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On Vanitas

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Rosy Colombo

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[…]
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> 8 Vanitie of vanities, saith the Preacher; all *is* vanitie.
> (*Qoheleth*/ *Ecclesiastes*, Chapters I-XII)[1]

> "Picture human beings living in some sort of underground cave dwelling […] Do you think that prisoners of that sort have ever seen anything more of themselves and of one another than the shadows cast by the fire on the wall of the cave in front of them? […] What about the objects? Wouldn't they see only shadows of these also? […]All in all, then, what people in this situation would take for truth would be nothing more than shadows."
> (Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII)[2]

The verses herewith borrowed from *Qoheleth*, together with a passage on the myth of the cave quoted from Plato's *Republic*, are meant to serve as a Prelude to *Memoria di Shakespeare*'s current investigation into Shakespeare's attitude towards the early modern imaginary, rhetoric and treatment of *vanitas.* The *vanitas* theme is here considered to be a crucial *topos* in the modern crisis of language as conveyor of truth in the field of aesthetics, following a twofold perspective: the first built on a profound awareness of the transience and mortality of the human condition (a theme strongly reassessed by the Reformation culture, as Hamlet would have learned in Wittenberg); and the second founded on a disowning of outward modes of representation, conceived as hollow shapes. The vacuity of knowledge drawn from visible appearances, in life as well as on stage, is omnipresent[3]. In Hamlet's words, not only does drama provide – as a mirror of life – "abstracts and brief chronicles of the time"; the play is also "the thing" needed to question the performing shadows that make up its own unsubstantial frame:

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1 *The Geneva Bible: A facsimile of the 1560 edition, with an introduction by Lloyd E. Berry*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1981 (2nd edition).

2 Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari and trans. Tom Griffith, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 220-221.

3 Cf. the topical statement "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" in *The Tempest*, IV.i.156-58.

from images *of* pictures and *in* pictures, to the fleeting identity of the *dramatis personae*. "Mirror imaging" – which in this issue B. J. Sokol's essay looks into, analyzing two kinds of 'mirror *use*' according to a physiology of visual perception supported by some revolutionary optical principles of the New Science – is a passage of paramount importance in the Renaissance epistemological shift of representation from mimetic codes to a distorted, asymmetrical, practice[4]: the stage itself as "vanitie of vanities".

In the Middle Ages the *vanitas* motif connoted desire as a paradigm of mortality in the guise of a *Danse macabre*, with variations on Death as the great jester, on figures of female agency reminiscent of the Fall and in a close imaginative connection with folly through the empty language – mere wind – of the 'natural' fool[5]. With Erasmus (see Claudia Corti's "Shakespeare contra Erasmus", highlighting cross references between *The Praise of Folly* and Shakespeare's vision), other symbols fostered a Renaissance anamorphic gaze on 'vanitas', assigning the fool a disturbing, liminal role in the making of meaning, which Shakespeare was to explore within the framework of knowledge as illusion, a crucial one in tragedy, particularly in *King Lear* (see Michael Neill's essay, "'This is nothing, fool': Shakespeare's Vanities"). A climax in such a representation was reached thanks to a renewed consciousness of the irrevocable waste of time in the *memento mori* imagery of later Renaissance – for example the skulls, hourglasses, candles and withering flowers here analysed by Alessia Palmieri ("Vanitas Iconography as a Dramatic Device in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*"). *Vanitas* as an issue of meaning, both in its semantic and semiotic implications, informed a complex theoretical debate on the classical analogy between literature and painting, challenging their relation as "sister arts", and of course it was at the core of the quest into

[4] Drawing from the multiple perspective in the mirror iconography, B. J. Sokol's "An Image of Vanitas: Geometrical Optics and Shakespearean Points of View" offers an interesting contribution to the interpretation of *Titus Andronicus* and of *Troilus and Cressida*, focused on scenes performing the characters' distorted vision.

[5] Vanna Gentili, *La recita della follia. Funzioni dell'insania nel teatro dell'età di Shakespeare*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997.

other issues of death typical of the early modern imaginary[6]. However, *vanitas* fantasies will continue to haunt the 'Age of Reason' and some later styles of modernity, in defiance of conventional cultural modes – one could make a list of them, from Samuel Johnson to Samuel Beckett[7]. Johnson's obsession with the vanity of human wishes, explored by Robert DeMaria in this volume, explicitly took its cue from *Ecclesiastes* (still attributed in Johnsons' time to King Solomon[8]) in connection with the Latin etymology of the term "vanity" from the Latin *vanus*: a term the editors of this issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare* have made a point of referring to as the signifier of an existential hollow rather than expressing an ontology of nothingness[9]; one challenging – precisely because of its indeterminacy – the very foundations of human knowledge.

As in Holbein's motivations in the *Ambassadors* for revealing a skull behind a scenario of wealth – we are all familiar with this painting as an iconic one in the genre – so that we may "see the skull beneath the skin" (in T. S. Eliot's definition of Webster), the *vanitas* theme bears witness to the emptiness of human life[10], to its lack of purpose and meaning or *telos*, thus connoting tragedy as philosophy[11]. It also concerns the vacuous statute of theatre and drama and of its shadows, doomed to vanish into thin air. A case

6 See Michael Neill, *Issues of Death. Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997. I am indebted to Michael Neill for reminding me that he drew the title of this seminal study from John Donne.

7 Rosy Colombo, "*My Johnson Fantasy": Samuel Johnson nello specchio di Samuel Beckett*, in *Mélanges en l'honneur de Mariella di Maio*, ed. Valentina Fortunato, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2019, pp. 191-201.

8 The original name of the title, in fact a pseudonym (as a feminine singular participle *Qoheleth* identifies the author with the function of a professional speaker) was superseded by the Greek translation *Ecclesiaste*s, and as such adopted in the course of all English translations of the Bible. The only historical person who fits the description of both son of David and king over Israel is King Solomon, to whom Samuel Johnson refers in an important sermon on *The Vanity of Human Wishes.* See in this issue the essay by Robert DeMaria.

9 Thus Michael Neill: "Although we nowadays associate the word with self-conceit […] its root lies in the Latin *vanus*, meaning 'empty' or 'void'" (p. 40).

10 Cf. "Thou hast nor youth nor age, / But, as it were, an after-dinner sleep, / Dreaming of both" (*Measure for Measure*, III.i.31-33).

11 Russ Leo, *Tragedy as Philosophy in the Reformation World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019.

in point is *Antony and Cleopatra*: at the heart of his loss Antony, like an imperfect actor, contemplates his identity dissolving in the mirror of the sky: a replica, among others in Shakespeare's exploration of identity, of the splendid mirror scene in *Richard II*, the climax of the king undoing of himself:

> Give me that glass, and threin I will read.
> […]
> O, flattering glass,
> Like to my followers in prosperity,
> Thou dost beguile me.
> […] As brittle as the glory is the face, (*he throws the glass down*)
> For there it is, cracked in hundred shivers.
> (*Richard II*, II.iv.276-88)

> Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
> A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
> A towered citadel, a pendant rock,
> A forked mountain, or blue promontory
> With trees upon't that nod unto the world
> And mock our eyes with air.
> […]
> That which is now a horse, even with a thought
> The rack dislims, and makes it indistinct
> As water in water.
> […]
> Now thy captain is
> Even such a body.
> (*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV.xv.2-13)

A short distance lies between Hamlet's puritan resistance to a false language of truth based on the conventions of "seeming"– a resistance later enforced by Edgar's challenge to "what we ought to say" in *Lear* – and Prospero's acknowledgement of the limits of his art as illusion[12]. Besides partaking of Montaigne's skepticism about the vanity of writing *of vanitie*[13], as Michael Neill reminds us, in

[12] "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep". (*The Tempest*, IV.i.156-58).

[13] Montaigne's essay "Of Vanitie" is particularly relevant to these notes as a radical deconstruction of the sign-referent relationship in the language/truth issue.

Prospero's cave the act of disowning knowledge founded in the shadows of the imagination bears unmistakable traces of Plato's myth of the cave.

As a *memento mori* archetype, *Qoheleth* has played a subversive role both in Judaism and Christianity, a role emphasizing the absence rather than the presence of God, a sort of 'biblical unconscious' which persisted from the Middle Ages into early modern culture, in compliance with the claims of the Reformation. In this process, however, representations of mortality underwent an important shift, as Catherine Belsey demonstrates in this issue ("In Defiance of Death: Shakespeare and Tomb Sculpture"). In her critical survey of an early modern double-decker tomb, Belsey illuminates an intersection between two distinct versions of *vanitas*: on the one hand, medieval asceticism shows death triumphant in the humiliation of the body's mortality, while on the other hand, humanism celebrates death as a gateway to immortality, allowing the dying self to defy finitude. *Antony and Cleopatra* gives evidence of Shakespeare's drawing imagery and action from both traditions: Antony's botched suicide performs dying as a humiliating experience, whereas for Cleopatra death involves the agency of a free will, leading to transcendence of the mortal frame of the body. Although Shakespeare has little use for the word *vanity* itself (it occurs only 21 times in the entire corpus), he has obviously dramatized the *vanitas* tradition with a shift towards issues of *meaning*, thus retrieving – in keeping with Qoheleth's musings about a world without God – fantasies that will stretch out into Giacomo Leopardi's rhetoric of "l'infinita vanità del tutto"[14], as well as into Beckett's repeated exploration of the failure of human wishes as a key note of his personal disavowal of the deceits of "literature", the "sugar plums" of the bourgeois false consciousness, supposed to make up for a humiliated human condition[15].

Over the past few decades critical practice, in the wake of Catherine Belsey's postmodern approach, has reassessed the conventional relation between Shakespeare and visual culture –

[14] Giacomo Leopardi, *A se stesso*, in *Canti*, 1835.

[15] Cf. Hamm to Nagg: "There are no more sugar-plums" (Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, in *Samuel Beckett. The Complete Dramatic Works*, London, Faber & Faber, 2006, p. 119).

expanding from the theoretical *Paragone* debate to the intersection of mimetic and diegetic paradigms, to an analysis of the chiaroscuro technique deployed by Shakespeare and Caravaggio in their overlapping careers, of such stylistic modes as ekphrasis and anamorphosis, above all of imagery as a dramatic device[16]. However, with regard to the theme of *vanitas* in drama, this issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare* has explicitly taken its cue from Keir Elam's investigation into *Shakespeare's Pictures: Visual Objects in the Drama* (Arden, 2017): a study with an original focus on pictures, not as stage props with a decorative role, but as objects with a performing agency – imbued with a symbolic power to enter

[16] See: Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice,* New York, Routledge, 2002; Armelle Sabatier, *Shakespeare and Visual Culture: A Dictionary*, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury, 2017, a research recently shared with Camilla Caporicci in their joint editing of *The Art of Picturing in Early Modern English Literature*, New York, Routledge, 2019; Rocco Coronato, *Shakespeare, Caravaggio and the Indinstinct Regard*, New York, Routledge, 2017; Michele Marrapodi, ed., *Shakespeare and the Visual Arts, The Italian Influence*, New York, Routledge, 2017; B. J. Sokol, *Shakespeare's Artists*, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, also in Caporicci and Sabatier, in continuation of the essay exploring in this issue the theme of Mirrors from the scientific multiple point of view in Optics; Claudia Corti's lifelong research in this field leading up to Shakespeare and Erasmus in this volume, from her *Silenos: Erasmus in Elizabethan Literature*, Pisa, Pacini, 1998, and *Shakespeare e gli emblemi*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2002. See, among others, Anna Anzi, *Shakespeare e le arti figurative*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1998. An important related title to the topic of literature and the visual arts with reference to Shakespeare is Milena Romero Allué, *Immagini della mente. Scrittura e percezione visiva nella letteratura inglese del Rinascimento*, Venezia, Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina, 2016. On the intersection of mimesis/diegesis in early modern drama explored in a theoretical/epistemological light, see Silvia Bigliazzi's forthcoming essay "Focalizing Drama: Notes on Point of View in Shakespeare", *Fictions*, 20 (2020), a sequel to "Diegesis and Mimesis", *Skenè*, 2:2 (2016).

directly into the action of the play, and into a relationship with the *dramatis personae*.

Two chapters are particularly compelling with regard to the theme of *Vanitas, or Memento mori*: Chapter 3, on *The Merchant of Venice*, and Chapter 4, on *Hamlet as portrait: A Shadow's shadow. The Merchant of Venice* – writes Elam, and I wholeheartedly agree with him – is "a play dominated by the shadow of death" (p. 200). The *memento mori* imagery is thematically linked with the casket plot – the casket resulting in a dramatization of the coffin, the conventional *locus* of the vanity of desire of which Portia is the object, cunningly displaced into her picture as a metaphor of mimetic desire[17]; but it also "contaminates the bond plot", in which Shylock, stripped of his identity, eventually turns into a *vanitas* figure. Elam's comment expands at large on the central role played at the time by portraits (and miniatures). Moreover he argues that in the casket scene words and images underlie the *vanitas* theme, in a dialectical relationship between what is only an illusory identification of an image with the true person (as in Plato's parable of the cave)[18], and the picture as an uncanny mirror image of the viewer him/herself: "Portia is imagined as a femme fatale associated with death" (p. 181), along with the vanitas symbols of the skull (Morocco), the fool's head (Aragon), and the lead encoding Bassanio's death drive[19]. This reading of the casket scene in terms of Plato's philosophy of knowledge has of course raised the question of Shakespeare's familiarity with Qoheleth's desperate vision: words, words, words…

And yet, to conclude with Elam's chapter on Hamlet's portrait as a shadow's shadow, there is a paradoxical disproportion between Hamlet's distrust of the airy vacuity of signifiers (starting from his resistance to whatever "seems" in I.ii.76) and his

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17 For an interpretation of the casket scene in terms of mimetic desire see the classic René Girard, *Shakespeare: Les feux de l'envie*, Paris, Grasset, 1990.

18 Elam, p. 210: "Hamlet can be read as a dramatization of the allegory of the cave, even if Shakespeare had probably never read Plato". Another reference to Plato, *The Republic*, Book IX, is also in Elam, p. 209.

19 The reference is of course to Freud's interpretation of this scene in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press, 1958, 24 vols, vol. XII. Shakespeare will deploy the symbolic power of "lead" also in *Antony and Cleopatra*, in Antony's humiliating representation – and self-representation – as a dying heavy body (Act IV).

enormous emotional and cognitive investment in shadows, assuming a play within the play as vehicle of truth (II.ii). Precisely this disproportion is the character's – and Shakespeare's – main problem in the tragedy.

Post Scriptum

As of the current issue, the Advisory Board of *Memoria di Shakespeare* will be the poorer, for the loss of Harold Bloom, of Yale University, and of Remo Bodei, last based in UCLA, after holding a chair in aesthetics at the Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa. Since 2013, when the open access, online version of the journal was launched, they had been leading supporters and mentors in two of its privileged foci: Shakespeare as *Sprachschöpfer* (in Wittgenstein's definition), and Shakespearean insight into philosophical questions of knowledge and representation. Harold Boom's contribution to our journal was given in continuity with Samuel Johnson's critical freedom from academic fashions – a legacy he claimed as did his Italian brother in trade, Agostino Lombardo, founder of *Memoria di Shakespeare*. In the philosophical insight of Remo Bodei, our journal found its legitimization in approaching Shakespeare as an active performer and thinker on issues constitutive of early modernity, such as time and identity. For both of them, Shakespeare was at the core of passionate research into the mystery of things, each, of course, with his own instruments: for Bloom he was *The "Inventor" of the Human* (1998), for Bodei a challenging explorer of the rise of modern consciousness in terms of the performing self (*Immaginare altre vite*, 2018). We will miss them as radical readers of Shakespeare, precisely for their inexhaustible digging into the roots of literary and philosophical knowledge. It is to them that the current issue, deeply engaged in thought about the existential condition of humankind, is dedicated.

R. C.

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In Defiance of Death: Shakespeare and Tomb Sculpture

Catherine Belsey

1. Images of death

Maximilian Colt, sculptor of the marble monument to Elizabeth I in Westminster Abbey, was also responsible for the memorial to Robert Cecil, Lord Salisbury, right-hand man of Elizabeth and her successor, James I. Cecil's magnificent tomb at Hatfield, constructed after his death in 1612, shows two distinct effigies of its subject. One, the main commemorative sculpture, depicts a statesman lying at rest after a life of devotion to both monarchs, borne on his bier by personifications of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice, the virtues supposed to have characterized his service. In this capacity, the Earl of Salisbury wears the robes and collar of the Garter, the highest order of knighthood, and holds the staff of the Lord Treasurer of the realm. He is seen resting his head on embroidered cushions, in repose but not inert. His eyes are open, ready to see the Second Coming.

Immediately below this confident figure, shown as its subject would want to be remembered[1], a skeleton lies on a bare rush mat. With the bones picked clean, this is the same Robert Cecil, we are to understand, after death. The two figures are aligned and similarly proportioned, each in white marble supported on black limestone. The moral of the monument is clear: death, the great leveller, confiscates worldly office, reducing the powerful to the fate common to all mortals. This is a three-dimensional *vanitas* on the grandest of scales.

But does the moral tell the whole story? However recognizable the skeleton as *memento mori* – and in the early seventeenth century it was very familiar indeed – this juxtaposition still has the power to surprise, not least because the bones remain perfectly articulated. The framework of the body has not collapsed with the decomposition of the connective tissue. Instead, the skeleton preserves its own integrity. Its jaw has not fallen away like Yorick's: on the contrary, the chin juts firmly into the air, while the eye sockets stare upwards intently, creating a figure that remains oddly alert, in spite of death and regardless of the moral point. The image invests the bones, paradoxically, with power – to hold their shape against ruin. Cecil has not crumbled to dust. On the contrary, if devouring time has consumed the flesh, it has left the outline of the man intact. Even without the signifiers of worldly glory, confined to the properties shared with other human beings, the skeleton has not lost all dignity in death. Colt's glowing Carrara marble, never painted, invests this *vanitas* with its own strange energy. The monument preserves the paradox of authority subject to and yet not quite extinguished by mortality.

It is tempting to see the Cecil monument as a late extension of the fashion for *transi* tombs that prevailed in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. These equally double-decker constructions show the deceased, fully and formally dressed, recumbent on a tomb chest, while below the commemorative effigy lies a corpse in a state of decay. Stripped to their shrouds, often contorted, sometimes verminous, the gaunt cadavers throw into relief the transitory nature of the grandeur shown above them. This

[1] The monument gives no indication of the curvature of the spine that elicited nicknames from both the monarchs he served.

shrunken state, they proclaim, is what human beings are brought to. Such mummified bodies are shameful, their lean hands pulling at their winding sheets to cover their genitals.

Pillars or arcading commonly support the upper effigy, partly screening the corpse and so creating the impression that the walls of the usual tomb chest have been pierced to show what ought to be hidden there. In this sense, it is as if they promise access to a forbidden knowledge. "We are teased by what ordinarily we should not be seeing"[2]. One of the best-preserved examples gives an indication of the project. Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury and founder of All Souls College, Oxford, died in 1443. But his *transi* tomb was constructed to his own specification in the 1420s, with his robed and mitred effigy above a cadaver. He must have contemplated this *vanitas* in his cathedral for fifteen years or more. The inscription round the cadaver reads:

> Pauper eram natus, post hic primas relevatus
> Iam sum prostratus et vermibus esca paratus
> Ecce meum tumulum, ecce tuum speculum
> Quisquis eris qui transieris rogo nunc memoreris
> Tu quod eris mihi consimilis qui post morieris
> Omnibus horribilis pulvis vermis caro vilis.[3]

The internal rhymes of the epitaph degrade their subject almost as effectively as the visual image, while Chichele asks passers-by to look at his monument, dwelling on his corpse as their own mirror-image. The sculpted dead invite a morbid curiosity as they testify to the viewer's destiny too. Double effigies encourage self-reflection and self-contempt, Paul Binski argues. In contemplating the fate of the body, "[w]e mourn ourselves", as he succinctly puts it[4]. Supplanting earthly glory, death humiliates all.

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2 Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*, London, British Museum Press, 1996, p. 149.

3 "I was born a pauper, then raised to primate here; now I am laid out and prepared as worms' meat. Behold my tomb; behold your mirror. Whoever you may be who will pass by, I ask for your remembrance, you who will be like me after you die, in all things horrible, dust, worms, vile flesh". Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

4 Binski, p. 150.

Officially, perhaps, the Cecil tomb encourages a similar response. But in this instance, the skeleton conceals nothing. Instead, it is exposed to full view, unashamed and resigned, its palms at rest on its rush mat. In this instance death puts on display the ingenious architecture of the human body, defying its own annihilation. The difference is brought home by the adjacent memorial to Sir William Curle, d. 1617. This bas-relief by Nicholas Stone shows a contorted body in its shroud. No one would be likely to mistake it for a medieval sculpture but it clearly alludes to the older tradition. Where the Stone monument looks back, Colt's salutes the Renaissance. Would it be too much to suggest that his work invites us to celebrate ourselves? Perhaps, but if "a bare-bon'd death", as Shakespeare's Lucretius calls it (*Lucrece*, l. 1761)[5], necessarily constitutes a reminder of mortality, the manner of its depiction may introduce a range of distinct nuances into the customary theme.

I suggest that such differential attitudes can be traced in Shakespeare and that the defiance we may read in the marble monument Cecil commissioned before his death[6] finds a dramatic parallel when the "marble-constant" Cleopatra takes control of her own final image (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii.239). Commentators have rightly stressed the transfiguration of the Egyptian queen in the artful performance of her death. She becomes her own masterpiece[7], her own memorial[8], truly authentic in her self-dramatization – with whatever irony that entails[9]. The scholarly emphasis has been on Cleopatra's assumption into the artifice of eternity. But what is easily overlooked or taken for granted is the sheer effrontery of her choice, "To rush into the secret house of death / Ere death dare come to us" (IV.xv.85-86). In her case, all-humbling death is to lose his usual advantage. Instead, the queen

5 All Shakespeare references are to *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, eds Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan, London, Bloomsbury, 2011.

6 Adam White, "Maximilian Colt: Master Sculptor to King James I", *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 27:1 (1998), pp. 36-49: p. 44.

7 Anne Barton, *Nature's Piece 'gainst Fancy: The Divided Catastrophe of* Antony and Cleopatra*; An Inaugural Lecture*, London, Bedford College, 1973.

8 Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1997, pp. 305-27.

9 Rosy Colombo, "Cleopatra's 'Roman' Death", *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies*, 4 (2017), pp. 73-86: p. 80.

with her women will voluntarily "make death proud to take us" (IV.xv.92). As Charmian speaks Cleopatra's epitaph, while Death personified takes ownership, it is as if the queen confers an honour on an inferior. At last his pride is justified: "Now boast thee, Death, in thy possession lies / A lass unparalleled" (V.iii.313-14).

