up his own project, Sillars says that the purpose of his book lies in: "disentangling and then reassembling these forces, to reveal what is arguably the major force of Victorian Shakespeare activity, on stage and in painting, in illustrated edition, in records of performance through engraving and photograph, and in the construction of the plays in the memory of the reader and viewer" (p. 4).

As the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth century, the so-called hierarchy of styles took a firm grip on the world of the visual arts. In this certain genres were considered much superior to others. At the bottom of this hierarchy was portrait and landscape painting and at the top, high and untouchable, was what was called 'history painting'. This involved subjects drawn from myth, battles and significant moments in the, usually, European past, together of course with subjects drawn from Shakespeare. Shakespeare was perennially popular partly because subjects from the plays immediately attracted distinction and second because such subjects were highly saleable. In Britain the genre was frequently steeped in personal sentiment in which the tender emotions of individuals were contextualized in great historical moments. When the young men of the Pre-Raphaelite movement came to the fore, they too saw the possibilities in the Shakespearean subject. And it is here that Sillars detects a watershed in the visual representation, and consequently the wider sense of the significance of Shakespeare's plays. The early Victorian mode of conception he identifies with a painting like Daniel Maclise's well-known *The Play Scene in Hamlet* of 1842. Sillars provides his readers with a brilliant and sensitive deconstruction of this piece and especially the way in which the complex symbolic system works across the picture plane referring to moments in the drama that preceded and succeed this particular event. This, Sillars tells us, is one of the finest yet last pictures

painted in this mode in which the temporal sequence of the play employs such progressive inclusiveness. The Pre-Raphaelites changed this, he argues. In such famous works as Millais's *Ophelia*, and his painting *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* or Holman Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella* the painterly techniques of the Pre-Raphaelites set out new ways of representing the material world and hence new ways of interpreting Shakespeare. The hyperrealism of colour and form creates a powerful tension as it works against the absence of aerial perspective and often of geometrical perspective. In the example taken from *The Tempest*, argues Sillars, the disconcerting eerie otherworldliness of Millais's techniques has a parallel in the supernatural events of the drama in a way previous illustrators would have found impossible.

Shakespeare, Time and the Victorians goes on to examine the dialectic between Shakespeare's text and its other visually directed manifestations in the nineteenth century. A chapter on Charles Kean and staging is followed by the 'memorialising' of productions in the journals, especially *The Illustrated London News*, and another on the status of photography in the production of Shakespeare for an audience that may not have seen any staging. The anthologising and fragmentation of Shakespeare's plays then follows, with a section on the development of Shakespearean subject in painting after the Pre-Raphaelites.

Such a brief report cannot do justice to neither the richness nor the complexity of Sillars's work in this book. His range is superb, his analysis usually fine and his choice of example subtle and sensitive. It will remain an outstanding contribution to this field for many years to come. But the field itself lies firmly in the realm of Victorian culture. The book draws upon a detailed knowledge of Shakespeare, but it offers little in terms of commentary or interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. It does provide a remarkable insight into how our ancestors responded to Shakespeare, and it provides access to the response in a remarkably intelligent way. This, therefore, is an outstanding book on one significant element within Victorian culture.

J. B. Bullen, Professor Emeritus, University of Reading

Laura Tosi and Shaul Bassi, eds, *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, xvii+259 pp., £ 60.00.

In his Introduction to *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare* Stanley Wells outlines just how important Italy was to Shakespeare. From its dark, dangerous and mysterious culture to its warm, fruitful and extrovert life, if it had not existed, says Wells, Shakespeare would have had to have invented it. It is unlikely that Shakespeare ever visited the country, though Well suggests that he may well have been able to read Italian. But the idea of Italy loomed large

in the sixteenth century imagination and at the centre of this fantasy stood Venice followed by Rome. As Tosi and Bassi point out, within the Renaissance response to Italian culture, "Venice is the most enduring symbolic landscape" providing the "ultimate fictional landscape of otherness" (pp. 2-3) because Venice seemed to embody the very Renaissance "culture of paradox". Strangely enough though two decades have passed since the role of Venice in Shakespeare's plays has been reassessed yet the subject occurs in two books almost at the same time and from the same publisher: Graham Holderness's *Shakespeare and Venice* (2010) and this one, *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare* (2011) edited by Laura Tosi and Shaul Bassi.

Visions of Venice is comprised of a number of fine and sometimes highly specialized essays from a group of international scholars. The chapters fall into four groups, one dealing with sources, one dealing with politics and religion, one dealing with the mythology of Venice, and the fourth about the reception of the Venetian plays.

The collection opens with a discussion of Shakespeare's likely source material for his personal vision of Venice, where the novellas of Giraldi Cinthio seem to come out favourite. The older notion that Venice was a screen used by Shakespeare on which to project the culture of his contemporary London has been largely discredited, but as the second section of this book points out, Venice is constructed as a puzzle of utopian and dystopian qualities that gives a hint of what England might become. Most interestingly Andrew Hadfield shows how Shakespeare probably drew on William Thomas's *History of Italy* (1549) for *The Merchant of Venice* and Virginia Mason makes out a strong case for Shakespeare's dependence on Richard Knowles's *Generall Hisotrie of the Turkes* (1603) and the shift in Venetian history, as Knowles records it, from the military prowess identified with Othello and the Machiavellianism identified with Iago.

In the second section on the role of Venetian politics and religion in Shakespeare's texts, Julia Reinhardt points out how the Old Testament figure, Job, was worshipped as a saint in Venice. In a brilliant chapter she outlines his shadowy presence in Shakespeare's Venetian dramas. Job was, she says a figure that represents the commutativity between ancient and modern religious traditions, between Christianity and Islam and between Othello and Shylock.

In the section dealing with the mythology of Venice, Graham Holderness points out how the myth of the city has been created partly by its own inhabitants and partly by its visitors. Surprisingly, modern myths began very early in the Renaissance itself, and had their source in the multicultural population, and the liminal position of the city between East and West. This liminality is touched upon again by Kent Cartwright in his examination of the return-from-the-dead motif that features in *The Merchant of Venice* as well as in Shakespeare's early comedies. The hybrid, liminal city, says Cartwright, "is

the very image of Shakespeare's Renaissance". The afterlife of Shakespeare's Venetian plays in the fourth section is dominated by the work of Stuart Sillars who explores the visual representation of Venice in English culture. Sillars notices the explosion of interest in an authentic topography after the fall of Venice and the advent of Byronic tourism and its taste for the exotic.

Visions of Venice in Shakespeare is a stimulating collection of essays, which using more recent methodologies brings the presence of Venice in Shakespeare's plays up to date. Naturally it does not aim for total inclusiveness, but is intended to act as a stimulus for further work in this field. In opening up new realms of exploration and providing a spring board for debate Laura Tosi and Shaul Bassi are to be congratulated.

<div align="right">J. B. Bullen, Professor Emeritus, University of Reading</div>

Garry Wills, *Rome and Rhetoric in Shakespeare's* **Julius Caesar, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2011, 197 pp., € 19.61. Raphael Lyne,** *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition***, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 267 pp.**, **€ 64.95. Maria Franziska Fahey,** *Metaphor and Shakespearean Drama: Unchaste Signification,* **Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 192 pp.**, **€ 62.17.**

Shakespeare and rhetoric still proves a fruitful line of inquiry. The authors of the three books here examined adopt three different angles. Garry Wills's *Rome and Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar* envisages rhetoric in a traditional manner, as the art of choosing and organizing linguistic material to the end of persuasion, even more so in a play which – the author maintains – is about the demagogic skills of its characters. The book was first presented as the Anthony Hacht Lectures in the Humanities given by the author in 2009. Accordingly, its approach is informal and accessible to the non-scholarly reader. Wills examines how the Plutarchian techniques of *syngkrisis*, or joint judgment, and of paired discourses, are woven through Shakespeare's play and are actually responsible for the difficulty in deciding which role is prominent in *Julius Caesar*. In obedience to that structure, the male characters mirror each other, and the same dynamics connects Portia and Calphurnia's roles. Wills moves easily between Elizabethan performances, digressions on their material conditions, and twentieth-century film adaptations.

Raphael Lyne's *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition* is rooted in the more recent attempt to connect Shakespeare with cognitive sciences, a strand of research which has grown with books like Philip Davis's *Shakespeare Thinking* (2007) or Mary Crane's *Shakespeare's Brain* (2001). Rhetoric, the book suggests, is not to be regarded merely as a guide to eloquent and persuasive

speech. Key rhetorical tropes, instead, have a close relationship with the way thought works and actually happens. In Lyne's reading, tropes are heuristic means that bring together the mind with reality and represent thought while it struggles to take shape. Soliloquies, the author claims, employ rhetorical tropes not to persuade the audience, nor to reveal a hidden interiority, but seem to be devoted to mastering thoughts in moments of cognitive uncertainty. The first chapters offer a detailed critical map of the seminal studies in the field. Chapter 2 develops an unconventional history of rhetorical manuals with Renaissance England as a culminating point. According to Lyne, writers perceived qualities in rhetoric that placed it closer to the origins of intellectual endeavour than to an ornamental enrichment of speech. Synecdoche, for instance, etymologically a 'taking together', mirrors the way in which comprehension takes place in the brain, in which new connections are formed by partial intersections; indeed, synecdochical comprehension occurs when one aspect of something recalls the whole of something else. Similarly, in George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), 'concept' is presented as a 'taking together', from the Latin *concipio*. In the second part of the book, Lyne analyses both Shakespeare's plays and the *Sonnets*, beginning with *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, and Bottom's attempt to process his experience of dreaming. A similar formative movement is shown to pervade the rhetorical richness of Imogen's speeches in *Cymbeline*. However, while in *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* and in *Cymbeline* the heuristic finality of rhetoric brings about a sense of delightful enrichment to the way reality is apprehended, in *Othello* cognitive-rhetorical resources lead to a heuristic failure. Othello's metaphors engender problems more often than they solve them, and their discoveries are false. The last chapter, on the *Sonnets*, explores the ways in which Shakespeare achieves insights into extreme feelings by means of rhetorical-heuristic turns, complementing Lyne's findings about the theatrical staging of thought with the more intimate fruition of the *Sonnets*.