2. Changing attitudes

The Cecil tomb and the play both respond in their different ways to an evolution in the meaning of mortality. Broadly speaking, in its medieval representation death appears as an unqualified victor. The figure of death, unseen but everywhere visualized, holds sway over all life on earth. His dart strikes unaccountably and brooks no resistance. Lydgate's poem, *Death's Warning to the World*, characterizes an indomitable antagonist:

> My dredefull spere [that ys] full sharpe ygrounde
> Doth yow now, lo, here thys manace,
> Armour ys noon that may withstande hys wounde.[10]

"Against me may no man stand", declares Death in *The Castle of Perseverance* (c. 1400); "Against me there is no defense" (ll. 2806, 2828)[11]. There is no pleading with Death, either, as Everyman discovers towards the end of the fifteenth century. If he goes on the journey Death requires, can he come back, asks the protagonist. "No", replies God's messenger. Can he, then, have until tomorrow to repent? "Nay" is the inevitable answer. Reasoning is vain, "[f]or it is God's commandment / That all to me should be obedient" (*Everyman*, ll. 150, 176, 117-18)[12].

In this climate defiance is synonymous with folly. Rex Vivus in the fourteenth-century play *The Pride of Life* boasts that he is immortal, ignoring the wise counsel of his queen and dismissing the bishop who urges him to remember his ending. The King of Life sends out his herald with an invitation to all comers to meet him in

[10] John Lydgate, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Part II, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, London, Oxford University Press, 1934, p. 655.

[11] Edgar T. Schell and J. D. Shuchter, eds, *English Morality Plays and Moral Interludes*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969, pp. 1-110.

[12] Schell and Shuchter, pp. 111-65.

single combat. His special target is Death who, he insists, has neither might nor ability to frighten him. And there the fragment ends but the prologue indicates what was to follow. Death wins the fight and fiends take the king's soul; its final destiny will depend on the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

The project of the play, as of the *transi* tombs, is to show pride brought low by the recognition that the values of this world are inconstant, its pleasures fleeting. Meanwhile, a capering death, sovereign over popes and emperors, as well as fools and beggars, drags all estates into the *Danse macabre*, originally depicted in graveyards in Paris, Basel and London. Hans Holbein's popular woodcut images of the *Dance of Death* were first published in France in 1538, before they were reprinted, translated and copied all over Europe. Holbein's King is feasting when he looks up to see Death's mummified carcass advancing towards him. Soon he will be in the grave, not where he eats, but where he is eaten. The quatrain below reads:

> Ainsi qu'auiourdhuy il est Roy,
> Demain sera en tombe close.
> Car Roy aulcun de son arroy
> N'a sceu emporter aultre chose.[13]

The emphasis on death's irresistible dominance is not fully explained, in my view, by an irrational outbreak of the macabre, or a sudden preoccupation with mortality prompted by the Black Death. On the contrary, it makes theological sense. The *transi* cadavers are bare on scriptural authority. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither" (Job 1.21). When the Bad Angel leads the naked Mankind to the World in *The Castle of Perseverance*, the World's first action is to dress him (ll. 627-30). Infans asks to be clothed by Mundus in *The World and the Child*, a moral play of the early sixteenth century. "These garments gay I give to thee", Mundus replies (l. 67)[14]. In each case, the clothes are rich beyond the needs of their wearers, but there is no suggestion

[13] "Just as today he is king, tomorrow he will be shut in the tomb. For the king cannot take anything with him". Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Dance of Death*, ed. Werner L. Gundersheimer, New York, Dover Publications, 1971, p. 23.

[14] Schell and Shuchter, pp. 167-98.

that the human protagonists should remain in a state of nature. "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Timothy 6.8).

In other words, human beings have no choice but to inhabit the world they are born into. At the same time, a proper contempt of the world entails a contempt of the self, or at least that part of the self that belongs in and to the world. The correct – and difficult – course is to remain in the world but not of it, wearing its clothes, eating its food, but refusing to overvalue its proffered delights. Remembrance of death keeps the world in perspective. "Man, think on thine ending day / When thou shall be closed under clay" (ll. 408-9), urges the Good Angel in *The Castle of Perseverance*, and, in case of doubt, God reiterates the imperative at the end of the play:

> To save you from sinning,
> Ever at the beginning
> Think on your last ending! (ll. 3681-83)

In Holbein's *Dance of Death*, a cloaked female Death grins at the Empress in her regalia.

> Qui marchez en pompe superbe,
> La Mort ung iour uous pliera.
> Comme soubz uoz piedz ployez l'herbe,
> Ainsi uous humiliera.[15]

The orthodoxy of the period takes for granted that death is and ought to be an object of terror. "In what state that ever I be, *Timor mortis conturbat me*". The Latin phrase, originally from the Office of the Dead, recurs as the refrain of a number of medieval English lyrics[16], as well as William Dunbar's late-fifteenth-century *Lament for the Makaris*, itself a verbal re-enactment of the *Danse macabre*, but with special reference to poets. "O wretched caitiff, whither shall I

[15] "You who walk in proud pomp, Death will one day make you bow. As you bend the grass beneath your feet, so it will humiliate you". Holbein, p. 25.

[16] See, for example, E. K. Chambers and Frank Sidgwick, eds, *Early English Lyrics: Amorous, Divine, Moral and Trivial*, London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1966, p. 150 (and p. 149); MacCracken, pp. 828-32.

flee?" (l. 171) exclaims Everyman, once he grasps the meaning of his own mortality.

Unsurprisingly, similar anxieties make themselves felt in Shakespeare. "Death is a fearful thing", confesses Claudio, for instance (*Measure for Measure*, III.i.115), and, since Isabella remains obdurate,

> The weariest and most loathed worldly life
> That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
> Can lay on nature, is a paradise
> To what we fear of death. (III.i.128-31)

Better present miseries than unknown pains to come. But there is in Shakespeare an alternative view. The elegy spoken by Guiderius and Arviragus over Fidele exactly reverses the terms; here death puts an end to fear, worries about food and clothing, the anxieties that attend life in this world and the humiliations that flesh is heir to:

> Fear no more the heat o'th' sun,
> Nor the furious winter's rages […]
> Fear no more the frown o'th' great,
> Thou art past the tyrant's stroke,
> Care no more to clothe and eat,
> To thee the reed is as the oak […]
> Fear not slander, censure rash.
> Thou hast finished joy and moan. (*Cymbeline*, IV.ii.258-73)

This is not, it appears, merely a historicist concession to a play set in a pagan Britain. Although the form of the song is characteristically lyrical, the sentiments seem to have had a conventional purchase by this time (probably 1608-9). Within a decade either way of 1600, an engaging epitaph inscribed on the tomb of an unknown woman in Herefordshire endorses the view that death is not to be dreaded:

> Death! She did not fear
> The tenor of thy dart,
> And that did well appear

When thou didst pierce her heart.[17]

Instead, the deceased is now at rest.

The fear of death was not extinguished. (How could it be?) But, alongside that habitual and rational apprehension, another option was making itself felt. When the Prince of Denmark lists the reasons why death is "a consummation / Devoutly to be wish'd" (*Hamlet*, III.i.63-64), he paraphrases Erasmus in *The Praise of Folly*, a work familiar in Latin from the grammar-school curriculum[18] and repeatedly issued in English in the course of the sixteenth century[19]. The goddess Folly claims that she rules the world. After all, she asks, since life is one long history of disease, oppression, misrepresentation and shame, who in their right mind would not end it? But as most people don't, she goes on, it is perfectly evident that the majority are fools and subject to her jurisdiction[20].

Folly is wrong, as Hamlet recognizes: she ignores the next life (III.i.78-85). Even so, the logic of her case appealed to Christian stoicism. *The Comedy of Errors*, for example, opens with a condensed version of the same sentiment: "Proceed, Solinus, to procure my fall, / And by the doom of death end woes and all" (I.i.1-2). Moreover, in case the groundlings were not yet giving the play their full attention, once the sentence has been pronounced, Egeon reaffirms his resignation: "Yet this my comfort; when your words are done, / My woes end likewise with the evening sun" (I.i.26-27). The Duke puts Folly's case to Claudio: "Reason thus with life: / If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing / That none but fools would keep" (*Measure for Measure,* III.i.6-8).

The sources of the argument that follows are widespread and classical. But the new humanist learning, however influential, could not alone shift the emphasis from death as a source of fear to death as release from fear. The Reformation and, in particular, the abrogation of purgatory must also have played a part. It has

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17 Quoted in Peter Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008, p. 74. For further examples, see pp. 111, 201.

18 T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke,* Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1944, 2 vols, vol. I, p. 436.

19 It was translated by Sir Thomas Chaloner in 1549 and reissued in 1560 and 1577.

20 Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folie*, ed. Clarence H. Miller, London, Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 41.

become the fashion to see the loss of purgatory as cause for regret[21]. Prayers, chantry chapels and masses for the dead, it is proposed, played their part in binding the living and the dead in a single community. Without the imperative to pray for the release of the dead from purgatory, who would remember them? The fear of death was compounded by anxiety about being forgotten[22].

This may be so but it neglects the contrary and corresponding possibility that the abolition of purgatory brought relief[23]. In theological theory, purgatory, designed for the elect, offered to comfort the dying: their venial sins would not lead them to damnation. Instead, their souls would be purified ready for the Last Judgement, refined by fire to fit them for heaven. In practice, on the other hand, this happy prospect included terrors of its own. Before the Reformation, anyone who was not a saint faced the immediate threat of a suffering unimaginable in this life. The fear of death can only have been intensified by the dread of facing "manyfold great and greuouse paynys" beyond the reach of human comprehension[24]. Appealing directly to the faithful for their prayers and alms, Thomas More's souls in purgatory evoke a fire that

> as farre passeth in hete all the firys that euer burned uppon erth / as the hotest of all those passeth a feynyd fyre payntyd on a wall. If euer ye lay syk and thought the nyght long & longed sore for day whyle euery howre semed longer than fyue: bethynk you then what a long nyght we sely soulys endure that ly sleeplesse / restlesse / burnyng / and

21 For influential examples, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992, updated edition 2005, pp. 348-54; Neill; Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory: Expanded Edition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013.

22 Conversely, "[a]s Jonathan Finch points out, in late medieval culture 'the living were not encouraged to *remember* the dead, but to *remember to pray for* the dead'" (Sherlock, p. 125). In Thomas More's *Supplication of Souls*, the dead who appeal to the living to remember them in their prayers and alms remain anonymous (Thomas More, *Supplication of Souls*, eds Frank Manley, Clarence H. Miller and Richard C. Marius, in *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St Thomas More*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963-97, 15 vols, vol. VII, p. 228).

23 But see Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 25.

24 More, p. 219.

> broylyng in the dark fyre one long nyght of many days / of many wekys / and sum of many yeres to gether.[25]

Old Hamlet, more circumspect, withholds the tale of his own prison house of purgation that would, he tells his son,

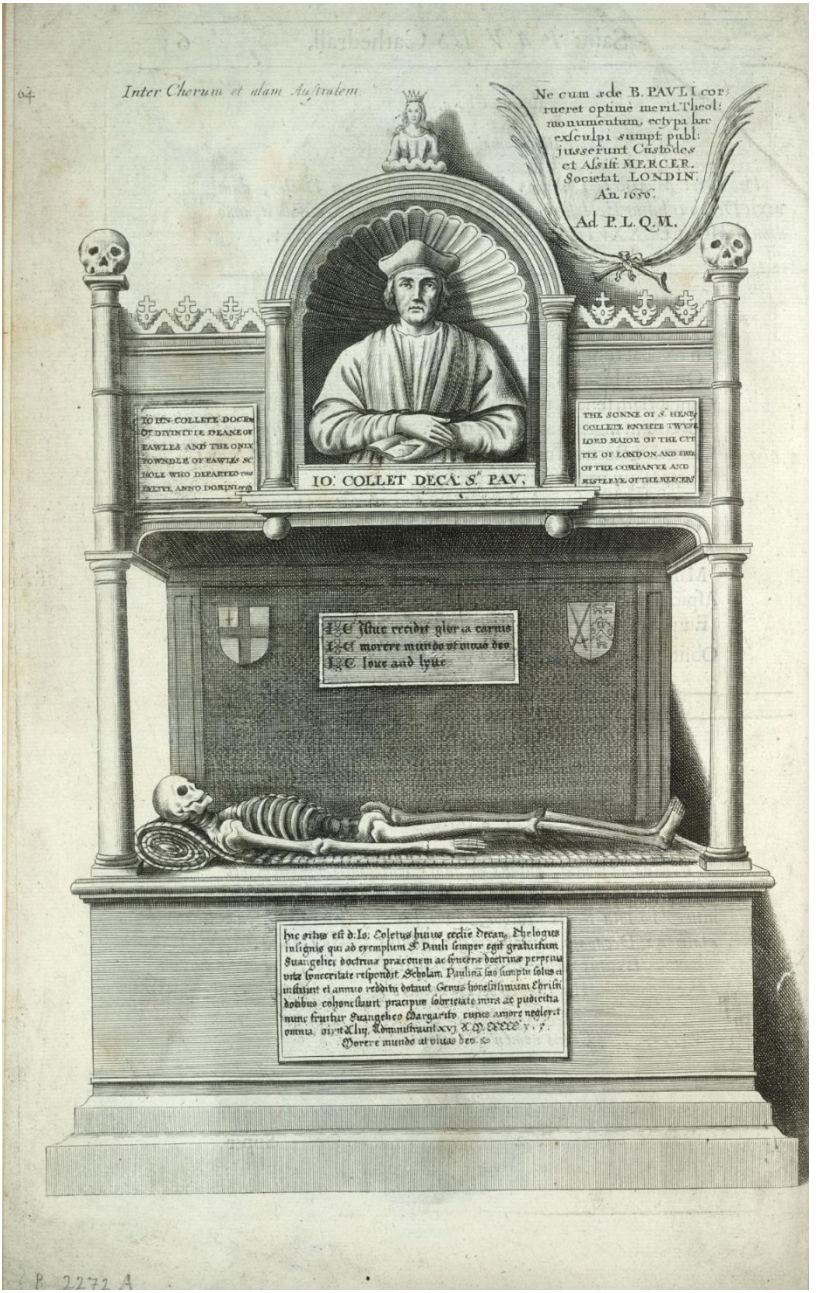
> freeze thy young blood,
> Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
> Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
> And each particular hair to stand an end
> Like quills upon the fretful porpentine. (*Hamlet*, I.v.16-20)

The ordeal of death itself was only the gateway to a more frightening state.

3. A new confidence

A wall monument to John Colet, friend of Erasmus, humanist, scholar and divine, already constituted a variation on the double effigy – and a new kind of *vanitas*. The skeleton lies on its rush mat in the same pose as Cecil's, but in this case on the tomb chest, not inside it. The structure above is supported only by a back wall and a pillar at each front corner. Nothing is concealed from the viewer. On the wall is inscribed in black letter, "Istuc recidit gloria carnis / Morere mundo ut vivas deo / Loue and lyue" ("The glory of the flesh is cut down to this. To die to the world in order to live to God. Love and live"). A black-letter inscription on the tomb chest below gives an account of Dean Colet's exemplary allegiance to the Gospel, his foundation of St Paul's School, his virtuous life and his death in 1519. The epitaph concludes by repeating the moral exhortation, "Morere mundo ut vivas deo". Above, in front of a scalloped niche, Colet faces the viewer confidently in a scholar's gown and holding a book. Skulls top the pillars, and the Virgin is shown in heaven above the portrait bust. Inscriptions in English and in Roman lettering declare Colet's foundation of the school, his father's status as freeman of the Mercers' Company and his death in 1519.

[25] More, p. 225. For further examples, see Duffy, pp. 338-39.



Wencelaus Hollar's Image of John Colet's Monument in St Paul's Cathedral. Historic Images / Alamy Stock Photo.

While this date is twice confirmed, the moment of the memorial is much more difficult to assess. We know of its existence in the old St Paul's Cathedral from an etching by Wenceslaus Hollar, reproduced in William Dugdale's *History of St Paul's Cathedral* (1658)[26]. Colet had endowed the school he founded with money inherited from his father, and it was the Mercers' Company who administered his trust. They also erected and maintained his tomb and are known to have restored it in 1580 and again in 1618[27]. It is therefore unclear when it took the form Hollar depicted. Was it conceived as a unit? Are the black-letter inscriptions and the skeleton earlier than the Renaissance scalloped niche and the Roman lettering? Portrait-busts of divines, lawyers and scholars, familiar to us from Shakespeare's, are widespread in England only from the late sixteenth century on[28]; most other known skeleton tombs are Elizabethan or later. On the other hand, the image of the Virgin implies a pre-Reformation construction.

Whatever the date, the monument constitutes an intermediary between the *transi* tombs and Cecil's. There is no invitation to pray for Colet's soul, nor is the image predominantly grim or shameful. There are no worms here, no dust, no vile flesh. While the skeleton is a residue of earthly existence, it does not humiliate the deceased. Death gives access to the next world; to die to this one is to gain eternity; the memorial embraces the gateway to life[29].

It is not, after all, so clear that purgatory was sorely missed. "On the surface the abolition of intercessory services was accepted with

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26 While John Weever describes the same image ("Under his liuely pourtraiture", a skeleton), he records a different inscription, though one that still extols Colet's virtues (*Ancient Funerall Monuments*, London, 1631, pp. 368-69).

27 Sherlock, p. 52.

28 Nigel Llewellyn finds medieval antecedents and ascribes the monument to the Florentine artist, Pietro Torrigiano (*Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 110-14). If the attribution is right, it might be no coincidence that the structure resembles Masaccio's *trompe-l'œil* fresco in Santa Maria, Florence, of *The Trinity* (c. 1425). There the tomb chest below the image of the Atonement bears a skeleton in exactly Colet's pose. The inscription translates as, "I was once what you are and what I am you will also be", but the predominant impression is of Christ's triumph over death.

29 Kathleen Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973, pp. 125-28.

remarkable alacrity"[30]. Conversely, it would be absurd to suppose that the fear of death disappeared overnight, since purgatory would never be its only cause. But now the event was ideally to be faced with assurance[31]. The tombs gradually register a new focus on death as access to life[32], in accordance with Cranmer's "Exhortation Against the Fear of Death" in the *First Book of Homilies*, appointed to be read in the churches and frequently reprinted between 1547 and 1640. Anyone who dies in the faith, the homily argues, has nothing to fear,

> [f]or death shall be to hym no death at al, but a very deliueraunce from death, from all paines, cares, and sorowes, myseries, and wretchednesse of thys worlde, and the very entry into reste, and a begynnyng of euerlasting ioye, a tastyng of heauenlye pleasures, so greate, that neither toungue is able to expresse, neither eye to see, nor eare to heare them: no nor for any earthly mans hearte to conceiue theim. So exceding greate benefites they be, whiche God oure heauenly father by hys mere mercy, and for the loue of hys sonne Iesus Chryste, hath layed up in store, and prepared for them, that humbly submytte them selues to Gods wyll and euermore unfaynedly loue hym, from the botome of theyr heartes.[33]

We know that Shakespeare expected his audience to recognize this widely repeated passage, since Bottom makes havoc of it in recounting his dream (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, IV.i.209-12)[34].

The arrogant tyrant familiar in the fifteenth century is here reduced to no death at all, a diminution that John Donne's *Holy Sonnet 6* develops as a direct challenge: "Death be not proud" (l.

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30 Ralph Houlbrooke, "Death, Church, and Family in England between the Late Fifteenth and the Early Eighteenth Centuries", in *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, ed. Ralph Houlbrooke, London, Routledge, 1989, pp. 25-42: p. 36.

31 Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1998, p. 353.

32 Sherlock, pp. 71-127.

33 Thomas Cranmer, *Certaine Sermons appoynted by the Quenes Maiesty, to be declared and read, by al Parsons, Vicars & Curates, everi Sunday and holi day, in their Churches: And by her Graces aduise pervsed & ouersene, for the better vnderstanding of the simple people*, London, 1563, sig. Piii^{v}.

34 The biblical text is much barer: "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" (1 Corinthians 2.9). Bottom's "taste", "tongue" and "conceive" are all from the homily.

1)[35]. "Some", Donne concedes, "have called thee / Mighty and dreadful" (ll. 1-2), but the burden of the sonnet is that they are mistaken: "For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow / Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me" (ll. 3-4). The poem does not deny the distress that the means may cause: "Thou'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men, / And doth with poison, war and sickness dwell" (ll. 9-10). But, however horrible the experience may be, mortality as "[r]est of their bones and soul's delivery" is here partially transferred from supernatural to human agency and its implications divinely cancelled by the Atonement. "Why swell'st thou then? […] Death, thou shalt die" (ll. 12-14).

Just as Donne defies Death by belittling it, the *vanitas* is reduced to portable property in the form of mourning and signet rings inscribed with skulls and hourglasses. These devices are luxury items, at once reminders of mortality and personal adornments. Death is owned and miniaturized. The so-called Torre Abbey jewel has nothing to connect it with monastic asceticism. A product of the 1540s or 50s, this 8cm coffin, made of enameled gold and enclosing a skeleton, was worn as a pendant. The image is a *memento mori* but the inscription is positive: "THRONGH. [sic] THE. RESVRRECTION. OF CHRISTE. WE. BE. ALL. SANCTIFIED"[36].

4. Ambiguities

This was the official view. But popular culture must move more slowly than orthodoxy, or lay people would hardly need constant exhortation. A variety of meanings for death is thus available to Shakespeare. "Rotten death" still conquers in *Lucrece* (l. 1767); "the lean abhorred monster" seems to have taken possession of Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet*, V.iii.104). Just as Death "arrests" Everyman and spares no one (l. 116), the "fell sergeant" "[i]s strict in his arrest" of Hamlet (V.ii.343-44), and the dead Polonius is compounded with dust and food for worms (IV.ii.5; IV.iii.19-20). The tyrant's power to humiliate remains. "O proud Death", exclaims Fortinbras at the

35 John Donne, *Holy Sonnet 6 (X)*, in *Collected Poetry*, ed. Ilona Bell, London, Penguin, 2012.

36 http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O33863/torre-abbey-jewel-pendant-unknown

sight of the bodies prostrate in Elsinore castle. "What feast is toward in thine eternal cell?" (V.ii.371-72).

In *1 Henry VI* Talbot reacts to the fall of his son in battle with a common accusation: "Thou antic death, which laugh'st us here to scorn" (IV.iv.130). This more ambiguous metaphor of death as a grotesque or a clown is echoed by Richard II, bewailing his losses. Within the circle of a king's crown, "[k]eeps Death his court; and there the antic sits, / Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp" (*King Richard II*, III.ii.162-63). As John M. Bowers points out, while the figure of death wears many guises in Holbein's *Dance of Death*, these include a fool's cap in one instance and a full jester costume in another[37]. Death had already appeared as the Fool's similitude when he took him by the hand in the mid-fifteenth-century *Totentanz* in Basel, where Holbein worked before he arrived in England. And, since an antic is also a dance (*The Two Noble Kinsmen*, IV.i.75), as well as a show or a pageant (*Love's Labour's Lost*, V.i.104, 138), we can legitimately see as antics all the prancing grotesques who deride and demean their living partners in the *Danse macabre*.