Maria Franziska Fahey's *Metaphor and Shakespearean Drama: Unchaste Signification* treats the role of metaphor in Shakespeare's plays from a historicist point of view, reading both Shakespeare and early modern texts with an awareness of how rhetorical tropes gain resonance from the whole of the cultural system. Chapter 2 examines falconry metaphors in *Othello*, reading them along with contemporary treatises on falconry and illuminating how the articulation of Desdemona and Othello's desires, modelled on falconer, hawk, and prey, suggest the failure of the couple's union from the beginning; by voicing those metaphors, Desdemona participates unwittingly in the discourse that disfigures her marriage. Indeed, one of the tenets of the book is metaphor's surreptitious ability to make speakers and auditors beget meanings and conceive ideas without their full awareness. Chapter 3 examines the triangulation of metaphor, sacrifice and violence in *Titus Andronicus*, centring on the way in which the line between words and force, metaphori-

cal and literal speech, is blurred as Aaron transforms the wooing of Lavinia into her hunting with force, twisting conventional metaphors of courtship-as-hunt love poetry into a literal enactment. Chapter 4 is devoted to the more predictable theme of equivocation in *Macbeth*; an analysis of *King Henry IV Part 1* allows the author to explore the role of metaphor in figuring royalty, as Prince Henry, like Christ, succeeds in aligning himself with lofty emblems of kingliness, such as the heavenly sun, and with the earthly emblems of the son of flesh and blood. The instrument of such a twofold figuration of royalty is the carnivalesque doubling of kingly metaphor that takes place in the tavern world. Metaphor, Fahey maintains, is central to the most weighty theological debate of Shakespeare's time, namely the one about the literal or metaphorical status of the Eucharist and of the verb 'to be' in that context. Finally, the book illustrates the role of dead metaphor in *Hamlet*, suggesting a metaphorical reading of the pouring of poison into the king's ear. The last chapter, on *The Tempest*, analyses how the metaphorical misnaming of Caliban as a "fish" orientates the travellers' further observations on the natives, and how the transfer of the word 'fish' onto Caliban actually projects the travellers' own hunger onto the supposed cannibal.

<div style="text-align: right">Maria Grazia Tonetto, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Christopher R. Wilson, *Shakespeare's Musical Imagery*, London, Bloomsbury, 2011, xi+259 pp., $ 120.00 / € 90.51.
Joseph M. Ortiz, *Broken Harmony: Shakespeare and the Politics of Music*, New York, Cornell University Press, 2011, xvi+261 pp., $ 46.95 / € 42.11.
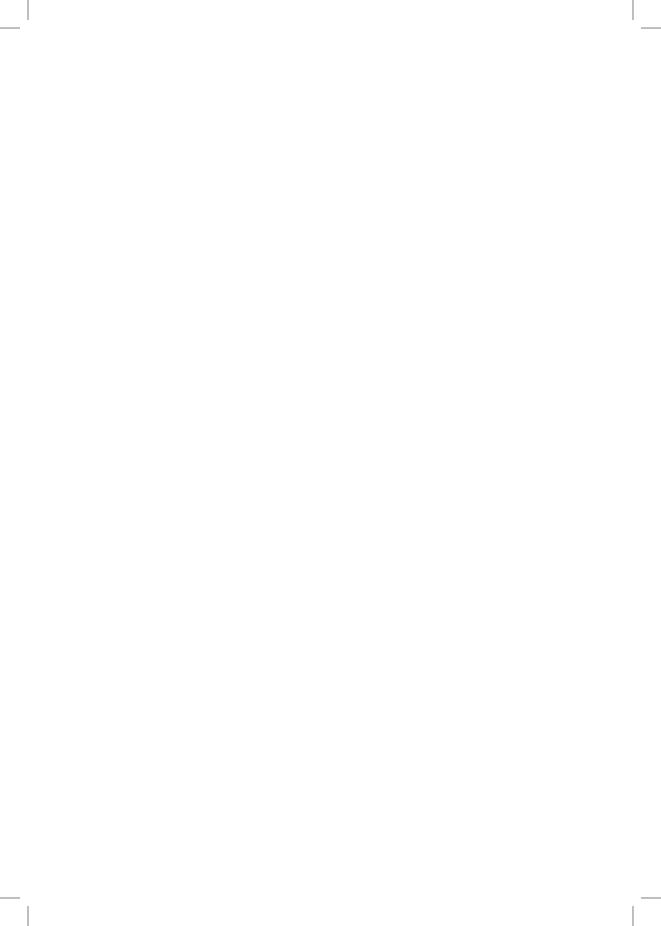
The interest for music in Shakespeare has been recently revived by two seminal books that came out in 2011: Christopher Wilson's *Shakespeare's Musical Imagery* and Joseph Ortiz's *Broken Harmony: Shakespeare and the Politics of Music*.

Shakespeare's Musical Imagery has a wide scope and focuses on a number of subjects such as musical theories; their history from the classical world to early modern days; references to music in figures of speech; myth and musical instruments. On rare occasions the book also offers brief comments based on the scores and on the rhetoric of Shakespeare's music – two traits hardly ever found in other essays, due to the interdisciplinary nature of the subject. Such characteristics only add up to Wilson's invaluable work, which will prove useful not only to the Shakespearean readership who takes a special interest in music, but also to the Shakespearean scholar *tout court* for the new light that Wilson's observations shed on the texts.

Broken Harmony: Shakespeare and the Politics of Music on the other hand does not revolve around textual or musical analysis. Devoid by Shakespeare of its Platonic ethos, music becomes a promiscuous means of communication.

Therefore on the whole Ortiz is not concerned with understanding the poetic function of each piece of music in Shakespeare. He is instead interested in penetrating the secret of music as a code of non-verbal communication and in its literary, social, political and religious reception and repercussions. He therefore focuses not only on Shakespeare's relationship with Ovid's musical myths, but also on Renaissance treatises, emblems, theatregoers' comments, reformist ideas, and iconoclasm, thus providing a very lively and greatly enjoyable portrait of Jacobean England and its cultural debate about music. It is a pity that the title induces the reader to think that the book is only about Shakespearean music, thus not accounting for the brilliant final chapter about Milton's *A Maske*.

<div align="right">Giuliano Pascucci, Sapienza University of Rome</div>

Abstracts

Shakespeare and Philosophical Criticism
Tzachi Zamir

The essay considers competing ways in which the interface between Shakespeare and philosophy may be conceived. After rejecting some routes, the essay unfolds its own proposal regarding philosophical criticism, exemplifying the approach through a reading of *Sonnet 71*.

Reading Shakespeare – Reading Modernity
Kristin Gjesdal

From the mid 1700s onwards, the German literati and theatre community were engaged in a heated and wide-ranging debate over William Shakespeare's drama. At stake were not only questions about the theatrical implications and impact of Elizabethan drama, but also a more systematic inquiry into the nature of art. In this context, one voice stands out: that of Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder's 1772 essay "Shakespear" (sic) sums up the contemporary discussion, but also brings it to a new philosophical level. For Herder, Shakespeare is the Bard of modernity. His theatre articulates patterns of diversity within and between cultures, thus also triggering a set of new hermeneutic problems and challenges. Through his work on Shakespeare, Herder brings forth a novel understanding of modernity – of art in modernity, of the conditions of self-understanding and understanding others – that differs from the way Hegel and his likes, a good thirty years later, would shape the discourse of hermeneutics as well as our understanding of the modern world and the role of art within it.

"The Charm Dissolves Apace": Shakespeare and the Self-Dissolution of Drama
Paul A. Kottman

In this essay, I argue that Shakespeare – perhaps the world's pre-eminent dramatist – stages, from within his drama, the self-dissolution of our need for the sensuous, material representation of human actions in order to understand ourselves as actors, as free self-determining agents in the world. The depiction of our lessening need for sensuous representational drama becomes, itself, a primary task of Shakespearean drama – as if being a dramatist, for Shakespeare, means making the historical disappearance of the conditions under which traditional (sensuous, representational) forms of drama matter into the very stuff of a dramatic work. Building on these claims, I suggest that Shakespearean drama offers an alternative future for modernism to the one presented in recent philosophical work on modernist art. Precisely because Shakespeare's artistic horizons are less limited than other modernist movements – his dramatic work is not nearly as restricted (not nearly as precious, some might say) as Cage's or Pollock's – it is to Shakespeare's radical modernism that we might turn to find a more capacious future for art (and, hence, for philosophical reflection on art) beyond both its sensuous and its representational form.

Nietzsche's Shakespeare: Musicality and Historicity in The Birth of Tragedy
Katie Brennan

Nietzsche was deeply interested in Shakespeare during the period leading up to the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*. His notebooks from this period clearly indicate that throughout the planning stages of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had intended to devote an entire chapter to Shakespeare, in which Shakespeare was to serve as a bridge between the spirit of the great ancient Greek playwrights and Wagner. In this paper I discuss why, despite the absence of a detailed account of Shakespeare in the final version *The Birth of Tragedy*, he is nonetheless essential to Nietzsche's theory of tragedy.

Considerazioni 'impolitiche' sul Re Lear
Massimo Cacciari

This essay reads Shakespeare's *King Lear* as the extreme expression of a world in decay, approaching a kind of apocalypse, the end of all time and radical dissolution of every human bond – political, social, familiar – symbolized in particular by the corrosion of the filial bond. Aspects of the carnivalesque inhabit such an accelerated world, rushing madly towards its end; however, it is argued, the process of the carnival here does not fulfil its traditional role as reversal leading to the re-establishment of a new world order. In this sense, the end cannot be interpreted as a new beginning, and the order of tragedy is abandoned in favour of the "grotesque absolute" (Hegel). The grotesque is traced throughout the play in the excess of passion that plagues the characters, while the apocalyptic setting is materialized through the diverse forms of *secessio* – the severance and radical departure from established human bonds and social and political norms – that the characters enact.