At the same time, the antic-as-Fool occupies an equivocal place in the power structure, entitled to tease and humble the prince, but at the aristocrat's command, even so, and subject to dismissal. Feste seems to be peripatetic (*Twelfth Night*, III.i.32-42), at once dependent and a free agent. Partly released by his own "antic disposition" (*Hamlet*, I.v.180), the Prince of Denmark jests with the skulls of representative social types, the politician, the courtier, the lawyer and the Fool (V.i.77-212) and ends with the dust of the emperor. But in this macabre pageant, played out in a graveyard, the power relations between life and death are partly reversed: here the living Hamlet initiates the dance[38]. When the antic hero faces his own mirror image in the skull of the Fool, it is the prince who scoffs at Yorick: "Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs […]? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen?" (V.i.187-90).

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37 The Abbot and the Queen; John M. Bowers, "'I Am Marble-Constant': Cleopatra's Monumental End", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 46:4 (1983), pp. 283-97: p. 287.

38 For the graveyard scene as Hamlet's Dance of Death, see Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden: The Construction of Family Values in Early Modern Culture*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 1999, pp. 140-56.

In the same scene, the prince questions the gravedigger on the decomposition of the body. The episode in the graveyard gives visual form to Hamlet's recognition that "it will come" and his acquisition of the "readiness" that defies the fear of death (V.ii.221). Defiance is neither victory nor denial. Instead, the term itself carries two contrary implications: on the one hand, facing up to the enemy, on the other, acknowledging the power of an opponent that calls forth such bravado. Defiance concedes how much there is to be feared but confronts it with courage.

Michael Neill points out that the Clown who brings Cleopatra the asp in a basket of figs is an antic impersonation of Death[39] but, as Bowers notes, this antic "is not an assailant but rather a servant"[40]. Cleopatra summons and does her best to dismiss him. Three times she bids him farewell but the irrepressible rustic resists her instructions in what amounts to a small-scale power struggle, absurd though it is. This Clown-as-Death, not entirely at the queen's beck and call, retains a vestigial intransigence. On the other hand, when she finally takes control, there is no suggestion that the antic asp-bearer does anything to degrade Cleopatra. On the contrary, the unimposing figure, who mangles the meanings of immortality and salvation (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii.246, 255), has the effect of guaranteeing the queen's release from humiliation in a Roman comedy (V.ii.235-36).

5. Classical models

In Westminster Abbey a free-standing alabaster statue commemorates Elizabeth Russell, who died in 1601. As a very early instance of the upright effigy, Elizabeth sits on a wicker chair with her head on her hand in a melancholy pose. Unusually, her eyes are closed. The inscription declares, "Dormit non mortua est" ("She is not dead but sleeps"). Her foot rests on a skull. The monument is a *vanitas* but with the terms reversed: present but beneath her feet, mortality is at once acknowledged and subjugated.

[39] Neill, p. 324.

[40] Bowers, p. 286.

Cleopatra, seated on her throne[41], has also in her own way both acknowledged and subjugated death; she too "looks like sleep" (V.ii.344). But there the similarity ends. Shakespeare's contradictory protagonist, queen, gypsy, lover, strumpet, hero, captive bears very little other resemblance to Elizabeth Russell or, at least, to the patient and pious young woman depicted on her monument. And Reformed Christianity, ready to embrace death, was not yet willing to accommodate suicide, the ultimate affirmation of human sovereignty. Self-slaughter, as Hamlet knew, was outlawed by the Everlasting (*Hamlet*, I.ii.131–2) as showing despair of God's mercy.

In pagan antiquity, however, Cleopatra has more to fear from Octavius Caesar than from the Everlasting and her role models belong to the powerful cultural current of classical learning brought into conjunction – and potential conflict – with religion by the grammar school curriculum. There Brutus, Seneca and Cato were heroes who followed the logic of their Stoic convictions when they resolutely took their own lives[42]. Shakespeare had already dramatized the deaths of Brutus and Cassius. Dishonourably, Macbeth refuses to take his own life in defeat: "Why should I play the Roman fool, and die / On mine own sword?" (*Macbeth*, V.viii.1-2). By contrast, Horatio chooses a heroic cultural allegiance before Hamlet deters him: "I am more an antique Roman than a Dane" (*Hamlet*, V.ii.348). When Cleopatra opts for death in "the high Roman fashion" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV.xv.91), if she adopts the mode of her conqueror, she nonetheless chooses self-determination over conquest by an oppressor. In controlling her own death, tactically outwitting the "ass" Caesar (V.ii.305), she will be true and "noble" to herself (V.ii.191).

41 Modern productions show her seated, but there is no stage direction. Oddly, Caesar gives instructions to "take up her bed" (V.ii.354). Alan Dessen, who knows more about early modern staging than anyone, replied to my question by conceding the problem, and adding, "However, the delivery of her final lines from a recumbent position seems unlikely – and there are sight-lines issues, then or now. At what point would she take to her bed?" He regards Caesar's words as among several unresolved puzzles in the play.

42 Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women*, London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 121-27.

Rome allotted sovereignty to the individual subject. And in a rare instance of gender equality, women were not excluded from Roman *virtus*. Portia's Stoic suicide takes place offstage in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, but Lucrece, universally praised in the Renaissance as chaste wife and founder of the Roman republic, has her own long, sympathetic narrative poem. And when Antony names Dido and Aeneas as their predecessors (*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV.xiv.54-55), even if he gets the story wrong[43], he offers a classical frame for Cleopatra's death. In the tragic love story that Shakespeare would have found in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Heroides*, Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, Dido anticipates Cleopatra as arguably the first North African casualty of the Roman will to empire[44]. The Carthaginian queen elaborately stages her own death on the funeral pyre she builds to burn all that reminds her of her Roman betrayer, declaring "sic, sic, iuvat ire sub umbras" ("thus, thus I go gladly into the dark", *Aeneid*, IV.660). This line from Virgil, quoted as her final words by Marlowe's protagonist (*Dido, Queen of Carthage*, V.i.313)[45], is echoed by Shakespeare's Charmian (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii.193).

Cleopatra takes on death as antagonist on her terms, not death's. If in the end she enters into his possession, she does so in defiance, not fear. Robert Cecil's tomb, I have suggested, also defies death in its refusal to humiliate his mortal remains. But is there a closer connection between the two? John Bowers proposes that in subjecting her body to the "worm", as the play repeatedly calls the asp, Cleopatra alludes to and transcends the tradition of the *transi* monument[46]. Tombs already represented a tourist attraction, as prompts to moral and social reflection[47]. Shakespeare's audience,

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43 The image of their ghosts drawing all attention away from the famous lovers evokes Cleopatra's first appearance and Antony's own consequent isolation in the market-place (II.ii.223-28), and prepares for her characterization of her death as reenacting that meeting, "I am again for Cydnus" (V.ii.227).

44 Colombo, p. 84.

45 Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett, London, Dent, 1999, pp. 242-93.

46 Bowers, pp. 288-89.

47 Llewellyn, pp. 337-62.

recognizing an allusion to them in the queen's self-declared marble-constancy, might well understand the last scene in this way.

Alternatively, however, instead of transcending the convention, does she not rather incorporate it? Her final effigy, if that is what we are invited to perceive, is not the conventional *vanitas* of the late Middle Ages. There is no decay involved, no decomposing flesh, no physical degradation. On the contrary, the seductive beauty that invests her with power remains intact (V.ii.342-46) as, in its own way, does the dignity of Robert Cecil. At the same time, both kinds of double effigy, whether they show cadavers or skeletons, bring earthly standing into conjunction and contrast with the condition that, whatever their status in life, all mortals have in common. *Antony and Cleopatra* shows a queen who has in her death, as in her life, at least two distinct identities. On the one hand, she takes her own life in the capacity of "Royal Egypt", an "Empress" (IV.xv.75) who, in her resolution, has nothing of woman in her (V.ii.237-38). On the other, she does so in the light of what she shares with all her sex, "[n]o more but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chares" (IV.xv.77-79). This is the "lass" who dies with her crown awry (V.ii.314-16).

In the death she stages, these two modes of being coincide but, as throughout the play, they do not quite coalesce. Cleopatra's image in death preserves at least one of the paradoxes that, since Plutarch, have fascinated poets, playwrights and film directors, ensuring her immortality through nearly twenty centuries of fiction.

As a postscript, I add the observation that the power struggle between the tyrant death and human sovereignty remains unresolved in many modern regimes, where people now face mortality on the state's terms, not theirs. In the UK, suicide was against the law until 1961 and assisted dying remains unlawful. As Antony's undignified ending demonstrates, sometimes people need help to exercise self-determination. How far can we be said to be sovereign subjects if we cannot legitimately ask others to hold our swords, bring us figs, or provide barbiturates when, in extremis, we ask for them?

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Shakespeare contra Erasmus

Claudia Corti

Vanitas as illusion

A last deep breath, and Moria gives out her definitive, explosive conclusions:

> Salomon the Ecclesiaste writeth in his fyrste chapitre, that the noumbre of fooles is infinite. […] What ment he (trow ye) by his protestacion, when he lowdely cried out so, *Vanitee of vanitees, and all is vanitee*? what? but (as afore I saied) that this humaine life is naught but a certaine great plaie of Folie? […] Moreouer, where the other wyse Ecclesiasticus saied, *A foole changeth like the moone, but a wiseman abydeth in one state as the sonne*, what signified he els hereby? but that mankynd is altogethers foolisshe.[1]

[1] Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folie*, trans. Sir Thomas Chaloner, ed. Clarence Miller, London-New York, Oxford University Press, The Early English Text Society, 1965, pp. 107-8. All the references are to this edition, and page numbers are inserted parenthetically in the text. The *Ecclesiastes* (Hebrew *Qohelet*, 'preacher') is the Old Testament Book of Wisdom. The *Ecclesiasticus* (The Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach) is a deuterocanonical text accepted in the Roman Catholic canon. Both

There are two aspects in Moria's considerations of the *vanitas* riddle[2]. One is the capacity to fictitiously represent parts of the real world; the other is that of giving instructions as to how to deal with these representations, which more often than not correspond to illusions and falsifications. Moria's strategy – a highly theatrical one, by the way – consists in inserting herself into the emotional structures of fictional characters and, by so doing, bringing the characters themselves into our minds as *real beings*[3]. Thus, she fulfils the endeavour of breathing life into fiction, in a pathemic way, either by empathy with or dislike of the characters. This procedure is what our contemporary philosophy would name 'simulation'[4]. As Moria runs simulations in our minds, she makes us not only 'imagine' her characters but urges us to share the urgency of their fluctuations and doubts, thus enabling us to reflect on these emotions in such a way as to create and determine mental models of ourselves.

It goes without saying that for Shakespeare – no less than for Erasmus – the very idea of ontological illusion coincides with their shared conception of theatricality as the utmost and most effective

Ecclesiastes and *Ecclesiasticus* contain practical rules and moral exhortations. Erasmus' intercultural bias underlines their mutual dependence.

2 Although Ernst Gombrich makes no explicit reference to Erasmus, he never avoids claims to his debts to what he calls more generally "humanist behaviour". I here draw upon his fundamental theses of *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, London, Phaidon Press, 1960, to interpret the true Erasmian sense of illusion itself.

3 See in particular Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979. His discussion of "word-things" relationship in Erasmus has provided more than one point of reference throughout this article.

4 'Simulation', according to analytic philosophy, is a way of modelling and re-modelling emotions and simulating their effects on social order. In literary texts – say, Shakespeare's or Erasmus' – a cognitive approach can help to better understand the characters' values, ideas and emotions; running them as simulations in his/her mind, a reader can identify the real relations between substance (inner experience) and shadow (outer behaviour). See the outstanding Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2009; and Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.

simulation of the world[5]. The transformations of substances into fallacies, that Moria so cunningly yet passionately denounced, were accomplished by Shakespeare in the ever transforming, appearing/disappearing *vanities* on the illusory space of the stage. Nevertheless, the playwright overcomes the philosopher (notwithstanding the latter's dramatic orientation) in exploiting the physical, material resources of the stage properties. Iago cleverly converts a banal handkerchief into a metaphysical instrument to transform Othello's perception of reality and ultimately reforms his very sense of himself (*Othello*, III.iv; IV.i). When Titania, after having "the juice of a little western flower" dripped into her eyes (*A Midsummer's Night Dream*, II.i.172), wakes up, she falls in love with Bottom, who has been reshaped in the guise of a donkey (III.i). When Cassius affirms that he will be the mirror (one of the stock devices of emblematic literature) for Brutus (*Julius Caesar*, I.ii.70-73), he does more than initiating his recruitment to plot Caesar's assassination. Indeed, in the second scene of Act I, we find embodied many of the elements of the modern literary and dramatic idea of character as a compound of emotion-based perspectives from which action flows: a flux of generative relations of shadows from substances, illusions from realities. Not to mention Hamlet, who, in his perhaps ambiguously 'feigned' madness, reaches the summit of his depiction of substantial interiority, as well as of its exterior, shifting manifestations, or *vanities*.

And here comes to the fore Erasmus' connection between simulation and theatre. Both in active and passive senses: because Moria's encomium is a 'praise of folly' pronounced on a stage by a character named Folly herself. Dramatic art – implies Erasmus – is actively an illusion, a simulation of reality. But its deep, innate,

[5] See: Claudia Corti, ed., *Silenos: Erasmus in Elizabethan Literature*, Pisa, Pacini, 1998; Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1963; James McConica, *Erasmus*, Oxford-New York-Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1991; Marc Fumaroli, "L'éloquence de la Folie", in *Dix conférences sur Érasme. Éloge de la folie – Colloques. Actes des journées organisées par l'Université de Bâle et le Centre Culturel Suisse, à Paris les 11 et 12 avril 1986*, Paris-Genève, Champion et Slatkine, 1998; Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Humanism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005; Arthur F. Kinney, *Continental Humanistic Poetics: Studies in Erasmus, Castiglione, Marguerite de Navarre, Rabelais, and Cervantes*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1986.

congenial falsity cannot run the risk of being disrupted by any 'wise', well-meaning – let us say – 'revisionist' who approaches the stage to denounce its constitutive passive vanity. On stage the parts are often miscast, this is undeniable, but Moria tries to picture what disaster would follow if someone who intends to shed light upon the miscasting were to interrupt the scene, stripping the disguises from the players. And life presents an analogue. Suppose some 'wise man' from the 'sky' (both in a metaphysical and theatrical sense, the sky also being the canvas pending onto the stage) should descend into the theatre of life and try to wring from the characters the roles for which they have been engaged. The result would be that the actors are not passively miscast, merely on account of the producer's miscasting, but have actively concurred to obtain their roles. Thus, the supposed intruder is not simply censuring what cannot be helped, but also exposing the intentional folly of the masquers.

Long and well known as it is, this passage is worth almost full quotation, being central to my whole *argumentum* here:

> If one at a solemne stage plaie, woulde take upon hym to plucke of the plaiers garmentes, whiles they were saiyng theyr partes, and so disciphre unto the lokers on, the true and natiue faces of eche of the plaiers, shoulde he not (trowe ye) marre all the mattier? […] ye shoulde see yet straightwaies a new transmutation in thynges: that who before plaied the woman, shoulde than appeare to be a man: who seemed youth, should shew his hore heares: who countrefaited the kynge, shulde tourne to a rascall, and who plaiede god almightie, shulde become a cobler as he was before.
> Yet […] (pp. 37-38)

"Yet", precisely "yet". For here comes Moria's revenge:

> Yet take awaie this errour, and as soone take awaie all togethers, in as muche as the feignying and counterfaityng is it, that so delighteth the beholders. (p. 38)

The parallel to life seems inevitable:

> So likewise, all this life of mortall men, what is it els, but a certayne kynde of stage plaie? Wheras men come foorthe disguised one in one

> arraie, an other in an other, eche plaiyng his parte, till at last the maker of the plaie, or bokebearer causeth theim to auoyde the skaffolde, and yet sometyme maketh one man come in, two or three tymes, with sundrie partes and apparaile, as who before represented a kynge, beying clothed all in purpre, hauing no more but shyfted hym selfe a little, shoulde shew hym selfe againe lyke an woobegone myser. And all this is dooen under a certaine veile or shadow, whiche taken awaie ones, the plaie can no more be plaied. (p. 38)

Which means: take away any falsification, illusion, allurement, vanity itself, and there is no play; much worse, there is actually no life at all!

Vanitas as fancy

When Bassanio, choosing among his three caskets, ponders the location of *fancy*, he cannot determine if it is either heart or mind, finally coming to the choice of *eye* (*The Merchant of Venice*, III.ii). In the late sixteenth century, 'fancy' is often indistinctly used with 'fantasy' or 'imagination', in reference to the mental/visual faculty, the one that can transform intelligible data into psychological 'phantasms'. Starting from Aristotle's *De anima,* through Aquinas and many mostly relevant medieval thinkers, the image-making faculty, as distinguished from sense and memory, came to invade the field of questioning the true realm of *phantasmatic* apprehension, triggered as it was by the ontological concern about supposed visual supremacy. Renaissance theoretical discussions offer different versions of fancy as a mentally unobjectionable function and of its inconsistent definitions as well. Either 'fantasy' is "what taketh all the formes or ordinances that be disposed of the fiue Wittes", or 'imagination' is "what apprehends the fourme or shape of sensible things"[6]. A third variation lists three fundamental faculties as "imaginacion or common sense", "reason or phantasie", and "memory"[7]. Such "confusion" perplexed, for example, the neo-Platonic poet John Davies:

[6] Thomas Vicary, *The English-mans Treasure: with the true Anatomie of Mans bodie*, London, George Robinson, 1587, pp. 15-16.

[7] Philip Moore, *The Hope of Health*, London, John Kingston, 1565, p. 8.

Imagination, Fancie, Common-sence,
In nature brooketh oddes or union,
Some makes them one, and some makes difference,
But wee will use them with distinction.
With sense to shunne the Sence confusion.[8]

However, locations of fancy or imagination had to be reconciled with the rapid advances of human anatomy, as exemplified by Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543), which nevertheless did not calm down the author's own anxieties about the mysteries of cognition: "I am unable to understand how the brain can perform its office of imagining, meditating, thinking, and remembering"[9].

In part because of its positional instability, fancy and/or imagination provided a conceptual space to analyse the relations between body and mind. Even before Descartes, the idea that "light is a percussion made by the illuminant that stricketh our sense in the part of the braine which we suppose to be the fantasie"[10] inaugurated in England the connection between light, sight… and *vision*. Inward images can be created that influence or shape or alter our perceptions, leading to our aesthetic conceptions. Imaginative, fantastic or phantasmal theories (either honestly derived or strategically absorbed from 'the famous clark Erasmus') were arousing examinations of particular aspects of mental disarrangement, chiefly due to abnormal functioning of either heart or eye. The meaning of 'phantasm' was also on the move, its traditional neutral sense of 'image' or 'appearance' giving way to 'illusory' or 'fictive' representations: appropriately the vanities of the eye![11]

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8 John Davies, *Mirum in Modum: A Glimpse of Gods Glorie and the Soules Shape*, London, William Aspley, 1602, p. 1.

9 Andreas Vesalius, *Vesalius on the Human Brain*, trans. Charles Singer, London, Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 4.

10 Kenelm Digby, *Two Treatises, in the One of Which, the Nature of Bodies; in the Other, the Nature of Mans Soule; is Looked Into*, Paris, Gilles Blaizot, 1544, pp. 275-76.

11 I owe many suggestions to: Ernest B. Gilman, *The Curious Perspective: Literary and Pictorial Wit in the Seventeenth Century*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1978; Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1983; Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 1986; David Michael Levin, ed., *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 1993; Christopher

Although either fancy or imagination are never explicitly mentioned in the Shakespeare sonnet sequence, the recurring dialogues among eye, heart and mind envisage issues of perception, cognition and interpretation. I mean exactly a sonnet *sequence*, and as such I intend to pursue my interpretative evaluation.

The relation eye-object-desire-phantasm starts in *Sonnet 2*:

> When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
> And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
> Thy youth's proud livery *so gazed on* now
> Will be a tottered weed of small worth held:
> Then being asked, where all thy beauty lies,
> Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
> To say within thine own deep-sunken eyes
> Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise. (ll. 1-8, my emphasis)[12]

The longest foresight of the future consists in beauty's destruction, a motive introduced by images of war ("besiege", "trenches", "battle-field"), admitting that such things as beauty itself, lusty days and material treasures only exist as long as youthful eyes can visualise them; a theme most cherished by Erasmus, also responsible for the war imagery. See *Enchiridion*:

> The life of mortal men is nothing but a certain perpetual exercise of war […]. The most part of men be overmuch deceived, whose minds this world as a juggler holdeth occupied with delicious and flattering pleasures, which […] make holidays out of season […]. It is a marvellous thing to behold how without care and circumspection we

Pye, *The Vanishing: Shakespeare, the Subject, and Early Modern Culture*, Durham-London, Duke University Press, 2000; Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 2002; Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

12 William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, 1996, p. 33. All quotations of the *Sonnets* are from this edition, and lines numbers are inserted parenthetically in the text.

> live, how idly we sleep […] when without ceasing we are besieged with so great a number of armed vices.[13]

It is worth noting that Erasmus' presence also reverberates in the phrase "thriftless *praise*" (my emphasis): everyone loses his/her beauty, and, for the youthful, to trust that there will still be some shine in his/her eyes is of no value, being as unreliable as a shameful lie.

Among the *vanitas* paintings of the Renaissance, one is particularly suggestive and pertinent here. The subject is the notorious Death and the Maiden theme (Fig. 1, Fig. 2), which sums up the emblems mostly derived from Erasmus and both his continental and British counterparts, starting with his best friend Thomas More[14]. In the first illustration, a young lady dressed in a very elegant costume, plays a lute, a common epochal symbol of harmony, learning and pleasure. Next to her, an elderly man (a usual representation of Time) holds up two ominous objects: a skull and a convex mirror; as he keeps the mirror elevated for the young lady to gaze into (the first line of *Sonnet 3* is "Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest"), we perceive that her own reflection is in turn a reflected image of death, which comes to the fore in the second Maid and Death illustration here, where the maiden, who admires her own face's reflection in a convex decorative mirror, looks unaware of the passage of time, as engraved in the blurred surface of her former beauty.

Sonnet 24 directly confronts the problem of the clash between the object and the subject of physical sight (as well as of exterior and inner vision) that informs the Silenos argument in the *Praise of Folly*. The dissonance between what appears and what it is, the chasm between phantasm and reality, is abundantly exploited by

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13 Desiderius Erasmus, *A Book Called in Latin Enchiridion Militis Christiani, and in English The Manual of the Christian Knight,* London, Methuen, 1905, p. 42.