Keywords: *King Lear*, Anomie, Impoliticality, Excess, Carnivalesque

Il testo dell'altro. Derrida dentro *Shakespeare*
Silvano Facioni

Aphorism Countertime is a short collection of thirty-nine aphorisms written by Jacques Derrida on *Romeo and Juliet*. In these aphorisms the French philosopher discusses the structure of the tragedy: Romeo and Juliet are, in a sense, the heroes of 'countertime' (*contretemps*), because they missed each other, but they also survived each other, through their name, by means of a studied effect of *contretemps*. The problem of the name represents the theoretical center of Derrida's analysis: when Juliet addresses Romeo asking him to disown his father and his name, she seems to call him beyond his name, or, in other words, she seems to want Romeo's death. He, his living self, living and singular desire, is not 'Romeo', but the separation, the aphorism of his name remains impossible. He dies without his name but he dies also because he has not been able to set himself free from his name, and this is the contradiction that leads the two lovers of Verona to their death. Jacques Derrida therefore wishes to show that the mourning of the other performed by each of the two lovers marks a relationship with otherness: the mourning of the other will always be, in a sense, the mourning of the self.

Keywords: Countertime, Jacques Derrida, *Romeo and Juliet*, Survival, The Other, Death

Confusing Matters: Romeo and Juliet *and Hegel's* Philosophy of Nature
Jennifer Ann Bates

This article concerns how we generate continuity from the disparate; how experienced time, like fire, is a show, is tragic, and yet is also kindling cognition. I discuss this by looking at nature metaphors in *Romeo and Juliet* through the lens of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*. This tragedy is not primarily about freedom. I begin with two metaphors of unification through mediation: the Friar's "plant" and Hegel's "rose in the cross". I then focus on Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and the 'show' of nature in terms of 1) the point of contact between ideality and reality and 2) ideality as light dialectically en-mattered into increasingly complex forms (fire, time and the self-kindling life of plants and animals). Light as chemical fire is the tragic "prose of nature", existing directly prior to organic life, the living "poetry of nature". In *Romeo and Juliet*, I draw on the play's abundant nature metaphors, especially of light, fire, the earth's elements, and the heat of contact between lovers and duelers. I show how these metaphors trace the en-mattering of light through fire into chemical combustion and thus reveal the tragic show of the inability of these lovers to exist as the poetry of nature.

Keywords: Hegel, *Romeo and Juliet*, Philosophy of nature, Nature metaphors, Dialectic, Tragedy

Hamlet *and the Passion of Knowledge*
Alessandra Marzola

This essay explores the ways Hamlet dramatizes early modern epistemophilia, a drive towards knowledge that is infused with passion and triggered by desire. Hamlet's desire to know "what lies inside" picks up rhetorical, scientific and philosophical threads of knowledge to see whether they are able to dissect, along with the deep recesses of the body, the density of language and of time. I submit that Hamlet's quest for knowledge finds its sense and its urgency in the Ghost's poisonous story (I.v), where the biblical Fall is said to be beyond salvation and yet imposed upon as the foundational scene of action. In fact, I propose to read the whole play as a striking revisitation of that Fall, which stages and re-enacts the trauma of Protestant modernity. *Hamlet* is thus seen to partake in the early modern interrogation of the Scriptures, an impressive cultural venture whose political and religious implications the play masterfully foregrounds. More than any biblical exegete could have done, *Hamlet* shows the ways in which desire feeds the search for knowledge. And through a close reading of selected passages, I set out to trace and

explore the *loci* of such desire. I also point to ways in which Hamlet's lines of questioning – of the body, of Time, of memory techniques and of their encroachment upon oblivion – ultimately converge into one, all-encompassing interrogation of knowledge.

Keywords: *Hamlet*, Epistemophilia, Traumatized memory, Desire

It Nothing Must
Simon Critchley, Jamieson Webster

The figure of Hamlet haunts our culture like the Ghost haunts Shakespeare's melancholy Dane. Arguably, no literary work is more familiar to us. Everyone knows at least six words from *Hamlet*, and most people know many more. Yet the play – Shakespeare's longest – is more than "passing strange", and it becomes even more complex when considered closely. Reading *Hamlet* alongside other writers, philosophers, and psychoanalysts – Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Freud, Lacan, Nietzsche, Melville, and Joyce – Simon Critchley and Jamieson Webster go in search of a particularly modern drama that is as much about ourselves as it is a product of Shakespeare's imagination. They also offer a startling interpretation of the action onstage: it is structured around "nothing" – or, in the enigmatic words of the player queen, "it nothing must". From the illusion of theater and the spectacle of statecraft to the psychological interplay of inhibition and emotion, *Hamlet* discloses the modern paradox of our lives: how thought and action seem to pull against each other, the one annulling the possibility of the other. As a counterweight to Hamlet's melancholy paralysis, Ophelia emerges as the play's true hero. In her madness, she lives the love of which Hamlet is incapable. Avoiding the customary clichés about the timelessness of the Bard, Critchley and Webster show the timely power of *Hamlet* to cast light on the intractable dilemmas of human existence in a world that is rotten and out of joint. (From the blurb of *Stay Illusion!: The Hamlet Doctrine*, New York, Pantheon Books, 2013, of which the chapter is an excerpt.)