14 Criticism on this subject is limitless. I personally shall limit myself to what I have found both profitable and up-to-date with regard to my argument here: Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997; Marion A. Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Modern Romance*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2007; Peter Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford-London, Ashgate, 2008.

Erasmus, both in the *Encomium* and the *Adagia*[15]. The typical Erasmian image for the distortions of representation is precisely the figure of the Silenos (Fig. 3), the double-faced optical illusion, the fake outward show of what is not real, which is everywhere central to Erasmus' polemics. Let us consider Moria's dispute here:

> All humaine thynges like the *Silenes or double images of Alcibiades*, haue two faces muche unlyke and dissemblable, that what outwardly seemed death, yet lokyng within ye shulde fynde it lyfe: and on the other side what seemed life, to be death: what fayre, to be foule: what riche, beggerly: what cunnyng, rude: what stronge, feable: what noble, vile: what gladsome, sadde: what happie, unlucky: what friendly, unfriendly: what healthsome, noysome. Briefly the Silene ones beyng undone and disclosed, ye shall fynde all thynges tourned into new semblance. (p. 37)

Shakespeare's personal adaptation of this famous humanist *locus* is the connection he establishes between poetry and painting, in dealing with the object of (his) love, having himself become the artist set in front of his easel: "Mine eye hath played the painter and hath stelled / Thy beauty's form in table of my heart" (ll. 1-2). Then he invites the beloved to look inside him, to put himself to the test of verity: "Through the painter must you see his skill / To find where your true image lies" (ll. 5-6). The view is blurred or distorted, though, due to the false perspective of having been encapsulated within the poet/artist's "bosom" (l. 7), which alters the eye's discrimination and falsifies the mind's knowledge: "Now see what good turns eyes for eyes have done" (l. 9); "They draw but what they see, know not the heart" (l. 14).

In *Sonnet 27* (no doubt one of the most connotatively 'Erasmian' ones), images come to the fore of consciousness in the sensory void of silence and darkness, during the night where a mental as well as heartfelt journey begins "to work my mind, when body's work's expired" (ll. 1-4). Mythical implications (Love's/Cupid's blindness) and metaphysical paradoxes, reminiscent of Moria's speculative

[15] Margaret Mann Phillips is still the major authority on Erasmus' *Adagia*. See her indispensable book *The 'Adages' of Erasmus: A Study with Translations*, London-New York-Ibadan, Cambridge University Press, 1964. See also Thomas Dorey, ed., *Erasmus*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.

insinuating methodology, suggest the idea that, only in the deepest interiority of the mind, *sight* can finally become *vision.* Indeed:

> [T]hen my thoughts […]
> keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
> Looking on darkness which the blind do see:
> Save that my soul's imaginary sight
> Presents thy shadow to my sightless view. (ll. 5, 7-10)

Sonnet 46 again modulates the eye/heart opposition by taking over the military, belligerent and legalistic metaphorical language which is so characteristic of both the *Enchiridion* and the *Praise*:

> Mine eye and heart are at a *mortal war*,
> How to *divide the conquest* of thy sight:
> Mine eye my heart thy picture's sight *would bar*,
> My heart mine eye the freedom of *that right*.
> My heart *doth plead* that thou in him dost lie
> (A *closet never pierced* with crystal eyes),
> But the *defendant doth that plea deny*,
> And says in him thy fair appearance lies.
> To 'cide this *title is impanellèd*
> A *quest* of thoughts, all *tenants* to the heart,
> And *by their verdict is determinèd*
> The clear eye's *moiety* and the dear heart's *part*,
> As thus: mine eye's *due* is thy outward *part*,
> And my heart's *right* thy inward love of heart. (ll. 1-14, my emphasis)

Going back to the Death and the Maiden painting (Fig. 1). Many commentators have seen in the face of the elderly gentleman a portrait of Shakespeare, as he depicts himself in the very sad *Sonnet 62*: "beated and chopped with tanned antiquity" (l. 9)[16]. It is precisely with a commentary on this sonnet that I intend to conclude this section of my essay. The lyric is centred on the sin of arrogant self-love, self-adulation, self-satisfaction, when one believes he is everywhere extremely superior, either physically, spiritually or intellectually… Yes, until a mirror reveals to him his true inner self:

[16] See Janet Birkett, ed., "Shakespeare in 100 Objects. Vanitas", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67:1 (Spring 2016), pp. 159-162.

> Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,
> And all my soul, and all my every part;
> And for this sin there is no remedy,
> it is so grounded inward in my heart.
> Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
> No shape so true, no truth of such account,
> And for myself mine own worth do define,
> As I all other in all worths surmount.
> But when my glass shows me myself indeed,
> Beated and chopped with tanned antiquity,
> Mine own self-love quite contrary I read;
> Self so self-loving were iniquity. (ll. 1-12)

Much lighter and more cheerful appears to me Erasmus' indictment of precisely the same "sin", although no less severe than Shakespeare's:

> I can not passe ouer in silence those pecockes, which […] vnder a vaine title of nobilitie doe wondersly stand in theyr owne conceites. […] through this sweete perswasion of *Selflykyng*, they leade a golden life: […] as though this *Selflykying* made not most men, manifoldly, by wonderous meanes, most happie in theyr owne opinion […] *Selfloue* is altogethers so muche theyr alie: *Syngyng men, Sophisters, Rhetoriciens, and Poets* doo excell therin: amonges whom, the uncunnynger, the more lyketh hym selfe, and the franklier bosteth what he can dooe. (pp. 59-61)

Vanitas as royalty

The above quotation about self-love and self-liking is the most perfect introduction to my final discussion of vanity, now in relation to kingship and earthly power, which is Shakespeare's most 'Erasmian' topic. I shall be focussing on *Richard II*, where two typical Renaissance philosophical-political themes intertwine: that of *vanitas* and that of *rule* and *government*[17]. In my opinion, the

[17] I have recently contributed to a new Italian edition and translation of all Shakespearean works in four volumes, supervised by Franco Marenco. My personal task has been *Richard II*, where my reader could find lots of more specific information both in the introduction and the notes. See William Shakespeare, *Riccardo II*, ed. Claudia Corti, in *Tutte le opere*, gen. ed. Franco Marenco, Milano,

"lamentable" story of Richard represents the failure of earthly power at its aesthetically best, or ethically worst, point of self-realisation. The protagonist is enslaved within the fatal destiny of the 'death of kings' theme, as it was culturally envisaged in the monarch's institutional position. In this position, interrogations about the sovereign's status coincide with the overall humanist *quaestiones* of self-knowledge and search for identity: both the classic 'know thyself' and 'who am I'.

However, before plunging into the lamentable, tragic recesses of one of the most disquieting Shakespearean kings, let us enjoy aesthetically (as well as intellectually ponder) Moria's apparently joyful, ironic, histrionic meditation about the superficially happy – in fact, inwardly deprecable – royal status. Like the Silenos, kings have a double, contrasting appearance. On the one hand, a king postulates to be cheerfully rightful, honest, loyal and mindful of his own people; on the other, the same king is due to be disclosed as subject to sombre treason, gloomy hypocrisy, perfidious lust, pernicious greed and ominous flattery:

> I longe sore a little now to treate of kynges and princes. […] If thei considred well what belongeth to theyr estates, now I see not what life might be more carefull than theyrs, nor less to be desyred. For suche shall neuer thinke that a kyngdome shoulde either by usurpacion, or any other wronfull title be sought for, as dooe waine with theim selues, what a charge he sustaineth on his shoulders. […] A prince is set in that place, where as if he wrie him selfe neuer so little that becometh hym, straigth waies the infection of the example crepeth contagiously to many men. How muche more the height of a princes fortune maie be a meanes to peruert hym from the right trade, either through pleasure, libertee, adulation, or delicatenesse, so muche the warelier shoulde he resist theim. (pp. 92-93)

Moria's sarcastic conclusion is: "If a prince do perpende wel, I beleue surely he shoulde take his slepe and fode with lesse gladnesse, than a farre meaner person dooeth!" (p. 93). The

Bompiani-Giunti, 2017, 4 vols, vol. III. I also treated this topic in "Scene, racconti, fantasie, fantasmi… Le immagini anomale di *Richard II*", in *Richard II dal testo alla scena*, ed. Mariangela Tempera, Bologna, EMIL, 2015.

corollary target of Moria's attack against royalty concerns the abominable courtiers, particularly pertinent in regard to *Richard II*:

> What saie you to *Courtiers?* these minion gaibeseen gentilmen beying, who beying for the most part as fawnyng, as seruile, as witlesse, and as abiect as can be deuised, […] beyng contented to haue their bodies outwardly garnisshed with golde, with gemmes, with silkes, and with other representacions of vertue and wysedom, […] theyr faces like visers will blusshe at nothing: […] that in bourdyng, and in flyryng, thei can flatter pleasauntly. For these be the qualitees they holde most mete for a kynde gentliman, and rufler of the courte. (p. 94)

A Shakespearean king who, after much debauchery inoculated in him by his courtiers, surely does not eat and sleep in pleasantness is Richard II, both the deposed king and final martyr of his existential tragedy.

The renowned critic Ernst Kantorowicz was the first (giving the lead to so many followers) to note that the looking glass in the deposition scene (*Richard II*, IV.i) "has the effect of a magic mirror", thus emphasising the Erasmian, neo-Platonic disjunction between outer appearance and inner self[18]. As previously observed here, the magic or convex mirror is one of the central symbols of the Renaissance *vanitas* motive, and it is not by chance that Shakespeare so intensely deploys it in a tragedy centred on the theme of the death of kings. The mirror episode is in fact the culmination of a sequence of ritualistic spectacles which constitute an embedding – similar to a Silenos' construction – of apparently distinct facts: primarily the crown-holding tableau between Richard and Bolingbroke, the removal of both the crown and its related royal paraphernalia enacted by Richard himself, and the actual shattering of the mirror by Richard's hand. Although the usurper, Bolingbroke, sets up a judicial frame to convict the legitimate king of inadequacy to rule, the very setting, however 'stately', is just a parody of 'state' (one should not forget at this point Moria's bitter irony about the functioning of the judicial system, as well as her outright attacks on judges). The abyss between true and pretended authority could not be more manifest. In the ceremonial pageant of

[18] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. 39-40.

the handing over of the crown as a public gesture of submission and resignation, Shakespeare forces our attention on a stage property which is not only an obvious symbol of power but, in being held thus between the two competitors, is a token of possession to be seized and possibly stolen. Another sign of impermanence and fickleness, as it was anthropologically connoted in the *vanitas* portraiture (Fig. 4).

The reverse ceremony of Richard's 'undoing' – his physical, psychological, mental spoliation – functions like the convex mirror of a macabre ritual of self-effacement, where the *Danse macabre* is one of the traditional eschatological representations of Death being placed in earthly surroundings (Fig. 5). Death is – humanists say – continually thrust against Life. That is why the connivance of Fool and King (which Richard is forcefully brought to recognise in his own *persona*), tells the same humanist, Erasmian truth:

> For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings –
> How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
> Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
> Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed,
> All murdered. For within the *hollow crown*
> That rounds the *mortal temples of a king*
> Keeps *Death his court;* and there *the antic sits*,
> *Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp*,
> Allowing him a breath, a little scene. (III.ii.151-60, my italics to emphasise the typical Erasmian language)

Having once given away both crown and sceptre, similar symbolic gestures of renunciation accompany the king's other divestments: of "kingly sway", "balm", "sacred state" (IV.i), but also cancellations of oaths and duties. The sequence of disruptive actions culminates in the smashing of the mirror, with Richard's understanding of 'the brittleness of the glass' as supreme symbol of the fragility and vanity of life itself. In this sense, Richard's yearning for the Erasmian (and Pauline as well) "new world's crown" expressed in the prison soliloquy (V.i) gives us the complete measure of his voluntary destruction of any earthly regalia. The prison where he lives is the circumscribed content of his mind and soul, where he has desperately tried to "hammer out"

a significance for his own life (V.v). Only to discover that none can be "contented". Heidegger said that death is not something that can be imagined once and for all but an idea that has to be constantly re-imagined[19]. Deleuze and Guattari argued as well (although not from an existential but a psychological viewpoint) that, in modernity, the antithesis to death is only a vacuous, vanity boasting, instance of possession[20]. Thus, if everything in life is so fragile and brittle as the mirror that Richard has previously broken, there is no use in searching for knowledge and self-knowledge *in this world*. Like a true fool, Richard interrupts his futile questioning and encourages his own death, blandly contrasting his murderers. By way of paradox (to be sure one of Moria's methodologies), one can say that king Richard II – narcissist, self-deceiver and destroyer of his own identity as he has proved to be – has finally understood Erasmus' optimistic lesson about being a genuine "fool". Not so much 'know then yourself', as possibly 'let yourself go free', even to the point of death:

> How so euer suche foolisshe pranckes are thought to brede an euill name, I praie you, what mattier is that to my fooles, who eyther feele not what the inconuenience of an ill report meaneth, or if thei fele it, can so little set by it, and easely passe it ouer? If a Mylstone fall vpon thy head, that is an euill in deede: but as for shame, reproche, losse of reputacion, or euill speche, these maie do the as muche hurt as thou felist theim: that and if thou felist theim not, than are they no euils at all. (p. 43)

[19] At least in both *Sein und Zeit* and *Holzwege*. See: William Large, *Heidegger's Being and Time*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008, pp. 125, 148, 297-300; Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, eds Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, *passim*.

[20] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, New York, Viking Press, 1977.

Fig. 1: Anon., *Death and the Maiden*, about 1570, Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Fig 2: Hans Baldung Grien, *Three Ages of Woman and Death,* 1511, Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Fig. 3: *Silenos*, terracotta, fourth century BC, The Paul Getty Trust.

Fig. 4: Anon., *Vanitas Still-Life*, 1570-75, Holyoke College Art Museum (Massachusetts).

Fig. 5: Bernt Notke, *Danse Macabre*, about 1490-95, London, The Trustees of the British Museum.

On Vanitas
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"This is nothing, fool": Shakespeare's Vanities

Michael Neill

There is peradventure no vanity more manifest,
th[a]n so vainely to write of it.
Michel de Montaigne, "Of Vanitie"

It often falls out that somewhat is produced of nothing.
Francis Bacon, "Of Vain-glory"

Of what is't fools make such vain keeping?
John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*

"Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas", intones the Preacher of Ecclesiastes (1.2; 12.8): "Vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity. […] I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit" (1.2-14). Although we nowadays associate the word with self-conceit, pride and the ostentatious displays of wealth and power, its root lies in the Latin *vanus,* meaning 'empty' or 'void', so that, in its original sense, it stood primarily for a kind of nothingness. The Preacher's *vanitas* signifies the hollowness and final nullity of all earthly things – a lesson famously remembered in *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), where Bunyan's Christian and his fellow pilgrims arrive at the town of Vanity, with its great fair, set up by the demons Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion; here, they discover, the entire catalogue of worldly delights is offered for sale, "as houses, lands, trades, places, honours,

preferments, titles, countries, kingdoms, lusts, pleasures, and delights of all sorts, as whores, bawds, wives, husbands, children, masters, servants, lives, blood, bodies, souls, silver, gold, pearls, precious stones, and what not"[1]; yet for the pilgrims, who wish only to "buy the truth"[2], there is nothing there: "*All that cometh is vanity*"[3].

Behind Bunyan's allegorical re-imagining of the Biblical text lay the tradition inspired by medieval morality drama in which Vanity had appeared as a Vice figure: usually female and puffed up with narcissistic self-importance, she might easily – as in neo-moralities like Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1592) – be conflated with Pride (*Superbia)* to become one of the Seven Deadly Sins. In addition to mainstream dramas like Marlowe's, the morality tradition seems also to have spawned the popular form of puppet theatre that is glanced at in several plays of the period. In Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) – whose satire of fleshly indulgence surely contributed to Bunyan's own vision of the Fair – the grotesque Puritan, Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, self-appointed scourge of fairground vanities, denounces puppeteering itself as "the waiting-woman of Vanity" (V.v.76)[4], only for the Puppet Dionysius to retort that Busy's fellow zealots, the tradespeople of Blackfriars, "*with their perukes, and their puffs, their fans and their huffs*" are the true "*pages of Pride, and waiters upon Vanity*" (V.v.80-82).

Jonson's Vanity was the same figure that Shakespeare had remembered in *King Lear* (1605), where Kent accuses Oswald of "tak[ing] Vanity the puppet's part against the royalty of her father" (II.ii.35-36)[5], transforming Goneril into Lady Vanity, and momentarily reducing the tragedy to the moralised simplicity of a puppet play. Yet, despite his evident familiarity with the *vanitas* tradition, Shakespeare's instinct was to resist its allegoric simplifications, so that neither denunciation resonates much beyond its immediate rhetorical context. Nor does vanity (at first

1 John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965, p. 125.

2 Bunyan, p. 127.

3 Bunyan, p. 124.

4 Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, ed. E. A. Horsman, Revels Plays, London, Methuen, 1967.

5 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2004.

sight anyway) seem to be an especially prominent theme in his work: indeed the word appears only twenty-one times in the entire canon; and, in many of these cases, it often conveys little more than its weakened modern sense of "self-conceit" (OED *n.* 3a), while elsewhere it can mean simply "the quality of being foolish or of holding erroneous opinions" (OED *n.* 2b), or refer to some "vain, idle, or worthless thing" (OED *n.* 4a). All of these senses, of course, are necessarily coloured by the word's Latin origin, but rarely does Shakespeare's "vanity" seem to equate fully with the biblical *vanitas*.

A marked exception involves the figure of Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays. It is the fat knight whom the sick king of *2 Henry IV* (c. 1597) must have in mind when he envisages the scandal of his son's imminent succession: "Harry the Fifth is crown'd! Up, Vanity! / Down Royal State!" (IV.v.119-20)[6]. Mocked by the prince as "that Vanity in years" (*1 Henry IV*, II.iv.448-49)[7], as if he were some monstrous male version of Lady Vanity, Falstaff will subsequently encounter a rather different incarnation of *vanitas* on the battlefield at Shrewsbury. Looking down on the dead body of Sir Walter Blunt, "[s]emblably furnished", as Hotspur has told us, "like the King himself" (*1 Henry IV*, V.iii.21), Falstaff exclaims: "There's honour for you! Here's no Vanity!" (V.iii.32-33). His sarcasm transforms the richly clad corpse in its royal coat-of-arms into one of those monitory emblems sometimes known as *memento mori*; but, ironically, just a few lines later, in Hal's double-edged response to the apparently lifeless form lying beside the dead Hotspur, that role will seem to have passed to Falstaff himself: "O, I should have a heavy miss of thee / If I were much in love with Vanity: / Death hath not struck so fat a deer today" (V.iv.104-6). The word-play that turns the heaviness of grief into a joke about Falstaff's corpulence neatly matches the way in which what Hal first sees as a tragic figure of mortal frailty is momentarily collapsed into a satiric emblem of worldly self-indulgence, before it rises to become "the true and perfect image of life indeed" (V.iv.118-19).

6 William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 2*, ed. A. R. Humphreys, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1967; capitalisation mine.

7 William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 1*, ed. A. R. Humphreys, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1961; capitalisation mine.

Shakespeare's interest in the *vanitas* motif is most conspicuous, however, in a play where Vanity is never named at all. The graveyard scene in *Hamlet* (c. 1599) looks back not to the theatrical morality tradition, but to successive iterations of the pictorial *memento mori*, conspicuously represented in the great mural paintings of the *Danse macabre* and the *Triumph of Death* that adorned the walls of graveyards, churches, palaces, and other public spaces in late medieval Europe, reminding onlookers of the hollowness of earthly pomp and power. More immediately, in the figure of the young prince himself holding a skull, the scene recalls the genre that came to be known as *vanitas* paintings. Unlike their spectacular predecessors in the *memento mori* tradition, these were small-scale works intended for contemplative viewing in private residences. Although the name is nowadays most often associated with the still-life-with-a-skull images that became especially popular in seventeenth-century Holland, earlier forms of the *vanitas* – no doubt influenced by stories of St Jerome's self-mortifying visits to the catacombs in Rome – typically showed a man (usually young and affluent) holding a skull, reminding both himself and the viewer of the transitoriness of human life. This is the image that Webster's Duchess has in mind when she declares that Antonio's kiss is "colder / Than that I have seen a holy anchorite / Give to a dead man's skull" (III.v.84-86)[8]. Made famous by Frans Hals (relatively late *Young Man Holding a Skull* (1626)[9] , the image survives in numerous other versions by Aelbrecht Bouts, Lucas van Leyden, Bernardino Licinio, Jan Lievens, and others – as well as in Holbein's extraordinary variant on the motif, the dual portrait known as *The Ambassadors*[10].

Hamlet's image of a young man contemplating a skull – along with its reworkings in the boneyard of Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy* (published in 1611) and in Vindice's grim games with the skull of his murdered mistress in Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* (1607) – is enough to show the familiarity of Shakespeare and his

8 John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Michael Neill, Norton Critical Editions, New York, Norton, 2015. Her *vanitas* itself seems to come as a response to Antonio's own reflection on human nullity in the preceding speech: "Heaven fashioned us of nothing, and we strive / To bring ourselves to nothing" (III.v.78-79).

9 National Gallery of Great Britain, NG6458.

10 National Gallery of Great Britain, NG1314.

contemporaries with the pictorial *vanitas* tradition. Act IV, scene iii of Tourneur's tragedy is set in an "unfrequented" churchyard where the protagonist, Charlemont, is made to set the scene – "How fit a place for contemplation / Is this dead of night, among the dwellings / Of the dead" (IV.iii.3-5)[11] – as Hamlet-like he muses upon the vanity for which it stands:

> This grave – perhaps th'inhabitant
> Was in his lifetime the possessor of
> His own desires. Yet in the midst
> Of all his greatness and his wealth, he was less rich
> And less contented than in this poor piece
> Of earth […] O
> That man with so much labour should aspire
> To worldly height, when in the humble earth
> The world's conditions at the best! […]
> since to be lower than
> A worm is to be higher than a king. (IV.iii.5-24)

The action focusses upon a charnel house, from among whose skulls Charlemont and his beloved Castabella choose for their pillows before lying down to sleep. Startled by the sight of another of its death's heads, and haunted by the memory of one of his own victims, the murderous atheist D'Amville longs to be turned to "nothing in the air" (IV.iii.252), only to be confronted by the emblematic spectacle of his daughter and her lover:

> Asleep? So soundly? And so sweetly
> Upon deaths' heads? And in a place so full
> Of fear and horror? Sure there is some other
> Happiness within the freedom of the
> Conscience than my knowledge e'er attained to. (IV.iii.283-87)

For D'Amville, however, these skulls offer only a reiteration of the knowledge that has been the foundation of his atheism from the beginning: the idea of death as a mortal "revolution" that renders "man and beast […] The same for birth, growth, state, decay and death" (I.i.6-7). This is the same "fine revolution" on which Hamlet

[11] Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist's Tragedy*, eds Brian Morris and Roma Gill, New Mermaids, London, Ernest Benn, 1976.

moralises in Shakespeare's play (V.i.89)[12] – a levelling transformation exemplified in the fearful anonymity of the bones turned up by the gravedigger's spade: "Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay, / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away" (V.i.206-7). Hamlet makes the sometime owners of these skulls parade in the audience's imagination like generic figures from the Dance of Death: Politician, Courtier, and Lawyer; but these conjectural identities serve only to emphasise their blank indistinguishability – at least, that is, until the grave-digging Clown gives the last of them a name: "This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester" (V.i.174-75). Given the horrible sameness of all skulls, there is an uneasy ambiguity about that "same"; yet, whatever the source of the Clown's confidence, for Hamlet his act of naming endows this skull with an intensely personal meaning: "Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft" (V.i.182-83); while, for the audience, the effect is to translate the spectacle from the public moralising of the Dance of Death, to the more private world of *vanitas* paintings.