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Nihilism, Gorgias, Sovereignty

Shakespeare's Sense of Dialectics: A Contribution to Kate's Policy
Franca D'Agostini

I suggest that the notion of conceptual dialectics finds an ideal representation in Shakespeare's theatrical work. In a sense, Shakespeare shows us how concepts work, and how we may make them work. This is especially interesting, from a philosophical point of view: not exactly in theoretical but rather

methodological perspective. After a brief specification concerning the meaning of dialectics here taken into account, I focus on one of the first (maybe the first) of Shakespeare's comedies, *The Taming of the (a) Shrew*, in which Shakespeare's sense of dialectics finds a peculiar expression, revealing that it is not only a linguistic feature, but a true principle of dramaturgic creation, as well as a reflection on life and human interactions.

Tempo e sovranità. Note a Richard II
Edoardo Ferrario

Based on the well-known interpretations of Shakespeare by Giorgio Melchiori, Ernst H. Kantorowicz and Franco Moretti, this paper examines some of the verbal and dramatic sequences around which the tragedy of *Richard II* develops. These are viewed as the onset and the gradual deepening of the conflict between time and sovereignty. With the help of the philosophy of Kant, Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas, the paper traces them back to their roots in human subjectivity, or rather, in ipseity.

"To Save the Honor of Reason": Quasi-Antinomial Conflict in Troilus and Cressida
Andrew Cutrofello

In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, Jacques Derrida contrasts two different ways of saving the honor of reason. One way is that of Immanuel Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant purports to save reason's honor by resolving its antinomies – the conflicts that arise when reason seeks to determine the world as a totality. The other way consists in acknowledging reason's inability to resolve such conflicts while warding off the concomitant danger of reason's autoimmunity or self-destruction. In the preface to the *Critique* Kant purports to save the honor of metaphysics by resolving the antinomies. By personifying "the queen of the sciences" as Hecuba, he implicitly likens antinomial conflict to the Trojan War. After briefly indicating how Kant's critical project is rhetorically supported by his Roman sources (Ovid and Virgil), I go on to show the relevance of *Troilus and Cressida* both to Kant's representation of the antinomies and to Derrida's account of the two different ways of saving reason's honor. For Troilus, as for Kant, the honor of Hecuba has
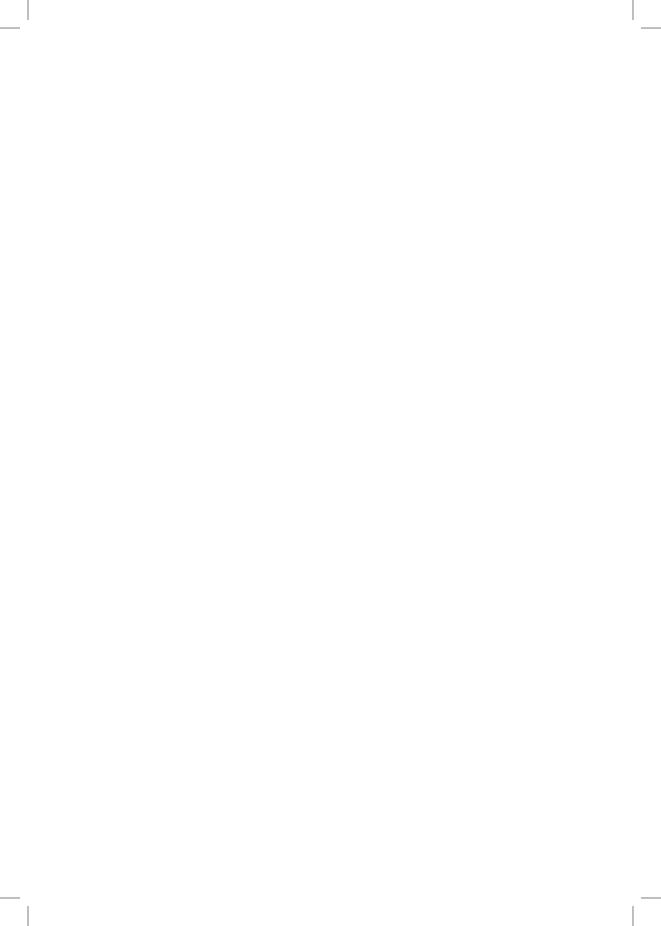
metaphysical significance. But for Troilus, who stands for pure honor rather than pure reason, the threat of the antinomial represents another kind of danger, one that bears on the autoimmunity of honor itself. The question with which Shakespeare's play leaves us is what it might mean to save the honor of honor.

Keywords: *Troilus and Cressida*, Honor, Reason, Antinomies, Autoimmunity, Hecuba, Metaphysics

Sucking the Sweets of Sweet Philosophy: Shakespeare's Dramatic Use of Philosophy
Erik W. Schmidt

This essay explores the suggestion that Shakespeare incorporates philosophical elements into his plays to pursue dramatic rather than philosophical or intellectual goals. I suggest that attending to this dramatic dimension reveals how the plays can make a genuine contribution to philosophical thought while avoiding a common form of philosophical bardolatry that attributes to the plays an explicitly philosophical intention they lack. The essay breaks down into three sections. First, it provides an overview of the way Shakespeare uses philosophy to pursue three kinds of dramatic goals in the plays. Next, it outlines the way our study of those effects contributes to philosophy. Finally, it explains how focusing on the issue of dramatic contribution enables us to address three important concerns that have been raised over any effort to link literature to philosophy. By the end, its intent is to show how thinking about the dramatic role philosophy plays in Shakespeare's dramas can help us develop a more complete account of the relationship between philosophy and Shakespeare while avoiding the spectre of a form of philosophical bardolatry that attributes an explicitly philosophical intention to the plays.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Philosophy, Performance, Philosophical method, Literature as philosophy

Contributors

Jennifer Ann Bates is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Duquesne University. She specializes in nineteenth-century German philosophy with an emphasis on Hegel. She is author of two books*: Hegel's Theory of Imagination* (SUNY Press, 2004) and *Hegel and Shakespeare on Moral Imagination* (SUNY Press, 2010). She is co-editor with Richard Wilson of *Shakespeare and Continental Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming). Bates earned her B.A. in Philosophy and Literary Studies, her M.A. in Comparative Literature and her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Toronto.

Katie Brennan is a graduate student in Philosophy at Temple University. She has a Master's Degree in Philosophy from SUNY Stony Brook and is the former Editorial Assistant for *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. She is broadly interested in aesthetics, pragmatism, and nineteenth-century European philosophy. At the moment, she is working on a dissertation on the role played by Shakespeare in Nietzsche's aesthetics. More specifically, the dissertation focuses on the integral role that Shakespeare plays in Nietzsche's struggle with the concept of modernity that begins in *The Birth of Tragedy* and extends throughout his writings.

Massimo Cacciari, a graduate in Philosophy of the University of Padua (1967), was Full Professor of Aesthetics from 1985 until his retirement, and is currently Professor Emeritus at Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele, Milan, within the Department of Philosophy, of which he was one of the founders in 2002. He was also Director of the Philosophy Department of the Academy of Architecture, University of Lugano (USI), Switzerland, from 1998 to 2006. He has served as a member of the Italian Parliament (1976-1983), as mayor of Venice (1993-2000; 2005-2010), as well as a member of the European Parliament (1999-2000). He collaborates closely with the Italian Institute for Philosophical

Studies in Naples and the Collège de Philosophie in Paris. Among his most recent books are *Il potere che frena* (Adelphi, 2013), *Doppio ritratto* (Adelphi, 2012), *I comandamenti. Ama il prossimo tuo* (il Mulino, 2011), *I comandamenti. Io sono il Signore Dio tuo* (il Mulino, 2010), *Hamletica* (Adelphi, 2009).

Rosy Colombo is Senior Professor of English at Sapienza University of Rome, where she was also Director of the Graduate School in Literatures in English from 2003 to 2009. She was Visiting Professor at Columbia University in 1980 and at the University of Reading in 1998. She is currently a member of the national rating agency ANVUR, evaluating national and international journals in the area of English Literature and Language. She is the author of *Otello. Le utopie e la storia* (Adriatica, 1974); she has edited and introduced the Lombardo-Strehler correspondence (W. Shakespeare, G. Strehler, A. Lombardo, La Tempesta *tradotta e messa in scena: un carteggio ritrovato e due traduzioni inedite*, Donzelli, 2007), as well as Agostino Lombardo, *Lettura del Macbeth* (Feltrinelli, 2010). She has been the general editor of *Memoria di Shakespeare* since 2008, and has dedicated herself in particular to the authorship question in a special issue published in 2012. Besides Shakespeare, her research interests include eighteenth-century studies, women's poetry and fiction, Romantic closet drama, Samuel Beckett.

Simon Critchley is Hans Jonas Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research, New York. He also teaches at the European Graduate School. His many books include *Very Little… Almost Nothing* (1997), *Infinitely Demanding* (2007), *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (2008), *The Faith of the Faithless* (2012), and, with Tom McCarthy, *The Mattering of Matter: Documents from the Archive of the International Necronautical Society* (2012). A new work on *Hamlet* called *Stay, Illusion!* was published in 2013 by Pantheon Books in the US and Verso in the UK, co-authored with Jamieson Webster. He is series moderator of "The Stone", a philosophy column in *The New York Times*, to which he is a frequent contributor.

Andrew Cutrofello is Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago. He received his doctorate from Northwestern University in 1989. His forthcoming book, *All for Nothing: Hamlet's Negativity*, will appear in 2014 from MIT Press. His previous books include *Continental Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, 2005) and *The Owl at Dawn: A Sequel to Hegel's* Phenomenology of Spirit (SUNY Press, 1995). Since 2008 he has edited the Continental Philosophy section of *Philosophy Compass*. With Paul Livingston he is currently writing a book with the working title, "The Problems of Contemporary Philosophy".