It is a sign of how perfectly the Prince's contemplative moment seems to reproduce the Young-Man-with-a-Skull motif that Frans Hals's famous painting was so often misidentified as an illustration of Shakespeare's scene. Hamlet, however, though his "gorge rises" (V.i.181) at the sight of the skull, quickly brushes aside any suggestion that it forms the kind of *vanitas* in which he should recognise the mirror of his own mortality. As if, again remembering the *Danse macabre* tradition, where Death himself was often represented in a jester's cap-and-bells, he consigns Yorick to a different mission. Echoing his earlier sarcasms against Ophelia's "paintings" (III.i.144), he orders the bony prankster to "get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that" (V.i.186-189). The picture he thus conjures up is that of Death and the Maiden, another *Danse macabre* pairing that, in paintings, woodcuts, and engravings by Hans Baldung Grien, Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, Barthel Beham, and others, had achieved a life of its own – one that Shakespeare had remembered in his early tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*:

[12] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1982.

> Ah, dear Juliet,
> Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe
> That unsubstantial Death is amorous,
> And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
> Thee here in dark to be his paramour? (V.iii.101-5)[13]

Like Yorick's, the skull carried by the protagonist in the opening scene of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is ambiguously imagined. Although Vindice describes it as the "sallow picture of my poisoned love […] Once the bright face of my betrothed lady" (I.i.14-16)[14], it remains oddly anonymous. Indeed, by describing this "shell of Death" as "my study's ornament" (I.i.15), he seems at first to cast it simply as a conventional *vanitas* token, calculated, like the skull in St Jerome's study, only to remind him of his own mortal condition. Almost immediately, however, he (like Hamlet) deflects this suggestion, making the vanity of others the real object of its mocking grin: "Advance thee, oh thou terror to fat folks, / To have their costly three-piled flesh worn off / As bare as this" (I.i.45-47) – a theme to which he will return in Act III as he prepares "*the skull of his love dressed up in tires*" (III.v.42 sd) for its assignation with the Duke. It is only in this scene, at the moment when Vindice finally introduces his "bony lady" (III.v.120) to the old Duke, that the relic is given the name that seems to confer proper individuality upon it as "the skull / Of Gloriana, whom thou poisonedst last" (III.v.148-49). Even here, however, the rhetorical emphasis continues to be upon its generic significance as an emblem of vanity:

> It were fine methinks
> To have thee seen at revels, forgetful feasts
> And unclean brothels; sure 'twould fright the sinner
> And make him a good coward, put a reveller
> Out of his antic amble,
> And cloy an epicure with empty dishes. (III.v.89-94)

[13] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Brian Gibbons, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1980.

[14] Anon [Thomas Middleton], *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. Brian Gibbons, New Mermaids, London, A&C Black, 2008.

Thus, when the corrosive poison that Vindice paints upon its lips begins to eat at the Duke's flesh, it does more than simply exact a personal revenge against Gloriana's murderer: for, as "[t]hose that did eat are eaten" (III.v.161), the spectacle becomes an exemplary demonstration of the vanity of "fat folks" (I.i.45) and the hollowness of the court's "false forms" (III.v.96). In both *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Hamlet*, the protagonist's attempt to deflect the meaning of his *vanitas* itself proves vain, since the skull turns out to be exactly the mirror of a young man's unwitting vulnerability that it first appeared to be. The dying Hamlet's recognition that "this fell sergeant Death / Is strict in his arrest" (V.ii.320-1) locates the prince himself in a Dance of Death procession[15]; while Vindice, whose vicious joke at the beginning of Act V turns the Duke's corpse into a wicked reflection of himself ("I must stand ready here to make away myself yonder", V.i.4-5), becomes at the play's end his own deathly summoner: "Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes" (V.iii.113).

The treacherous irony registered in the grinning of the *vanitas* skull is by no means limited to reflexive moments of this kind, however: inevitably it turns back, sooner or later, on the audience themselves; for the more they focus upon the apparent victim's predicament, the more they are liable to forget what should be only too apparent – their own implication in the spectacle. Perhaps the most sophisticated example of the way in which such enfolded ironies can entrap the onlooker is Holbein's famous *vanitas* painting, *The Ambassadors.* The subjects of the portrait – the aristocratic landowner Jean de Dinteville and the senior cleric Georges de Selve, Bishop of Lavaur – seem proudly secure amid the trappings of worldly wealth, knowledge, and power that the artist has placed between them. Yet their apparently self-confident control of the pictorial space is destabilised by the outlandish white oblong that is stretched across the painting's lower quarter. What is especially striking about this device is the perspective trick that renders it not merely invisible to the sitters themselves, but enigmatically indecipherable even to viewers of the work – at least

[15] For examples of Death figured as the arresting sergeant of impending Judgement, see Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 59-62 and fig. 6a, p. 55.

until they learn how to look at it from the only angle that can properly resolve the object's distortion, revealing it as an anamorphic skull. More disturbing still is the fact that, once the death's head becomes fully visible, the nominal subjects of the painting are themselves rendered indecipherable, leaving its viewers alone with what now appears to be signature of their own mortal vanity.

Shakespeare, we know from *Richard II*, was fascinated by the ingenuities of perspective art and what it could suggest about the limits of visual perception. In *Richard II*, for example, Bushy is made to reflect on how easily human understanding can be confused: "powerful emotion", he tells Richard's queen,

> Divides one thing entire to many objects,
> Like perspectives, which, rightly gaz'd upon,
> Show nothing but confusion; ey'd awry,
> Distinguish form. So your sweet Majesty,
> Looking awry upon your lord's departure,
> Find shapes of grief more than himself to wail;
> Which, look'd on as it is, is nought but shadows
> Of what it is not. (II.ii.17-24)[16]

Needless to say, the stage cannot easily replicate such effects, but there are, I think, moments in Shakespeare's plays that act in a similar way, establishing a perspective which exposes everything that appears most substantial as an empty "shadow of what it is not" – a mere vanity.

This is perhaps most obvious in the way that sly reminders of mortal frailty are set against the conventional happy endings of comedy. In an early play like *Love's Labour's Lost* the effect is managed in a fairly straightforward way: on Marcade's sudden announcement of the death of the King of France, "the scene begins to cloud" (V.ii.714)[17], upsetting the comic progress towards wedding and rejoicing: "Our wooing", remarks the rueful

[16] William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Peter Ure, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1959. See also *Henry V*, V.ii.338-9; *Twelfth Night*, V.i.215; *Sonnet 24*; *All's Well that Ends Well*, V.iii.47-52.

[17] William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. Richard David, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1968.

Berowne, "doth not end like an old play; / Jack hath not Jill" (V.ii.866-67). He himself is condemned to spend a year visiting the mortally sick, doing penance for the vanity of his own wit in what he declares can only be a vain effort "To move wild laughter in the throat of death" (V.ii.847); and the play itself concludes with a song in which the cheerful notes of Spring give way to the cuckoo's mocking cry (V.ii.891, 900), while frozen Winter's "merry note" is sounded by that bird of ill-omen, the owl. The same bird makes its appearance at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – but there only after the Athenian mortals have left the stage. Addressing the happily reunited lovers, Theseus promises "nightly revels and new jollity" (V.i.361)[18]; but, for the audience, this celebratory *exeunt* is immediately countered by Puck's nocturnal *memento mori*:

> Now the wasted brands do glow
> Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,
> Puts the wretch that lies in woe
> In remembrance of a shroud.
> Now it is the time of night
> That the graves, all gaping wide,
> Every one lets forth his sprite
> In the church-way paths to glide. (V.i.365-72)

This is one of a number of instances in which playgoers are made to confront a kind of *vanitas* of which the characters in the play remain blissfully – or perhaps pitifully – unaware. More subtly perspectival is the plangent song with which the Clown farewells the audience from the emptied stage at the end of *Twelfth Night*. His lyrics set the beating of wind and rain against the buoyant summons of Orsino's "golden time" (V.i.381)[19], giving an uneasy double meaning to "our play is done" (V.i.406) – one that looks back to Jacques' melancholy elaboration of the trope that "All the world's a stage" (II.vii.140-67)[20], in which the "last scene of all" presents the "mere oblivion" that attends a creature fast becoming

[18] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Stanley Wells, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967.

[19] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds J. M. Lothian and T. W. Craik, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1975.

[20] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Juliet Dusinberre, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2006.

a death's head "*Sans* teeth, *sans* eyes, *sans* taste, *sans* everything" (II.vii.167).

An even darker version of the same effect is produced at the end of that strange Homeric travesty, *Troilus and Cressida* – a tragically plotted play whose prefatory epistle nevertheless compares it to "the best Commedy in *Terence* or *Plautus*". As the action unfolds, the work's tragic pretensions are systematically undermined by the cynical self-interest of the pimp Pandarus, who manages the protagonists' love-story, and by the foul-mouthed sarcasms of the fool Thersites, who acts as a kind of burlesque chorus to its epic contest. For Thersites, the whole matter of Troy amounts to a degraded "war for a placket" whose only reward will be the syphilitic "vengeance" of "the Neapolitan bone-ache" (II.iii.18-21)[21]. Even the lovelorn Troilus is reduced by the fool's invective whose combat with his rival Diomedes simply illustrates how "in a sort lechery eats itself" (V.iv.35). In the last scene, Troilus seeks to restore a properly heroic note to the action in the defiant couplet that concludes his lament for Hector: "Strike a free march to Troy! With comfort go: / Hope of revenge shall hide our inward woe" (V.x.30-31); but his gallant bluster is immediately made ridiculous by the entry of the wheedling Pandarus, whose obscene epilogue, with its talk of "aching bones" (V.x.51) and promise to "bequeath you my diseases" (V.x.57), finally turns Thersites' venereal threats against the audience themselves. All that remains in the face of such "monumental mockery" (III.iii.153) are "the husks / And formless ruin of oblivion" (IV.v.165-66) of which Agamemnon speaks, as Shakespeare's characters are made to look forward to the *vanitas* that the play itself enacts:

> When water drops have worn the stones of Troy,
> And blind oblivion swallow'd cities up,
> And mighty states characterless are grated
> To dusty nothing. (III.ii.184-87)

Troilus and Cressida is what Sir Philip Sidney would have denounced as an example of the "mongrel tragi-comedy" – that

[21] William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Kenneth Palmer, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1982.

bastard form in which his contemporaries perversely chose to mingle "kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion"[22]. Fools (as Thersites indeed seems to demonstrate) would seem to have no proper place in works claiming to be considered "right tragedies"[23]; even Yorick, after all, is reduced to a mere skull – a ventriloquist's dummy, in effect, for the protagonist's railing. It is true that clowns briefly find their way into *Macbeth* and *Anthony and Cleopatra* in the form of the Porter (II.iii.1-22)[24] and of the "rural fellow" (V.ii.233)[25] who brings the basket of asps to Cleopatra. But, although the former imagines himself as the "devil-porter" at Hell's gate, while the latter is an actual harbinger of death, neither is properly a *vanitas* figure. Rather, it is Macbeth himself who (briefly) comes close to playing that role: responding to the report of Lady Macbeth's death, he dismisses life, in language that echoes Thersites' "dusty nothing", as a meaningless succession of days that serve only to lead "fools / The way to dusty death […] a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (V.v.22-23, 26-28). That fearful evacuation of meaning, however, immediately sends us back to the play that Shakespeare wrote immediately before *Macbeth*. In *King Lear*, the king's "all-licensed fool" (I.iv.191) is given a role that, for all Sidney's strictures, proves absolutely integral to the play's treatment of "majestical matters".

The word "fool", it is worth noting, derives from the Latin *follis*, meaning "a bellows", and therefore, by extension, in Latin slang, "a windbag or empty-headed person" – hence the close imaginative link between folly and vanity that is suggested by Goneril's tartly pleonastic dismissal of Albany as "Vain fool" (IV.ii.62). A professional fool's protection lay in the pretence that his words were indeed empty – mere wind: "This is nothing, fool", snaps Kent

22 Sir Philip Sidney, "An Apology for Poetry", in *English Critical Essays (Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries)*, ed. Edmund D. Jones, London, Oxford University Press, 1959 (1st edition 1924), p. 48.

23 Sidney, p. 48.

24 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1951.

25 William Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, ed. Michael Neill, Oxford Shakespeare, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994.

at the doggerel which the Fool offers to teach his master (I.iv.126); but nothingness in a deeper sense is what the Fool's promise to set Lear "to school" (II.ii.257) is all about. In this he resembles the Clown of *Twelfth Night*; who, as we have seen, has his own lessons to teach about vanity. The "love-song" he performs to the two debauched knights in Act II, scene iii, ends with the reflection that "youth's a stuff [fabric] will not endure" (II.iii.53), and his later rejoinder to Sir Toby's boast of immortality – "Sir Toby, there you lie" (II.iii.107) – amounts to a punning *vanitas* motto, though it is one that his vain old pupil cannot even hear. In the following scene, his song for Orsino, though announced as "dall[ying] with the innocence of love", begins with the ominous "Come away, come away death" and concludes with the image of a funeral leading to an anonymous grave (II.iv.51-66), before the Clown exits with a jest about making "a good voyage of nothing" that surely refers to the fool's own practice of turning "nothing" to good account (II.iv.79).

There is however a significant difference between this Clown and Lear's Fool, for he is given both a proper name and a history. When Curio introduces him to Orsino as "Feste the jester, my lord, a fool that Lady / Olivia's father took much delight in" (II.iv.11-12), the effect is to endow him with a kind of individuality denied to his counterpart in the tragedy. Lear's Fool, despite his emotional intimacy with the king, is never given any name beyond the generic that defines his role in the court, and the usually affectionate "boy" with which his master addresses him. This is important, I think, for the way it allows him to become at times an almost abstracted embodiment of the *vanitas* motif. In a play which (as I have argued elsewhere)[26] is triangulated around three great negatives, "nothing", "no cause", and "never", it is the Fool who tutors his master on the true significance of "nothing". We hear the word first, of course, in the love test of the opening scene, where it triggers the exchange that initiates the play's catastrophic action:

[26] See Michael Neill, "'Wherefore to Dover': Seeing Nothing in *King Lear*", *Litteraria Pragensia*, 26:52 *Versions of* King Lear (2016), eds Martin Procházka, Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk, pp. 6-15. An expanded version of this essay has recently appeared as "From Nothing to Never: Facing Death in *King Lear*", in *Narrating Death: The Limit of Literature*, eds Daniel K. Jernigan, Walter Wadiak and W. Michelle Wang, New York.

LEAR
[…] what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.
CORDELIA
Nothing, my lord.
LEAR
Nothing?
CORDELIA
Nothing.
LEAR
How, nothing will come of nothing. Speak again. (I.i.85-90)

Although that last admonitory riposte borrows from the cosmology of the Greek philosopher Parmenides (*ex nihilo nihil fit*), Lear's "nothing" is simply the zero (or "naught") of the crude mathematical calculation that so confounds Cordelia – an emotional reckoning ultimately indistinguishable from the financial "Nothing" (I.i.246) with which he later responds to Burgundy's demand for his daughter's "portion" (I.i.244). The larger resonances of the word, however, will begin to emerge in Lear's first scene with the Fool (I.iv)[27].

It is Kent's dismissive "This is nothing" (I.iv.126) that gives the Fool his queue: "Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?" (I.iv.128-29) The re-doubled negatives (which alliteration can even seem to extend into the first syllable of that affectionate "nuncle") prompt Lear to a playful reiteration of Parmenides – "nothing can be made out of nothing" (I.iv.130); and what results is a kind of extended tutorial on nothingness – one whose satiric didacticism is repeatedly emphasised by the Fool's determination to "teach" the stubborn old man (I.iv.113, 136,170). The lesson reaches its conclusion with the entrance of Goneril:

Thou hast pared thy wit on both sides, and left nothing in the middle […]. Now thou art an 0 without a figure. I am better than thou art now.

[27] For James L. Calderwood, Shakespeare makes of "'nothing' […] a kind of verbal vortex that draws the ordered world of *King Lear* downward, reducing Lear to nakedness and madness" and diminishing language itself "to the point where words are shorn of meaning and become again mere savage cries […] [an] extreme of verbal nothingness" (James L. Calderwood, "Creative Uncreation in *King Lear*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37:1, 1986, pp 5-19: pp. 6-7).

I am a fool, thou art nothing. (I.iv.178-85)

The Fool's "0 without a figure" returns us to the mathematical "nothing" of the first scene, but now as a way of registering the effective cancellation of all that counts about a king, reducing him, as the Fool announces a few lines later, to an empty theatrical pretender like Macbeth's "walking shadow" (*Macbeth,* V.v.24): "Who is it that can tell me who I am?", the king demands of his entourage; "Lear's shadow", replies the Fool (I.iv.221-22). The moral appears at first sight to be simply political: for a king to "divest [himself] of rule" (I.i.49), or to "unking" himself, is, as Richard II discovered in Shakespeare's earlier tragedy, to "undo" his royal identity, to become a mere cipher: "for I must nothing be" (*Richard II*, IV.ii.203, 220, 201). For Richard, however, this sense of political annihilation would ultimately result in the philosophic resignation of his final scene:

Nor I, nor any man that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleas'd, till he be eas'd
With being nothing. (V.v.38-41)

No such consolation is available to Lear: for all his sarcastically professed desire to "learn" from the Fool, it is the imagined "marks of sovereignty" that confirm his sense of identity (I.iv.223). As a result, the unconsidered "nothings" of his opening confrontation with Cordelia will become the terribly insistent "nevers" of last address to his dead child (V.iii.307).

Behind the Fool's mockery, then, lies a truth about the mortal condition of humankind – one that the play's remorseless repetition of "nothing" and "naught" will gradually force upon the audience, even as it remains, until too late, occluded from Lear himself. Key to this perspectival revelation is the storm scene in Act III. It is no accident that the Fool should be made to respond to its "dreadful summoners" (III.ii.59) with a snatch from the melancholy song with which Feste ended *Twelfth Night*, *The Wind and the Rain*; but where Feste's lyrics hinted only obliquely at mortality, here the "winds" and "cataracts" have already seemed to threaten nothing less than the annihilation of created nature itself (III.ii.1-9); and, by the time we reach Lear's encounter with the blind Gloucester in the next act,

the king himself has become a "ruined piece of nature" whose mere presence seems to foreshadow how "this great world / Shall […] wear out to naught" (IV.vi.130-31)[28]. All, in the end, is vanity: the world, as the mad old man declares, is merely a "great stage of fools" (IV.vi.179) and he one of them – "The natural fool of fortune" (l.187). Nature, as both Edmund and Lear have suggested (I.ii.1; I.iv.267), is the presiding power in what the play has shown to be a fundamentally godless world; but "natural", as Lear's pleonasm reminds us, is also a word for Fool. Cordelia's natural goodness may make her, as the Gentleman declares, "one daughter / Who redeems nature from the general curse / Which twain have brought her to" (IV.vi.201-3); but, cruelly, it also helps to account for the way in which Lear in his distraction should seem to confuse her with the Fool ("And my poor fool is hanged", V.iii.304)[29] , precisely at the point where the prophetic truth of their repeated "nothings" is rendered unanswerable.

In the "general woe" (V.iii.318) that overwhelms his kingdom at the end of the tragedy, Lear himself becomes the dreadful summoner to whom Kent "must not say no" (V.iii.321). On one level, this is a reaffirmation of the faithful servant's loyalty to his master; but at this moment Kent also resembles those figures of mortal surrender who populated the great Dance of Death paintings in late medieval Europe. In the sequence of summonings that made up these works, it was the figure of the king who

[28] See Thomas Nashe's reflection in *Summers Last Will and Testament*: "This world is transitory; it was made of nothing, and it must to nothing", cited from R. B. McKerrow, ed., *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, London, A. H. Bullen, 1904-10, 5 vols, vol. III.

[29] The connection between the two characters has long intrigued critics. In light of the fact that, despite the emotional bond attributed to them by the Third Knight (I.iv.71-72), the two are never seen on stage together, it has sometimes been conjectured that the two were played by the same actor. If Lear's Fool, like Feste, was played by Robert Armin, that seems unlikely. But if, on the other hand, the Lord Chamberlain's Men had recruited a boy actor talented enough to play a clown's part, then the double casting seems entirely possible. Indeed, that would help to explain why Lear habitually addresses his Fool as "boy"; the only other character in Shakespeare to attract this appellation with comparable frequency is *Twelfth Night*'s Viola, who, in her guises as Cesario, is repeatedly called "boy" by Orsino. In that play, the endearment involves a metatheatrical joke about a boy actor playing a young woman who is herself pretending to be a young man; something similarly knowing may be involved in *King Lear*.

represented the vain pretensions of worldly "pride, power, and lineage" ("l'orgueuil, la force, le lignage"), but it was the Fool to whom Death – repeatedly represented in the *vanitas* tradition as the greatest jester of all – offered the levelling moral of the entire painting: "Tous mors sont d'un estat commun"[30]. So much for the vain pretensions of royal "estate". Gertrude's glib reflection on the "common" character of death is what triggers Hamlet's bitter dispute with his mother in the second scene of his tragedy: "Ay, madam, it is common" (*Hamlet*, I.ii.72-74). Gertrude confidently imagines humankind "passing through nature to eternity" (I.iii.73); but for all the appearances of Old Hamlet's ghost, the grim foolery of the boneyard renders the play itself more equivocal about human ends. Painting after painting in medieval churches had represented the Last Judgement, in which the dead rose from their graves to confront their everlasting fate, but the great Dance of Death murals that began to decorate churchyards suggest a different end. In the Basel Totentanz, for example, Death's procession leads to an ossuary, out of which tumble the skulls that speak only of vanity and "dusty nothing"; behind it stands a pulpit from which a Preacher delivers the lessons of *vanitas* to a solemn crowd[31]. In the last scene of *King Lear* Albany may talk of the "judgement of the heavens" (V.iii.230), while Kent briefly imagines himself caught up in some apocalyptic "promised end" (V.iii.261); but Lear's tolling negatives tell a different story.

[30] The quotation is from the verses attached to the image of the Fool in the *Danse macabre* at Les Innocents in Paris, as recorded in Guyot Marchant's engraving of 1485 (Neill, *Issues of Death*, p. 87).

[31] An early nineteenth-century copy of this once famous but now vanished work is reproduced in Neill, *Issues of Death*, p. 16.

On Vanitas
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Vanitas Iconography as a Dramatic Device in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*

Alessia Palmieri

I know thy works, that thou hast a name,
that thou livest, and [yet] art dead.
(Revelation 3.1)

The 'sister arts' in Shakespeare
"His images are indeed everywhere so lively"

Shakespeare's familiarity with classical antiquity[1] certainly included Plutarch. He might have known his *Moralia*: a complete English translation of this ample collection of essays and dialogues appeared no earlier than 1603[2], but a French edition by Jacques Amyot had

1 As demonstrated by Colin Burrow, 'classical antiquity' was not a common expression, at least up until the 1680s when 'the classics' started to be utilized with reference to classical authors. See Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 3.

2 Philemon Holland translated the first complete English edition of Plutarch's *Moralia*, which was published under the title of *The Moral Philosophy*. See Laura Aydelotte, "Holland, Philemon", in *The Encyclopedia of English Renaissance Literature*, eds Garret A. Sullivan and Alan Stewart, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons, 2012, 3 vols, vol. I, pp. 504-505.

been current since 1559[3]. Mentioning the relationship between Shakespeare and Plutarch right from the outset is essential, for it lays the ground upon which the argument of these pages is built, i.e. the complementarity of word and image[4] that is at play in the dramatic framework of Shakespearean tragedy. In this sense, Plutarch's quotation of Simonides of Ceos' well-known statement is instrumental for the advocacy of the association of painting with poetry:

> Simonides die, que la peinture soit vne poësie muette, & la poësie vne peinture parlante. Car les actions que les peintres monstrent comme presentes, & alors qu'elles se font, les lettres les racontent & composent comme aiants esté faictes, & si les vns les monstrent auec couleurs & figures, & les autres auec paroles & dictions, ils different en matiere & en maniere d'imitation, mais aux vns & aux autres y a vne mesme fin proposee. (*Moralia*, IV.xxv.346ff)[5]

By defining painting as 'silent poetry' and poetry as 'speaking painting', the emphasis is not merely placed on the discrepancies underlying these arts – namely, the fact that the former appeals to sight, whereas the latter to hearing – but rather on their embodying a unity of 'complementary opposites'. In other words, images channel meanings that words cannot and vice versa[6]. As far as theatre

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3 Peter France, *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 385. Furthermore, Burrow claims that Shakespeare might have known Plutarch's *Moralia* either from Amyot's French edition or by reading Montaigne's *Essais* (Burrow, p. 211).

4 For a detailed overview of the Renaissance treatment of the Arts, as well as the liaison between the verbal and the pictorial medium, see Rensselaer Wright Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*, New York, Norton, 1967, and Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics Part I", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 12:4 (1951), pp. 496-527.

5 Plutarch, "De l'excellence des Athéniens", in *Les Oeuvres morales et philosophiques de Plutarque; translatees de Grec en François*, ed. Jacques Amyot, Paris, Iean Macé, 1581, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département Réserve des livres rares, RES FOL-Z DON-100 (1), f. 524*v*. The choice to quote Plutarch's *De Gloria Atheniensium* in its French sixteenth-century translation depends on the consideration that this is the version of the text that Shakespeare might have known in his days, as explained in note 3.

6 To expand this idea of interdependency, it may be useful to consider Cesare Ripa's iconographic rendition of poetry and painting. Two entries in his *Iconologia* are respectively devoted to 'Poesia' (which is both visually and verbally exemplified) and

is concerned, Shakespeare must have been well aware of the importance of keeping the verbal 'within striking distance' of the visual. Hamlet himself brings to the audience's attention the fact that words sometimes lose their meaning, do not function anymore, and it is preferable to entrust oneself to the eye, which the Prince calls the "most miraculous organ" (II.ii.590)[7].

Moving from these premises, the following sections of this essay hinge on the close bond between the 'sister arts' in Shakespeare, for the scope is to underline how visual symbolism plays a primary role in the verbal component of a theatrical piece. In his study on Shakespearean imagery, Wolfgang Clemen goes as far as to claim that tragedy is the place where the playwright's "dramatic technique [is] at its best [and] the same applies to the imagery"[8]. I personally like to define Shakespeare's concern with the visual medium as his concealed 'effectual might' – as Milton would have it – since, in the development of the plots of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the recurrence of verbal images of decay is invested with a premonitory significance.

There are numerous perspectives through which a study on Shakespearean imagery can be conducted. For example, critics such as John Dixon Hunt and Margaret Farrand Thorp are more concerned with the Bard's interest in the visual arts in the physical sense of the term: the former draws an overview of the artistic panorama surrounding the Elizabethan age, while the latter surveys Shakespeare's adoption of objects belonging to the field of the 'visual arts' as props[9]. Conversely, what this article attempts to scrutinise is

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to 'Pittura' (merely described by means of words). Paradoxical though it may seem, all that Ripa does is to put into practice Simonides of Ceos' assertion. Therefore, in his collection of allegories, not only does the iconography of painting lack an image of its own, it is also verbally represented as a woman who denies herself that very same expressive medium through which her own description is made possible, i.e. words. On this matter, see Loretta Innocenti, "'Language thou art too narrow'. Reflections on Visual and Verbal Iconicity", *TEXTUS*, 12:1 (1999), p. 12.

7 All quotations from *Hamlet* are drawn from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2000 (1st edition 1982).

8 Wolfgang Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, London, Methuen, 1977, p. 89.

9 See John Dixon Hunt, "The Visual Arts of Shakespeare's Day", in *Shakespeare, Pattern of Excelling Nature: Shakespeare Criticism in Honor of America's Bicentennial*, eds David Bevington and Jay L. Halio, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1976, pp. 210-21, and Margaret Farrand Thorp, "Shakespeare and the Fine Arts", *PMLA*, 46:3 (1931), pp. 672-93.

the symbolic implications conveyed by the Bard's use of emblems that bear a *memento mori* message. In this respect, the word 'emblem' is here adopted with the meaning assigned by Mario Praz, i.e. a "representation of objects that designate a concept"[10]. Therefore, the employment of images in the two aforesaid plays is not to be considered as exclusively physical. It is, indeed, rather symbolic: scattered throughout the five acts, Shakespeare's small 'pictures of mortality' contribute to the whole meaning of the tragedy and to a structural cohesion that can only be appreciated retrospectively. Speaking about the use of death as a device in tragedy, John Bayley regards it as "the most cursory sort of dramatic convenience" and as "a way of ending a necessary dramatic discourse"[11]. Although no objections can be raised to this statement, when dealing with the two above-mentioned plays one feels that there is much more to it, since death does not merely occur in order to meet the requirements of the genre. *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are not tragedies where characters conventionally die by the end of Act V: in my view, in these tragedies characters are skilfully fashioned as already dead, right from the start of the play[12].

In his forging effigies of transience, Shakespeare develops his own iconography of death by implicitly presenting two distinct approaches to mortality. The first draws upon the medieval fondness for the macabre which, stemming from the perception of the "universal and obsessive presence"[13] of the dead among the living,

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10 Mario Praz, *Studi sul concettismo*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1946, p. 7. The term 'emblem' refers to a literary genre that found breeding ground during the seventeenth century, in which a visual image is connected to a verbal composition. As if to stress the interdependency of word and image in an emblem, the visual element and its verbal counterpart are referred to respectively as 'body' and 'soul'. Unless otherwise stated, the translation of excerpts from works written in non-English languages is mine.

11 John Bayley, *Shakespeare and Tragedy*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 49.

12 Such idea can be somehow linked to C. S. Lewis's consideration that in Shakespeare's previous plays characters "think of dying [but] no one thinks […] of *being dead*, [conversely] in *Hamlet* we are kept thinking about it all the time, whether in terms of the soul's destiny or of the body's". See C. S. Lewis, "Death in *Hamlet*", in *Shakespeare: The Tragedies: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alfred Harbage, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1964, p. 73.

13 Michel Vovelle, *La morte e l'Occidente. Dal 1300 ai giorni nostri*, trans. Giovanni Ferrara degli Uberti, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2000, p. 13. Vovelle calls the idea that the world of the living is enclosed by that of the dead a "horizontal perspective", for both coexist as parallel dimensions. A distinction between the medieval and the Renaissance

gave rise in the late fourteenth century to the motif of the *danse macabre* (as will be explained below). The second, a direct descendant of the former, is epitomized by the mid-seventeenth-century pictorial theme known as *vanitas*, which owes its name to the idea of the transience of earthly things as expressed by the Preacher in Ecclesiastes 1.2: "vanity of vanities saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity"[14]. With regard to *vanitas* still-lives, it is very unlikely that Shakespeare could have had contact with an artistic motif that originated in the Low Countries and spread only some years after his death[15]. Yet, germs of this tradition are detectable in Elizabethan England at about the same time when Shakespeare was composing *Hamlet*. A good instance of this can be seen in one of the Queen's portraits by Marc Gheeraerts the Elder, where a rather aged version of the sovereign is painted in the company of a skeleton flashing an hourglass[16].

treatment of death is also provided by Anna Anzi in her study on Shakespeare and the visual arts. In the Middle Ages, "the idea of our latter end is the source of fears and anxieties that can only be fought by means of faith and prayer"; during the Renaissance, conversely, "man's relationship with death starts to evolve […]. Thanks to Seneca, an attitude of defiance but also of serenity and maturity [towards death] is common among Elizabethan authors" (Anna Anzi, *Shakespeare e le arti figurative*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1998, p. 49).

14 The term 'vanity' has its etymology in the Latin word *vanitas*, *vanitatis*, whence the adjective *vanus*, namely 'empty', 'without substance'. See Luigi Castiglioni and Scevola Mariotti, eds, *Il vocabolario della lingua latina*, Torino, Loescher, 2007, p. 1480. The concept of impermanence is possibly even better expressed through the meaning of the original Hebrew term behind 'vanity', that is 'hebel' (הֶבֶל), which can be translated as 'smoke', 'vapour' or 'breath'. See Luisa Scalabroni, *"Vanitas". Fisionomia di un tema pittorico*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 1999, p. 17.

15 "It was during the latter half of the twenties that *vanitas*-paintings gained wider popularity. This might reasonably be connected also with the outcome of the Twelve Years' Truce in 1621, after which Holland was once again racked with the horrors of war" (Ingvar Bergström, *Dutch Still-life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, New York, Hacker Art Books, 1983, p. 158).

16 See Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 212.

Plate 1. Marc Gheeraerts the Elder, Elizabeth I with Time and Death. *C. 1600. Corsham Court, Wiltshire. Private collection*

The peculiarity of *vanitas* paintings lies in the deployment of a vast array of objects that, gathered around a skull, point to the hollowness of worldly goods in the face of death[17]. Ingvar Bergström has theorised a tripartite classification of these objects[18]: the second of the three categories – i.e. the one that encompasses symbols of the relentless passing of time – bears some resemblance to Shakespeare's symbolism of death in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. With a view to demonstrating the existence of a correlation between the narrative structure of these two plays and their being imbued with a *memento mori* iconography, each of the following sections will be devoted to

[17] Bernard Lamblin's definition of *vanitas* is that of a "painting of objects that are chosen and arranged so as to deliver to the beholder, by means of their symbolic meaning, a moral lesson: the vanity of an existence focused on worldly goods". See Bernard Lamblin, "Vanitas, la symbolique de l'objet", *Revue d'Esthétique*, 3-4 (1979), p. 198, quoted in Katerine Lanini, *Dire la vanité à l'âge classique. Paradoxes d'un discours*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2006, p. 68.

[18] See Bergström, p. 154.

the analysis of three elements belonging to the aforesaid category: candles, skulls and withering flowers.

Before investigating the specifics of how Shakespeare's iconographic universe blends with his dramatic art, it is useful to introduce the notion of 'preparation', a sort of "gradual working towards a catastrophe"[19] which, spanning the five acts, constitutes the backbone of the two tragedies under scrutiny in terms of narrative technique. John Dover Wilson defines, not without reason, this device as one of "progressive revelation"[20]. In this sense, Shakespeare's masterful and yet subtle interspersion of premonitory elements – "prophetic hints concealed in imagery", as Clemen has it[21] – throughout *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* allows for an empowerment on the part of the audience, since it involves the use of symbolic images that indirectly unfold details concerning further plot developments. In other words, if correctly interpreted, these signals are meant to 'prepare' the reader or the spectator for what will ensue. Although the audience theoretically "possesses knowledge which is superior to that shared by the main character"[22], foreshadowing hints can sometimes actually be grasped only when the occurrence they foreshadow is revealed, or even when 'having a glance' at the play in its entirety with the benefit of hindsight[23].

By virtue of this necessity to conceive of a play in terms of a unity rather than as a sequence of separate acts, Wilson Knight puts forward a sort of rule of thumb for an interpretation of Shakespearean tragedies:

19 Wolfgang Clemen, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art: Collected Essays*, London, Methuen, 1972, p. 1.

20 John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1951 (1st edition 1935), p. 231.

21 Clemen, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, p. 1.

22 Clemen, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, p. 5.

23 "Hints [that] can be only taken up by one familiar with the play as a whole are introduced, hints that do not in themselves arouse curiosity or anticipation but which will rather serve as an unconscious preparation". See Marco Mincoff, "The Structural Pattern of Shakespeare's Tragedies", *Shakespeare Survey*, 3 (1950), p. 60.

> To receive the whole Shakespearian vision within the intellectual consciousness demands a certain and very definite act of mind. One must be prepared to see the whole play in space as well as in time.[24]

Two renowned lines from Horace's *Epistle to the Pisos* (better known under the title of *Ars Poetica*) can function as a conclusion to this introductory section and might help to interpret a theatrical work in the guise of an 'impressionist' painting prompting the beholder to look at it from a certain distance in order to grasp its details[25]:

> A poesie is picture lyke, the which if thou stande nere,
> Delytes the much: sum picture more if further of thou were.
> (ll. 361-62)[26]

Sleep, candles and lead as deadly premonitions
"The sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures"

The analogy between Sleep and Death has constituted a *topos* in the literary as well as in the artistic Western tradition[27]. Their relationship is continuously underlined throughout the *Iliad*[28], where

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24 G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*, London-New York, Routledge, 2001 (1st edition 1930), p. 3.

25 The following quotation of Horace's *Ars Poetica* is derived from an English translation of this work by Thomas Drant, published in England as early as 1567. See Fred Schurink, "Drant, Thomas", in Sullivan and Stewart, vol. I, pp. 290-92. Other English specimens include a rendition of Horace's work issued by Ben Jonson in the early seventeenth century. See Burrow, p. 18.

26 "Ut pictura poesis: erit quae, si propius stes, / te capiat magis, et quaedam, si longius abstes" (Horace, "Of the Art of Poetrie", in *Horace: His Arte of Poetrie, Pistles, and Satyrs Englished, and to the Earle of Ormounte by Tho. Drant Addressed*, trans. Thomas Drant, London, Thomas Marshe, 1567, San Marino, Ca., The Huntington Library, STC 13797, f. 12*v*).

27 "Th[e] conception of death as a sleep occurs, although not as frequently as we are inclined to think, in pre-Christian Greek and Latin literature, appearing as early as Homer" (Marbury Bladen Ogle, "The Sleep of Death", *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 11, 1933, p. 81).

28 An analysis of Homer's epic poem has shown that the depiction of Sleep as Death's counterpart appears on a total of six occasions in the work, four of which deal with Death and Sleep as personified deities, the other two being rather oblique references, since sleep is no longer a divinity but a mere metaphor for 'death'. See Marcello Zanatta, "Immagini della morte in Omero", in *Homo Moriens. Ermeneutiche della morte*

they are depicted in the guise of two twin brothers[29], emissaries of peace and rest, thus projecting a perception of death as an almost comforting condition[30].

When it comes to identifying the source of Shakespeare's 'sleep of death' theme, critics agree that John Dolman's 1561 English translation of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* represents the most likely candidate[31]. Following the Epicurean train of thought according to which the end of one's life shall not be feared, for it is but absence of bodily sensation[32], the Roman orator draws a parallel between eternal rest and daily rest – experienced regularly – and reflects on how both states come as a relief from life itself:

> The nature of al things is such, as our byrth, is the originall cause and beginnynge of all those thynges whyche we have, so in likewyse oure deathe is the ende of the same: the payne of which, as it did nothinge pertayne unto us, afore our lyfe, so neyther shal it after our death. […]

da Omero a oggi, ed. Marcello Zanatta, Cosenza, Luigi Pellegrini Editore, 2006, especially pp. 86-106.

29 In classical imagery, Sleep and Death share a close family link, for both stemmed from the union of Night and Erebus, as recounted by Hesiod in his philosophical myth of creation: "Night bore loathsome Doom and black Fate and Death, / and she bore Sleep, and she gave birth to the tribe of Dreams", *Theogony*, ll. 211-12. See Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn Warren W. Most, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.-London, Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 21. See also Robert Graves, *I miti greci*, trans. Elisa Morpurgo, Milano, Longanesi, 1981 (1st edition 1955), p. 27, and Robin Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology: Based on H. J. Rose's "Handbook of Greek Mythology"*, London-New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 27.

30 In the *Iliad*, Sleep is described as νήδυμον and γλυκύς (both adjectives meaning 'sweet') in two episodes concerning respectively Sarpedon's death and Patroclus' funeral: "but when his soul and life have left him, then send thou Death and sweet Sleep to bear him away" (*Iliad*, XVI.453-55); "the son of Peleus withdrew apart from the burning pyre, and laid him down sore-wearied; and sweet sleep leapt upon him" (XIII.230-32). See Homer, *The Iliad*, ed. Augustus Taber Murray, The Loeb Classical Library, London-New York, Heinemann, 1924, 2 vols, vol. II, pp. 199, 511.

31 See Stuart Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare Sources*, London-New Brunswick, The Athlone Press, 2001, pp. 110-11. See also S. Viswanathan, "Sleep and Death: The Twins in Shakespeare", *Comparative Drama*, 13:1 (Spring 1979), p. 49.

32 "[Y]ou should accustom yourself to believing that death means nothing to us, since every good and every evil lies in sensation; but death is the privation of sensation […]. This, the most horrifying of evils, means nothing to us, then, because so long as we are existent death is not present and whenever it is present we are non-existent" (*Epistula ad Menœceum*, 125). See Epicurus, *The Art of Happiness*, eds George K. Strodach and Daniel Klein, New York, Penguin, 2012, pp. 156-57.

> Wherefore they which wil speake truly of the nature of death, do terme it a sleepe […]. So here you have slepe the ymage of our deathe, whyche you do dayly put uppon you: and do you doubte whether there be anye feelynge in death, since in the ymage and pycture of the same, there is none at al. (*Tusculanæ Disputationes*, I.91-92)[33]

Such a reassuring conception of sleep as a reprieve from pain, or even the transfiguration of a dead body into a thing of beauty, as with Cleopatra ("[S]he looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace", *Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii.344-46), is however not always applicable to the dramatic action of Shakespearean tragedy. If on the one hand Macbeth names sleep "innocent […] / [b]alm of hurt minds [and] / [c]hief nourisher in life's feast" (II.ii.34-39)[34], on the other hand, these words are pronounced at a moment when sleep acquires a rather sombre connotation. It is indeed by means of sleep that death sneaks into the play, since slumber becomes the 'place' where murder is perpetrated. Lady Macbeth plans to put an end to Duncan's life "[w]hen [he] is asleep" and to have his chamberlains slaughtered "[w]hen in swinish sleep / Their drenched nature lies as in a death" (I.vii.62-69). In the same way, upon disclosing perturbing truths as to the dynamics of his assassination, King Hamlet's ghost claims to have been poisoned while "sleeping in [his] orchard" (I.v.35).

In *Macbeth*, the "figurative link"[35] between sleep and death goes hand in hand with the depiction of the brevity of man's life by means of a candle, and both function as a structural device that abides by the above-mentioned technique of 'preparation'. The second act of the tragedy opens at night, with Banquo and his son Fleance holding converse just before Duncan's regicide. When the former gives voice to his inner turmoil, words that will prove to be staggeringly prophetic are spoken:

BANQUO

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33 Cicero, *Those Fyue Questions, Which Marke Tullye Cicero, Disputed in His Manor of Tusculanum*, ed. John Dolman, London, Thomas Marshe, 1561, San Marino, Ca., The Huntington Library, STC 5317, ff. G.iii*v*-G.iv*v*.

34 All quotations from *Macbeth* are drawn from William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir, London, Arden Shakespeare, 1991 (1st edition 1951).

35 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Albert R. Braunmuller, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 136, n. 68.

> There's husbandry in heaven,
> Their *candles are all out*. […]
> A heavy *summons lies like lead* upon me,
> And yet *I would not sleep*.
> (*Macbeth*, II.i.4-7, my emphases)

Images pertaining to the iconography of death are here unconsciously produced by Banquo and quite consciously – but, above all, adroitly – used by Shakespeare to pave the way for events occurring later on in the play, more specifically in Act III, scene iii. First of all, in order to verbally depict the lightless sky, his choice falls on a metonymy by which the stars are presented as "candles [that] are all out". Conventionally, the symbolism of the candle is metaphorically meant to exemplify human life which is as brief and evanescent as a candleflame[36]. Through Banquo's words, the iconographic overtone acquires a new layer of significance in terms of dramatic technique: what before was verbal speculation is then materially concretised some five hundred lines below, in the staging of Banquo's murder. Indeed, a stage direction informs us that "Banquo and Fleance [enter], with a torch" that the first murderer "strikes out" while the other two commit the crime (III.iii.14-18). The action is perfectly timed: the flame of Banquo's life is extinguished the moment the torchlight is put out. Thus, the iconic effect of the murderers' gestures is not merely verbal but also physical – or, better, visual – and it stands for "the realization of [a] metaphorical world in the action of the play"[37].

Pictorially speaking, the act of snuffing the flame of mortal life appears to be a 'prerogative' of rotting corpses, as is testified by both an engraving in Francis Quarles' 1638 *Hieroglyphikes of the Life of Man*

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36 The image of a candle as a symbol of the brevity of human life is both of biblical and classical derivation: "the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him" (Job 18.5-6); "Mortal beings did not leave with lamentations the sweet light of life in greater numbers then than now" (*De rerum natura*, V.988-90). See Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, ed. Martin Ferguson Smith, Indianapolis-Cambridge, Hackett Publishing, 2001 (1st edition 1969), p. 163. See also John Erskine Hankins, *Shakespeare's Derived Imagery*, Lawrence, Kansas, University of Kansas Press, 1953, pp. 41-52.