Franca D'Agostini teaches Philosophy at the University of Turin (Politecnico) and Milan (Università Statale). She is the author of books and essays concerning metaphysics, epistemology, philosophical logic and contemporary philosophy. In recent years she has especially studied public debate, dialectics and the role of truth. Among her books: *Disavventure della verità* (Einaudi, 2002), *The Last Fumes: Nihilism and the Nature of Philosophical Concepts* (Daviesgroup, 2008), *Paradossi* (Carocci, 2009), *I mondi comunque possibili. Logica per la filosofia e il ragionamento comune* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2012).

Silvano Facioni is Research Fellow of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Calabria. He has translated into Italian works by Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel de Certeau. He has published on French and Jewish Philosophy. His most recent publications include: *La cattura dell'origine. Verità e narrazione nella tradizione ebraica* (Jaca Book, 2005), *Il politico sabotato. Su Georges Bataille* (Jaca Book, 2009), *Derridario. Dizionario della decostruzione* (in collaboration with S. Regazzoni and F. Vitale, il melangolo, 2012).

Edoardo Ferrario is Professor of Aesthetics within the Philosophy Department of Sapienza University of Rome. In his research he has mainly focused on the philosophy of Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, as well as Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. He has published texts on the poetry of Dante, Vittorio Sereni, and Paul Celan. Among his books are: *Il lavoro del tempo* (Guerini, 1997), and *Testimoniare* (Lithos, 2006).

Nadia Fusini is Full Professor of Comparative Literature and English Literature at SUM, Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane, Firenze/Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. She previously held the chair of Shakespearean Criticism at Sapienza University of Rome. She has translated and written extensively on Virginia Woolf, Shakespeare, John Keats, Samuel Beckett, Mary Shelley, and many others. She is the Director of the *Piccola Biblioteca Shakespeariana* for Bulzoni Editore and of the Feltrinelli series of Shakespearean translations into Italian, for which she has translated and edited *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2006), *Much Ado About Nothing* (2009), *All's Well that Ends Well* (2012). She is the author of the biographical novel on Elizabeth I *Lo specchio di Elisabetta* (2001). Her most recent books include *Di vita si muore. Lo spettacolo delle passioni nel teatro di Shakespeare* (Mondadori, 2010), *La figlia del sole. Vita ardente di Katherine Mansfield* (Mondadori, 2012), and *Hannah e le altre* (Einaudi, 2013).

Kristin Gjesdal is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Temple University in Philadelphia. Her areas of specialization include German Idealism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (from Herder and Schleiermacher to Gadamer, Davidson, and beyond). She also has an interest in philosophy and tragedy and has published on the philosophical reception of Sophocles and Shakespeare, as well as on Henrik Ibsen. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Kant-Studien*, *Hegel-Studien*, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, and *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Her book *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* appeared with Cambridge University Press in 2009.

Paul A. Kottman is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the New School for Social Research, New York. Kottman is the author of *Tragic Conditions in Shakespeare* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), *A Politics of the Scene* (Stanford University Press, 2008) and the editor of *Philosophers on Shakespeare* (Stanford University Press, 2009). He is currently working on two book projects, tentatively entitled "Defying the Stars: Romantic Love as Human Freedom" and "Why Do We Care About Shakespeare (If We Do)?" Kottman is also the editor of a new book series at Stanford University Press, called *Square One: First-Order Questions in the Humanities*.

Alessandra Marzola is Professor of English Literature at the University of Bergamo. She has published and edited books on Shakespeare; twentieth-century British theatre; the rhetoric of economic discourse in John Maynard Keynes; 'Englishness' in the twentieth century; and literature, war and violence in twentieth-century Britain. Her books on Shakespeare include: *L'impossibile puritanesimo di Amleto* (1986), *La parola del Mercante* (1996), and, as editor: *L'altro Shakespeare* (1992) and *The Difference of Shakespeare* (2008). She is also the co-author, with Davide Del Bello, of *Shakespeare and the Power of Difference* (2011).

Erik W. Schmidt is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Gonzaga University in Washington. He has written on various topics related to moral psychology, including "Thresholds, Vagueness, and the Psychology of Small Improvements" (*Philosophical Studies*, 2008) as well as the philosophy of art, including *Beauty* (Fountainhead, 2014). He is currently working on a collaborative project with Michael Pringle that explores the themes of forgiveness, trust, and integrity in the works of Shakespeare. He is especially interested in the relationship between philosophy and issues of dramatic performance in Shakespeare's plays.

Jamieson Webster is a psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City. She is the author of *The Life and Death of Psychoanalysis* (2011) and has written for *Apology*, *Cabinet*, *Huffington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Playboy*, and many psychoanalytic publications. She teaches at Eugene Lang College and supervises doctoral students in clinical psychology at the City University of New York.

Tzachi Zamir is a philosopher and a literary critic (English and Comparative Literature) and is currently Chair of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of *Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama* (Princeton University Press, 2007), *Ethics and the Beast* (Princeton University Press, 2007), and *Acts: Theatre, Philosophy and the Performing Self* (The University of Michigan Press, forthcoming).