37 Alan S. Downer, "The Life of Our Design: The Function of Imagery in the Poetic Drama", in *Modern Shakespearean Criticism: Essays on Style, Dramaturgy, and the Major Plays*, ed. Alvin B. Kernan, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970, p. 41.

and a painting entitled *In Ictu Oculi* by the Sevillian artist Juan de Valdés Leal[38]. In addition to these two examples, it is worth mentioning a majestic specimen of a mid-seventeenth-century *vanitas* still-life attributed to the Flemish painter Carstian Luyckx. In the foreground, a chaotic heap of objects has ruinously fallen to the ground, while, still wrapped in its shroud, a full-length skeleton leans to blow out a candle with its bare phalanges. The gesture is extremely subtle: despite its camouflaging in the noisy ensemble of earthly goods and human remains, being located at the very heart of the canvas, the extinguished taper encompasses the entire *memento mori* warning that the picture conveys.

Plate 2. Carstian Luyckx, Memento Mori Still Life with Musical Instruments, Books, Sheet Music, Skeleton, Skull and Armour. *C. 1650. Oil on canvas, 73.5 × 92.5 cm. Private collection*

Candles are also to be found in close connection with the 'sleep of death' motif in the eighty-second plate of George Wither's 1635

[38] A candle figures as the protagonist in Quarles' short series of emblems. In one of the plates, Father Time is portrayed in the act of putting an arm around a skeleton's shoulder, which is about to extinguish a taper with a candle snuffer. As explained in the written dialogue accompanying the image, the two characters are quarrelling over Time's reluctance to indulge Death's swiftness in putting an end to human existence. See Francis Quarles, *Hieroglyphikes of the Life of Man*, London, printed by M. Flesher for Iohn Marriot, 1638, London, British Library, General Reference Collection 1077.c.5, p. 22.

Collection of Emblemes[39]. An epigram equating death with "*one* long Sleepe" and life with a "short Watch, *an hour before*" crowns the body of the said emblem, as a sort of translation of the Latin motto "VITA MORTALIVM VIGILIA" ('The life of mortals is a watch'). The *tondo* opens onto an indoor scene where a taper and an hourglass – typical symbols of the passing of time – are placed next to a *putto* holding a book open at a page where "DISCE MORI" ('Learn to die'[40]) is inscribed.

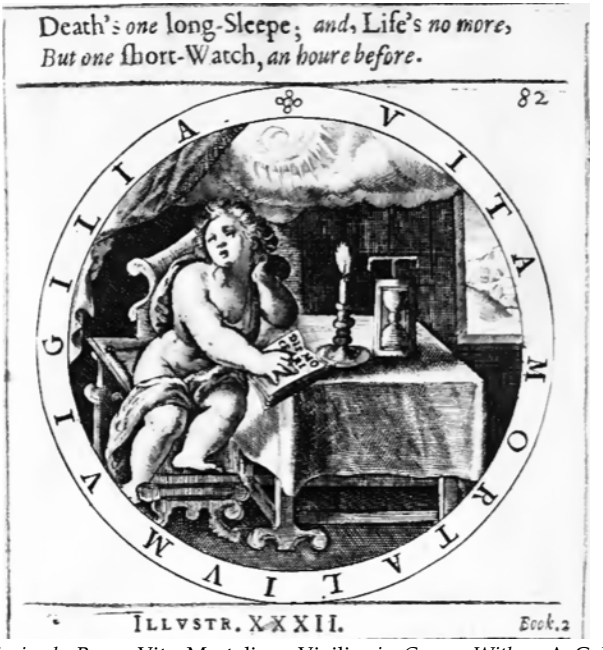

Plate 3. Crispin de Passe, Vita Mortalium Vigilia*, in George Wither*, A Collection of Emblemes*, London, 1635, Book II, Plate XXXIII*

Pursuing the analysis of the above-quoted passage from *Macbeth*, a second issue is Banquo's perception of sleep, which, in his own words, seems to be turned into an almost tangible and ominous

[39] See George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes*, ed. Michael Bath, Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1989, p. 94.

[40] The stoic teaching was early developed by Seneca, who states that "one must spend an entire lifetime in learning how to live, and […] an entire lifetime in learning how to die" (*De Brevitate Vitæ*, X.vii). See Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life", in *Dialogues and Essays*, eds John Davie and Tobias Reinhardt, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 146.

presence looming over him, whose oppressive physicality is felt as a "heavy summons [that] lies like lead" (II.i.6). In Shakespeare, the noun 'lead' and its derivative adjective 'leaden' are often attributed to 'sleep', in a way that would, once more, highlight its conceptual association with death. Lead, indeed, was the metal with which coffins were lined[41]. In *Julius Caesar*, a similarly dismal image is evoked by Brutus when he directly addresses Sleep[42] as follows:

> BRUTUS
> O murd'rous slumber,
> Layest thou thy *leaden mace* upon my boy,
> That plays thee music? Gentle knave, good night.
> (*Julius Caesar*, IV.iii.265-67, my emphasis)[43]

In order to portray Lucius on falling asleep, Brutus gives slumber the shape of a "murd'rous" entity equipped with a "leaden mace" that is about to fall on the boy. By providing a verbal depiction of Sleep in the likeness of a heinous slaughterer, Shakespeare manifestly weaves a visual bond between sleep and death, which is obliquely reiterated

41 Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007 (1st edition 1999), p. 110. See also Antony's last words to Cleopatra before dying: "Love, I am full of lead" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, III.xi.73). The same sort of juxtaposition of lead and death is hinted at in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. On four occasions in the novel, the sound of the passage of time (embodied by both the Big Ben and Clarissa's clock) is concretely visualized by the image of some "leaden circles dissolv[ing] in the air". The last of these four occurrences is specifically tied to the protagonist's meditation upon Septimus's suicide: "The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three […]. The leaden circles dissolved in the air". See Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. David Bradshaw, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 4, 41, 80, 158. As far as classical literature is concerned, the use of metal metaphors with reference to sleep is not uncommon either: "Agamemnon seized the spear in his hand and drew it toward him furiously like a lion, and pulled it from the hand of Iphidamas, and smote him on the neck with his sword and loosed his limbs. So there he fell, and slept a sleep of bronze" (*Iliad*, XI.238-42). See Homer, vol. I, p. 499.

42 In a chapter dealing entirely with a comparative analysis of *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, Wilson Knight notes that "[s]leep imagery is recurrent in the Brutus-theme and in *Macbeth* to an extent paralleled in no other of Shakespeare's tragedies" (Wilson Knight, p. 144).

43 All quotations from *Julius Caesar* are drawn from William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. John Dover Wilson, The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009 (1st edition 1949).

if we consider that, in a matter of a few lines, the stage directions will announce the appearance of Caesar's ghost (IV.iii.272). In the same way, Banquo does not merely lament an "innocent" sleepiness but a deadly torpor which, being described as a palpable presence hovering over his body, carries a truly menacing feeling with it, almost one of foreboding. Besides, the presentiment that Banquo's momentary drowsiness will soon evolve into a perennial sleep of death is also craftily suggested in the third scene of the same act. Upon discovering Duncan's corpse and in an attempt to raise the alarm, Macduff bids Banquo to "[s]hake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit / And look on death itself" (II.iii.76-77). Being addressed to Banquo, such an exhortation could not have sounded more prophetic.

Another Shakespearean opening endowed with an indisputable and yet cunningly concealed premonitory power is in *Hamlet*, I.iii. One of the numerous deaths in the play is implicitly announced at the very beginning of the tragedy:

> LAERTES
> My necessaries are embarked. *Farewell*.
> And, sister, as the winds give benefit,
> And convoy is assistant, *do not sleep*,
> But let me hear from you.
> (*Hamlet*, I.iii.1-4, my emphases)

Given the imminent departure for his French sojourn, Laertes' speech might well be interpreted exactly for what it is: a request from a caring brother to receive news of his sister. Were it not that, even a seemingly irrelevant scene offers the playwright a perfect opportunity to put his fatal technique of preparation into practice by turning an affectionate brother into yet another unaware 'prophet of death'. Placed in the middle of the first act, Laertes' "do not sleep" is an eerie and bitterly ironic warning, to be compared with Ophelia's

repeated 'goodnight'[44] in Act IV, shortly before she is found eternally asleep in the bed of a river[45].

Since *Hamlet* appears to be fairly pervaded by the sleep of death imagery[46], even the characters' 'goodnights' are possibly intended to sound outwardly harmless at the moment of utterance but tragically prophetical as the plot unfolds. For instance, Hamlet's speech to his mother, towards the ending of the closet scene, bears striking resemblance, in terms of repetition, to Ophelia's veiled *adieu* discussed above:

> HAMLET
> *Good night*. But go not to my uncle's bed.
> […] Once more *good night*,
> And when you are desirous to be blessed,
> I'll blessing beg of you. […]
> So, again, *good night*.
> I must be cruel only to be kind.
> (*Hamlet*, III.iv.161, 172-73, 179-80, my emphases)

From Laertes' prophetic reminder to his sister, to Hamlet's and Ophelia's 'goodnights', the overlapping of death and sleep represents a constant resurfacing act by act. Such a conceptual ambivalence peaks in "the sentence that the Prince addresses to his beloved Horatio before dying [which] may mean 'the rest is silence' but also 'the rest (i.e. death) is silence'"[47]. Thus, the long series of

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44 Ophelia addresses the following words to Gertrude, Horatio and Claudius, witnesses of her folly: "I hope all will be well. We must be patient. But I / cannot choose but weep to think they would lay / him i'th'cold ground. […] / Come, / my coach. Good night ladies, good night. Sweet / ladies, good night, good night" (IV.v.68-70, 71-73).

45 Laertes will be informed of the circumstances surrounding Ophelia's death by Gertrude: "Your sister's drowned, Laertes / […] down her weedy trophies and herself / Fell in the weeping brook […] / her garments, heavy with their drink, / Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death" (IV.vii.162, 172-73, 179-81).

46 "To die, to sleep; / To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there's the rub: / For in that sleep of death what dreams may come" (III.i.64-66). Besides death and sleep being equated with one another in Shakespeare's celebrated monologue, their identity is likewise expressed in one of Hamlet's meditations on human transience, which springs from the Prince's beholding Fortinbras' army marching by: "to my shame I see / The imminent death of twenty thousand men, / That for a fantasy and trick of fame / Go to their graves like beds" (IV.iv.58-61).

47 Milena Romero Allué, "'La Monna Lisa della letteratura'. Il Sonetto 20 di Shakespeare e Hamlet", in *Lingua, letteratura e umanità. Studi offerti dagli amici ad Antonio Daniele*, eds

premonitory hints comes full circle the moment Hamlet is saluted with the self-same words he had pronounced to his mother, namely 'good night'.

The analogy of sleep and death has been majestically captured on canvas by Spanish painter Antonio de Pereda y Salgado in his 1670 *El sueño del caballero* ('The Knight's Dream'), one of the best-known examples of baroque *desengaños*[48]. Playing on the double meaning attached to the term 'sueño'[49], Pereda's *vanitas* depicts a young nobleman presented with death while being fast asleep. An angel – which is painted in the act of visiting the knight in his dream – carries a scroll on which the following *memento mori* message is inscribed: "ÆTERNE PVNGIT CITO VOLAT ET OCCIDIT" ('Constantly it stings, speedily it passeth away and it kills'). Both the beholder and the protagonist of the picture are therefore provided with a moralising admonishment via traditional *vanitas* iconography – comprising material goods surrounded by two skulls[50] – which goes hand in hand with the concept of Time's swift passage as illustrated by the winged figure.

Vittorio Formentin, Silvia Contarini, Francesco Rognoni, Milena Romero Allué and Rodolfo Zucco, Padova, CLEUP, 2016, p. 235.

48 Spanish *vanitas* still-lives are usually called by this term, which means 'disillusion'. Indeed, this category of paintings is a visual translation of a typically baroque concept according to which the attachment to worldly goods is but an illusionary dream, hence the question whether sleep or wakefulness is closer to reality. See Enrica Zaira Merlo, "La morte e il disinganno. Itinerario iconografico e letterario nella Spagna cristiana", in *Humana fragilitas: i temi della morte in Europa tra Duecento e Settecento*, eds Pierroberto Scaramella and Alberto Tenenti, Clusone, Ferrari Editore, 2000, pp. 240-41. This notion is also embedded in both Shakespeare's last work and Pedro Calderón de la Barca's famous play *La vida es sueño*. Compare "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (*The Tempest*, IV.i.156-58) with "we live in a world so strange / That to live is only to dream. / He who lives, dreams his life/ Until he wakes. […] / The king dreams he is king, / And, under that delusion, / He orders, rules, disposes, / Until all the applause / That is only lent to him / Is scattered on the winds, / And death turns him to ashes. […] / Who would wish to be king, / Knowing that he must wake / From his dream in the sleep of death?" (*La vida es sueño*, II.xvii.2152-54, 2156-67). See Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life's a Dream: A Play in Three Acts*, eds Kathleen Raine and R. M. Nadal, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1968, p. 74.

49 This Spanish word translates both the English 'sleep' and 'dream'. See *Diccionario de la lengua espanõla*, Madrid, Real Academia Espanõla, 2014, pp. 2050-51.

50 For further information concerning the symbolism underlying the objects in Pereda's painting, see Alfonso Emilio Pérez Sánchez, *Pintura Española de Bodegones y Floreros de 1600 a Goya*, Madrid, Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección General de Bellas Artes y Archivos, 1983, pp. 110-11.

Plate 4. Antonio de Pereda y Salgado, El sueño del caballero. *C. 1670. Oil on canvas, 152 × 217 cm. Madrid (courtesy of Museo de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando)*

A tripartite medieval iconography of death: the Danse macabre, the Triumph of Death and the Legend of the Three Dead Kings

"Methinks their ghosts come gaping for revenge"

From an iconographic perspective, a skeleton haunting some church walls in southern Spain and the gravediggers at work in Elsinore's boneyard share the set of tools with which they are both visually and verbally depicted. Known by the title of 'pintor de los muertos' ('painter of the dead'), in 1670, Juan de Valdés y Leal produced a series of two *vanitas* named *Jeroglíficos de nuestras postrimerías* ('Hieroglyphs of our latter ends') that are nowadays hanging on the sidewalls, right at the entrance to the church of the Hermandad de la Santa Caridad in Seville[51]. In the first of these two paintings, entitled *In Ictu Oculi*[52], the character of Death appears in the form of a skeleton

51 Zaira Merlo, p. 244.

52 The Latin phrase – in English, 'in the blink of an eye' – is painted right above a candle that the skeleton is about to extinguish and it is a quotation from the New Testament: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, […]

dragging a shrouded coffin underarm, while menacingly pointing its scythe towards the beholder. When Hamlet and Horatio make their entrance onstage in Act V, scene i, similar tools are proudly evoked as symbols of his profession by an undertaker, in a song 'gladdening' the bloodcurdling atmosphere of Elsinore's cemetery:

> GRAVEDIGGER
> A *pickaxe* and a spade, a *spade*,
> For and a *shrouding-sheet*,
> O a pit of clay for to be made
> For such a guest is meet.
> (*Hamlet*, V.i.91-94, my emphases)

There have been numerous studies tracing the iconographical source of *Hamlet*'s graveyard scene to the medieval motif of the *danse macabre*[53], a fourteenth-century ancestor of *vanitas* paintings. To this end, it is crucial to highlight the Bard's choice to have his parade of death opened by the characters of two gravediggers[54]. It has been argued that the *danse macabre*[55] possibly stemmed from a concrete

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in the *twinkling of an eye*, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed. For this […] mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15.51-55, my emphasis).

53 In depicting his own dance of death, Shakespeare strictly adheres not only to the iconography of this medieval artistic theme by providing a list of stock characters, but also to the ideological implications of the genre, concerning the reversal of the social hierarchies and the universality of death. A thorough analysis of the graveyard scene in *Hamlet* has been conducted by Anna Anzi, who brilliantly highlights the visual component in the Bard's verbal *danse macabre* by defining it as a "vasto affresco cimiteriale" ('broad cemetery fresco'). See Anzi, pp. 53-55. See also Margaret Milne Beck, "The Dance of Death in Shakespeare", *Modern Language Notes*, 37:6 (1922), pp. 372-74; Harry Morris, "*Hamlet* as a *Memento Mori* Poem", *PMLA*, 85:5 (1970), pp. 1035-40, and Bridget Gellert, "The Iconography of Melancholy in the Graveyard Scene of *Hamlet*", *Studies in Philology*, 67:1 (1970), pp. 57-66.

54 In highlighting the role of imagery in the construction of the graveyard scene, Alan Downer claims that "in *Hamlet*, the gravediggers belong to the plot, as well as to imagery" (Downer, p. 40).

55 The dance of death (or *danse macabre*) became a widespread artistic and literary phenomenon in late medieval and Renaissance Europe. In its original form, this theme portrayed a procession of living people embodying the representatives of every social rank, each of whom was accompanied by a corpse in an advanced stage of decomposition or a skeleton. What this representation sought to convey was a message of equality in the face of death: every participant to the dance was arranged in a hierarchical order and no one among the living could escape the rule of Death. See

practice in real life. Indeed, the term 'macabre' started being employed in fourteenth-century France and its etymology springs from the Hebrew word 'meqaber', 'he who buries', in other words, a gravedigger[56]. It is not a coincidence that in France, at about the same time the expression 'danse macabre' was coined, Jewish confraternities of gravediggers used to perform annually, on the anniversary of Moses' birth, a procession through graveyards.

Before demonstrating how the dramatic structure of both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* is pervaded with a typically medieval feeling for the macabre, it is vital to mention how the *danse* flowed into England, with particular emphasis on the issue of the sources that might have been known by Shakespeare. Besides the first English specimen of the dance of death – which unfortunately was destroyed fifteen years prior to the Shakespeare's birth[57] – skulls and skeletons appeared in the English pictorial *milieu* during the Tudors' reign. When an outbreak of iconoclasm hit his hometown, the Basel-based engraver Hans Holbein the Younger resolved to set sail for England in 1532, where he was hired as court painter by Henry VIII[58]. Holbein's masterpiece is certainly the life-size anamorphic portrait of two French ambassadors[59] with a skull at their feet. However, since it has been determined that the painting was kept from the public eye at

Alicia Faxon, "Some Perspectives on the Transformation of the Dance of Death in Art", in *The Symbolism of Vanitas in the Arts, Literature, and Music: Comparative and Historical Studies*, ed. Liana Cheney, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992, p. 33.

56 Robert Eisler, "Danse Macabre", *Traditio*, 6 (1948), p. 200.

57 By 1425, the graveyard of the Church of the Holy Innocents in Paris had become the seat of what is held as the first known *danse macabre* representation. Not earlier than 1430, a second specimen appeared in the north cloister of St Paul's Cathedral in London, 'imported' by the Benedictine monk John Lydgate who, in 1426, had the chance to visit the Parisian dance. In 1549, the Duke of Somerset "destroyed the building to use the stone for his own grand house". See Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, Arden Critical Companions, London-New York, Bloomsbury, 2012 (1st edition 2010), p. 28. See also Elina Gertsman, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages. Image, Text, Performance*, Studies in Visual Cultures of the Middle Ages, Turnhout, Brepols, 2010, p. 3.

58 See Ulinka Rublack's critical commentary in Hans Holbein, *The Dance of Death*, ed. Ulinka Rublack, London, Penguin, 2016, p. 165.

59 It has been established that the two young men in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* are respectively Jean de Dinteville and George de Selve, both ambassadors at the English court during the year in which the painting was realized, i.e. 1533. See Mary Frederica Sophia Hervey, *Holbein's "Ambassadors": The Picture and the Men. An Historical Study*, London, George Bell and Sons, 1900, pp. 5-8.

least up to 1653[60], it is more likely for Shakespeare to have had direct contact with another among Holbein's works: *The Dance of Death*. Completed between 1523 and 1525, this series of forty-one woodcuts – in which animated skeletons pay a visit to every representative of the social hierarchy – might also have been observed on the walls of Whitehall before the fire of 1697. Evidence is provided in the opening of a seventeenth-century copy of Holbein's engravings by the amateur painter Nieuhoff Piccard:

> The costly palace of Whitehall […] contains […] a *Dance of Death*, painted by Holbein in its galleries, which, through an unfortunate conflagration, has been reduced to ashes; and even the little work which he has engraved with his own hand […] and which he himself had painted as large as life in fresco on the walls of Whitehall.[61]

Thus, it is not as far-fetched to spot a possible connection between one of Holbein's woodcuts and the banquet scene of *Macbeth*, and dwell once again on the 'preparation' of its tragic climax.

With a view to expanding Agostino Lombardo's statement that Act III, scene i is to be interpreted as an introductory phase to Banquo's death[62], I would additionally argue that the audience's being accustomed by degrees to death takes place even before the central act of the tragedy. The discovery of Duncan's lifeless body

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60 A seventeenth-century parchment manuscript reports that, after its creation, the portrait was placed by Jean de Dinteville in his private manor at Polisy, France: "in this picture is represented, life-size, Messire Jean de Dinteville chevalier Sieur de Polizy […] who was Ambassador in England for King Francis I in the years 1532 and 1533 […]. There is also represented in the said picture, Messire George de Selve […]; and they two having met in England an excellent Dutch painter, employed him to make this picture, which was carefully preserved at the said place, Polizy, up to the year 1653" (English translation from the French by Mary F. S. Hervey). This passage is quoted in Hervey, p. 12. Cf.: "[The picture] was undoubtedly placed by Dinteville in the castle of Polisy […] in a large hall, before a door and next to another exit, both of which corresponded to one of the two perspectives" (Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphoses ou Perspectives Curieuses*, Paris, Olivier Perrin, 1955, p. 65).

61 Quoted in Francis Douce, *The Dance of Death Exhibited in Elegant Engravings on Wood*, London, William Pickering, 1833, pp. 141-42.

62 "[W]hat will emerge from the scene is its preparatory quality to Banquo's murder". See Agostino Lombardo, *Lettura del* Macbeth, ed. Rosy Colombo, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2018 (1st edition 1969), p. 147.

prompts Macduff to utter words which appallingly fit the unfolding of the plot:

> MACDUFF
> Banquo and Donalbain! Malcolm, awake,
> Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,
> And look on death itself. Up, up, and see
> The great doom's image. Malcolm, Banquo,
> *As from your graves rise up and walk like sprites*
> To countenance this horror.
> (*Macbeth*, II.iii.75-80, my emphasis)

Macduff's inciting Banquo to rise from the sepulchre and walk like a ghost helps project – ahead of its actual staging – the ghastly sight of Macbeth's friend's future apparition in Act III, scene iv. Even more interestingly, in the scenes preceding the actual staging of the banquet, the characters' exchanges constantly reverberate with rumblings of the murder to come. When the newly elected king invites Banquo to a "solemn supper" (III.i.14), the farewell he addresses to his friend functions as a compelling example of a kind of irony that cannot immediately be processed, although it is rather frequent in the course of the play[63]:

> MACBETH
> Hie you to horse: adieu,
> Till you return at night.
> (*Macbeth*, III.i.34-35)

Regrettably for Macbeth, despite all the efforts to dispose of his comrade in arms, the wish that the latter could 'return at night' is soon to be granted, for the 'accident' with the three assassins will

[63] Arthur Quiller-Couch has provided quite an enlightening description of the use of irony in *Macbeth*: "usual tragic irony […] consists in making the protagonist utter words which […] convey to the audience (who know what he does not) a secondary, sinister, prophetic meaning. There is, to be sure, some of this traditional tragic irony in *Macbeth*: but its peculiar irony is retrospective rather than prophetic. It does not prepare the spectator for what is to come; but rather, when it comes, reminds him – as by an echo – that it has been coming all the while" (Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Notes On Shakespeare's Workmanship*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1917, p. 56).

technically constitute no hindrance for Banquo's taking part in the coronation feast.

As for Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death*, in one of the woodcuts, the character of the King agrees to be waited on by a skeleton which almost gives the impression to be playing the part of the servant. Despite such a debasement of his role, Death's rule over humanity is in no way undermined, since the bony fellow's hourglass – placed at the right end of the table – still preserves its function as a warning for the sovereign not to forget what human fate has in store for him, even at the climax of his power and wealth.

Plate 5. Hans Holbein the Younger, detail from The Dance of Death. *C. 1523-26. Woodcut, 6.5 × 4.9 cm. Washington, National Gallery of Art*

Translated for the first time into English by Barnabe Rich in 1584[64], Herodotus' *Histories* report a slightly horrifying ritual which was common practice in ancient Egyptian culture:

64 France, p. 383.

> The rych and wealthy men of the lande in greate assemblies haue an vsuall custome, that by some in the company there shoulde bee caryed aboute in a smale coffine the liuely & expresse image of a deade man […], which hauing shewne and reuealed to all that are presente, hee sayth thus: *Beholde here, and amiddest thy pleasure and delighte remember this, for such a one after thy death shalt thou bee thy selfe*. (*Historiae*, II.78)[65]

Although it is unclear whether Shakespeare was acquainted with the pages of the Greek historian, what is certain is that the *memento mori* essence displayed by the two above-illustrated examples of Death's barging in on a festive atmosphere is central in Shakespeare's banquet as well. Announced by the stage directions[66], Banquo's ghost makes its appearance onstage by occupying the King's place, as if to perform a silent declaration of royalty. Furthermore, a plausible link between the spectre and the iconography of the *danse macabre* is established through Macbeth's portrayal of his late friend's ghost:

> MACBETH
> Avaunt! And quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!
> Thy *bones are marrowless*, thy blood is cold;
> Thou hast *no speculation in those eyes*
> Which thou dost glare with.
> (*Macbeth*, III.iv.92-95, my emphases)[67]

Rather than a ghost, this visible shape resembles a veritable skeleton. Faced with such an appalling sight, the newly appointed king cannot

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65 Herodotus, *The Famous Hystory of Herodotus, Conteyning the Discourse of Dyuers Countreys, the Succession of Theyr Kyngs, Etc. Deuided into Nine Bookes, Entituled with the Names of the Nine Muses*, ed. and trans. Barnabe Rich, London, Thomas Marshe, 1584, London, British Library, General Reference Collection 294.e.11, ff. 90*r*-91*v*. This macabre custom is also recorded in Petronius' *Satyricon*: "As we drank and admired each luxury in detail, a slave brought in a silver skeleton […] and Trimalchio said appropriately: 'Alas for us poor mortals, all that poor man is nothing. So we shall all be, after the world below takes us away'" (*Petronius, Satyricon. Seneca, Apocolocyntosis*, eds Michael Heseltine and William Henry Denham Rouse, The Loeb Classical Library, London, Heinemann; New York, Putnam, 1925, p. 53).

66 "[The ghost of Banquo enters, and sits in Macbeth's place]" (III.iv.40).

67 Macbeth's depiction of Banquo's ghost sounds somehow close to the portrayal of a cranium provided by John Skelton: "No man may him hide / From Death hollow-eyed / With sinews wyderëd / With bonës shyderëd" (ll. 10-13). See John Skelton, "Upon a Dead Man's Head", in *English Renaissance Poetry. A Collection of Shorter Poems from Skelton to Jonson*, ed. John Edward Williams, New York, Norton, 1974, p. 4.

but acknowledge the gruesome and discomforting truth of an upside-down reality in which the dead appear more alive than the living.

The fluid boundary between the living and the dead constitutes a major concern for Horatio as well, who, prompted by King Hamlet's nocturnal apparitions, delivers a speech concerning a series of supernatural phenomena forecasting Julius Caesar's assassination:

> HORATIO
> In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
> A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
> The graves stood *tenantless* and the *sheeted dead*
> Did *squeak* and *gibber* in the Roman streets
> […]
> And even the like *precurse of feared events*,
> As harbingers preceding still the fates
> And prologue to the *omen* coming on,
> Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
> Unto our climatures and countrymen.
> (*Hamlet*, I.i.115-19, 124-28, my emphases)

Horatio's claims, too, function as a forecast of what King Hamlet's ghost will reveal to his son in Act I, scene v: his slaughter at the hands of a traitor. As in Macbeth's portrayal of Banquo's ghost, Horatio's approach to mortality is rather medieval in nature, since it is characterized by an almost obsessive fear of the return of the dead. His use of the verb 'squeak', suggesting the image of bones rattling all through the Eternal City, also makes it clear that, rather than immaterial spirits, those in Horatio's tale are tangible corpses. The dead pouring into the streets with the living is marked by a smothering physicality. Such an idea is even better expressed by Calpurnia's speech to Caesar, of which Horatio's macabre account is a self-quotation of Shakespeare's[68]. What Horatio illustrates through

[68] "Caesar, I never stood on ceremonies, / Yet now they fright me. There is one within, / Besides the things that we have heard and seen, / Recounts most horrid sights seen by the watch. / A lioness hath whelped in the streets; / And graves have yawn'd, and yielded up their dead; / […] / The noise of battle hurtled in the air, / Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan, / And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets" (II.ii.13-16, 22-24). David Daniell makes this connection explicit in the commentary to the Arden edition of *Julius Caesar*: "the list of unsettling phenomena […] overlaps with

the verbal medium transcends both the iconography and the moralising teaching of the *danse macabre*: it can more properly be identified with the *motif* of the *Triumph of Death*[69] painted by the Dutch artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder:

Plate 6. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Triumph of Death. *C. 1562-63. Oil on panel, 117 × 162 cm. Madrid (courtesy of Museo del Prado)*

Bruegel's panel features an authentic crusade of the dead: troops of skeletons breach the scenery from the right-hand side of the picture while humankind, caught off-guard, cannot but bow to the onslaught that approaches from the netherworld. Therefore, by portraying skeletons in arms, Bruegel's *Triumph of Death* gives expression to the aggressiveness of the dead towards the living and presents itself as the visual translation of both Horatio's and Calpurnia's macabre accounts. It has been argued that traces of symbolism coming from Greek mythology can be spotted in the skeleton's cart that occupies

Horatio's account of the disturbances" (William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, ed. David Daniell, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2016, 1st edition 1998, p. 219).

69 The iconography of the Triumph of Death originated from the Italian literary tradition and is to be found in Petrarch's *Trionfi*, written between 1352 and 1354. See Vovelle, p. 88, and Petrarch's *Triumphus Mortis* in Francesco Petrarca, *Rime e Trionfi*, ed. Ferdinando Neri, Classici Italiani, Torino, UTET, 1960 (1st edition 1953), pp. 556-58.

the left corner of the composition[70]. Painted right in front of Death's chariot, a woman in a red dress, holding a spindle and a pair of shears, is on the verge of cutting a thread as a horse ridden by a skeleton is about to crush her body. The woman's gesture evokes three mythological characters that in ancient Greek imagery had power over men's fate. Μοῖραι, indeed, were called those three goddesses that, depicted as spinners, would cut the thread which stood for the lifespan of a man, in order to spell the end of each individual.

When it comes to Shakespearean tragedy, an Elizabethan rendition of the three Μοῖραι is shown in the very opening of *Macbeth*'s initial act, as three witches enter the stage[71]. Besides classical mythology, a thorough perusal of the encounter between these three mysterious entities, on the one hand, and Banquo and Macbeth, on the other, reveals that the weïrd sisters might as well epitomize another Shakespearean expression of a macabre iconography akin to the *danse macabre*:

> BANQUO
> What are these,
> So *wither'd* and so wild in their attire
> That *look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth*
> And yet are on't? *Live you*? Or are you aught
> That man may question? You seem to understand me
> By each at once her *choppy finger* laying
> Upon her *skinny lips*.
> (*Macbeth*, I.iii.39-45, my emphases)

Echoes of Horatio's bravely questioning the Ghost can be heard as Banquo interrogates the witches[72]: by his description of their aspect,

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70 Keith P. F. Moxey, "The Fates and Pieter Bruegel's Triumph of Death", *Oud Holland*, 87:1 (1973), pp. 49-51.

71 The term 'weïrd', with which Banquo describes the three old sisters in *Macbeth* (II.i.20) is a derivation of the Old English 'wyrd', which precisely bears the meaning of 'fate'. See Kenneth Muir's critical commentary in his edition of *Macbeth*, p. 14.

72 The way Banquo's being left unimpressed by the strange creatures parallels Horatio's attitude towards Old Hamlet's ghost has been commented as follows: "Banquo, his conscience untroubled, speaks at once and boldly, seeing foul as foul. The witches […] are not enough powerful to tempt him" (Roy Walker, *The Time Is Free: A Study of* Macbeth, London, Andrew Dakers, 1949, p. 12).

one may wonder if these beings can actually be identified as women, or even as 'living' beings. Their "wither'd" skin, their "choppy finger", their "skinny lips", let alone the fact that Banquo himself questions their being alive, suggest that these enigmatic characters show physical features similar to those of corpses or skeletons. If that were the case, *Macbeth*'s Act I, scene iii can be held as Shakespeare's 'paying homage' to another version of the medieval macabre: the *Dit des trois vifs et des trois morts* ('The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead'). Widespread in both the pictorial and the literary *milieu* of the Middle Ages, this theme originated in France in the thirteenth century but was adopted in England only two centuries later, thanks to a poem by John Audelay[73]. As the story goes, during a hunting trip, three young men bump into three corpses in various states of decay, a horrid reminder of what the three living ones shall become. With reference to *The Legend* as portrayed in *Macbeth*, almost everything seems to find correspondence with Audelay's narrative: the three withered women, Banquo and Macbeth on their homeward route from the battlefield and even the admonitory – or, better, premonitory – message. Indeed, as the second witch salutes Macbeth, the latter is appointed with the title of a soon-to-be-dead man – that of Thane of Cawdor – with whom the future King will share both his fate and his faults[74]. Moreover, the rhetorical structure of the weïrd sisters' salutation to Macbeth shows clear analogies with the closing scene of the tragedy:

> 1 WITCH
> All *hail*, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis.
> 2 WITCH
> All *hail*, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor.
> 3 WITCH
> All *hail*, Macbeth! That shalt be King hereafter.
> (*Macbeth*, I.iii.48-50, my emphases)

[73] See Maria Ghiraldo, "1350-1500: temi macabri e danze della morte nell'Inghilterra tardomedievale", in Scaramella and Tenenti, eds, pp. 197-200.

[74] Macdonald, Thane of Cawdor and usurper to Duncan's throne, will perish under Macbeth's sword, who severs his head (I.ii.16-23). As noted by Agostino Lombardo, the traitor's cranium is a telling example of the Shakespearean technique of preparation: a similar image occurs in the closing act of the play, but this time it is reserved for Macbeth himself (V.ix.20-24). See Lombardo, p. 37.

The word 'hail', thrice addressed by the witches to Macbeth, is eerily echoed – following the same pattern based on a threefold repetition – during the final entrance of Macbeth onstage in the guise of a severed head:

> MACDUFF
> *Hail*, King! For so thou art. Behold, where stands
> Th'usurper's *cursed head*: the time is free.
> […]
> *Hail*, King of Scotland!
> ALL
> *Hail*, King of Scotland!
> (*Macbeth*, V.ix.20-21, 25, my emphases)

Albeit rather obliquely, the protagonist's downfall is forecast from the very outset of the tragedy. In the light of the unfolding of the plot, the words uttered by Shakespeare's Μοῖραι act as a *memento mori* which works its way through the final stage, where it resonates louder than a death knell.

Conclusions: the completion of a Vanitas *of Shakespeare's own "With fairest flowers / […] / I'll sweeten thy sad grave"*

Throughout the present study, two of the elements constituting traditional *vanitas* iconography have been analysed in the light of Shakespearean tragedy: the figurative link between sleep and death (with its derived symbolism) and the macabre recurrence of elements coming from the grave (ghosts, skulls and corpses). Nonetheless, in order for the painting to be completed, one last brush stroke requires to be delivered in terms of flower symbolism.

The image of a rose serves a dual purpose: on the one hand, it embodies the apex of beauty and youth; on the other hand, it stands for the transience of human life[75]. It is not uncommon for a rose to

[75] See the entries "simboli della morte", "bocciolo di rosa appassito" and "rosa" in *Dizionario sinottico di iconologia*, eds Norma Cecchini and Giuseppe Plessi, Bologna, Pàtron, 1976, pp. 135, 453, 467. Shakespeare employs the rose iconography in both its implications. It appears alternately as the epitome of beauty and youth in the *Sonnets* (see: "From fairest creatures we desire increase, / That thereby beauty's rose might never die", I.1-2) and as an emblem of death in *Othello*, when, meditating upon

appear in the array of objects accompanying a skull in *vanitas* still-life paintings[76]. Indeed, in Pierio Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica*, the rose is listed among the simulacra of the "IMBECILLITAS HVMANA" ('human feebleness'):

> Such a flower, which is so charming, so sweet-smelling, so appealing to the eye is a hieroglyph of human fragility and the symbol of everything which swiftly vanishes, for its life is so brief and its beauty so ephemeral that in the very same day in which it blooms, it also withers and fades away.[77]

More in general, Shakespeare's use of floral emblems in the tragedies follows that self-same rule by which his other effigies of mortality abide, namely the technique of preparation. In the opening scene of *Julius Caesar*, the occurrence of "flowers" and "blood" in two adjacent lines makes up an association between nature and mortality:

> MARULLUS
> And do you now put on your best attire?
> And do you now cull out a holiday?
> And do you now strew *flowers* in his way
> That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?
> (*Julius Caesar*, I.i.53-55, my emphasis)

carrying out Desdemona's homicide, the protagonist portrays his beloved in the guise of a rose: "when I have plucked the rose / I cannot give it vital growth again, / It needs must wither" (V.ii.13-15). This passage – along with many others – has been quoted by Caroline Spurgeon in a chapter devoted to Shakespeare's use of elements from the vegetable kingdom in order to metaphorically portray everything that concerns the human sphere (life, death, vices, female beauty and disease). See Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005 (1st edition 1935), pp. 86-92.

76 An example of this has already been provided by Carstian Luyckx' *Memento Mori*, where the skeleton tramples over some withered roses. See Plate 2.

77 "Quod flos is tam venustus, tam suaveolens, tam pulcher visu, tam suavi odore delectabilis, humanæ sit imbecillitatis hieroglyphicum, ac boni momentanei signum: tam brevis illa vita, tam caducus decor, ut quo die florens vigensq., enituerit, eodem ipso defloreat, & elanguescat" (Pierio Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica, sive, de sacris Ægyptiorum aliarumque gentium literis*, Basel, Michael Isengrin, 1556, Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana 86 D 90, p. 683).

Provided that the significance of floral iconography is known, when the act of strewing flowers is performed with reference to Caesar, the dictator's destiny can already be inferred before its actual fulfilment (III.i.77). As to the employment of flower images with the intent of conveying a *memento mori* message, in his edition of *Julius Caesar*, David Daniell does not fail to connect the Roman tragedy to *Hamlet*[78]. In this regard, besides defining Hamlet a "rose of the fair state" (III.i.154) – which, as such, is bound to wither – Ophelia's use of flowers is not only metaphorical but also prophetically material, as the flowers she distributes in IV.v.178-83[79] are once again evoked in Gertrude's account of the girl's death:

> GERTRUDE
> Fantastic garlands did she make,
> Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
> […]
> Down her weedy trophies and herself
> Fell in the weeping brook.
> (*Hamlet*, IV.vii.167-68, 173-74)

Sleep, candles, skulls, rotten corpses and flowers are all images through which the concept of man's transitory existence is manifestly conveyed. They all play a consistent role in Shakespearean imagery not only for their symbolic implication but more especially for their dramatic function in the tragic framework. One may hazard a pictorial reading of the two plays investigated so far. The communicative power of *vanitas* still-life paintings can be broken down to two components: a visual one, represented by the items constituting the iconographic texture, and an ideological one, rooted in the composition as a whole, conveying the vanity of earthly things. By means of his dramatic art, Shakespeare paints a 'verbal *vanitas*' of

78 See David Daniell's critical analysis in Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, p. 160.

79 "There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you, / and here's some for me; we may call it herb of grace a Sundays. / Oh you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a *daisy*. I / would give you some *violets*, but they *withered all when my father / died*. They say a made a good end" (my emphases). The symbolism attached to each individual plant or flower that Ophelia distributes is discussed at length in *Shakespeare's Plants and Gardens. A Dictionary*, eds Vivian Thomas and Nicki Faircloth, Arden Shakespeare Dictionaries, London, Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 100-1, 123-25, 229, 347-49.

his own. For, in addition to preserving their visual impact on the reader, emblems of death in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* also serve a certain premonitory purpose which is shared with *vanitas* paintings.

In conclusion, one last quality links Shakespearean tragedy to the *vanitas* genre. To the beholder an hourglass is simply an hourglass; however, if combined with a grinning cranium, the seemingly innocuous timepiece acquires new meanings. In the same way, as far as a study in dramatic imagery is concerned, it may be more helpful not to peruse each single act as embodying a small detail of a bigger picture. Reading *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* as "living organism[s] of which all parts are interrelated"[80] allows for the appreciation of the quintessence of Shakespeare's dramaturgy: the obsessive recurrence of effigies of decay that weaves a web of cross-references foreshadowing the protagonists' ineluctable fate and enacting the vanity of human wishes. At first glance, this peculiarity may escape attention; in retrospect, however, the intimations of death that resurface in the language channel the feeling that Shakespearean characters die a slow and gradual death, one that is repeatedly announced yet never fully acknowledged until it is made actual.

[80] Clemen, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, p. 9.

On Vanitas
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An Image of Vanitas: Geometrical Optics and Shakespearean Points of View

B. J. Sokol

An image concerning mirror-imaging

Vanitas as well as Superbia are clearly referenced in an intriguing illustration to *Der Ritter vom Turn* (Fig. 1), which was Marquard vom Stein's 1493 German translation of Chevalier Geoffroy de La Tour Landry's *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles* (c. 1372). This woodcut, quite possibly made by Albrecht Dürer, shows a young woman standing in front of a small mirror grooming her hair while, behind her, a naked horned demon deliberately crouches in order to display his anus and scrotum.

Fig. 1

At the moment captured in this illustration, the girl is clearly viewing her own reflected image with equanimity and pleasure, quite oblivious to the diabolical companion standing behind her[1]. Conversely, as seen from the point of view of the observer implied by the illustration (I will call this "our" point of view), the small mirror on the wall shows *only* the demon's posterior parts and does not show the girl at all. Thus, in the same mirror, at the same moment, what the girl sees reflected is satisfactory and appealing, and what we see reflected is diabolical and disgusting. Importantly, we as onlookers are able to see the demon as well as the girl and thus are placed so as to see not only that which the girl cannot see, but also *to see that she cannot see it*. Eventually, I will attempt to bring such a configuration in line with theatrical gestures that offer Shakespeare's audiences insights into the incomplete or distorted perceptions of dramatic characters.

To prepare for this, I will examine in detail some material aspects of the scene portrayed in the *Ritter vom Turn* woodcut, and

[1] Both text and the woodcut illustration provide no support for the view that "[t]he girl in the engraving from the *Ritter vom Turn* does not seem to be afraid of the horrible vision, almost as if she were familiar with this image of herself. Perhaps a witch, she holds the mirror aloft while waiting for the sabbath dance of spirits to begin again, a mobile and inconstant figure of an unstable world" (Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. Katharine H. Jewett, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 208). Rather, as will be argued, the girl simply does not (yet) see the demon.

in particular how geometrical optics make its peculiar arrangement credible. I will also mention that the optical principles supporting this plausibility, although understood since classical times, acquired a deeper significance in Shakespeare's period. The intellectual and cultural conditions that helped to enable that increment in scientific knowledge may have also influenced artistic practices – such a notion is of course not provable but is perhaps still worthy of consideration.

First, however, before considering the geometry of the mirroring depicted in our woodcut, we may note how its topic, female mirror-use, accumulated complex and multiple cultural valences. One polarity is emphasized in the source of the *Ritter vom Turn* text, a chapter of Landry's *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles* that is headed "Of a lady that dispended the fourthe parte of the day for to araye her capitulo" (quoted here from Caxton's 1484 translation). This chapter explains that "She was alweye acustomed for to be long to araye her And to make her fresshe and gay" which "annoyed and greued moche the parson of the Chirche and the parysshens" because she repeatedly asked them to "tarye for her". Therefore, "somme said softely. god sende to her an euyll syght. in her myrroure that causeth vs this day and so oftymes to muse & to abyde for her. & thene as it plesyd god for an ensample. as she loked in the Myrroure she sawe therin the fende whiche shewed to her his hynder parte so fowle and horryble that the lady wente oute of her wytte". Finally, "god sente to her helthe And after she was not so long in arayeng but thanked god that had so suffred her to be chastysed"[2].

However, later in the very same text, Landry represents mirroring as morally exemplary (which indeed was an extremely common figurative usage). Thus chapter 41 in Caxton's edition describes the "good wymmen" of the "byble" who "were the myrrour and exemplary to alle other of that tyme that now ben & to them that ben yet to come"[3].

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2 Transcribed from Chadwyck Healey EEBO document image 27 of *Here begynneth the booke which the knyght of the toure made and speketh of many fayre ensamples and thensygnementys and techyng of his doughters* [STC (2nd ed.) / 15296].

3 Transcribed from Chadwyck Healey EEBO document image 57 of *Here begynneth the booke which the knyght of the toure made and speketh of many fayre ensamples and thensygnementys and techyng of his doughter*.

Here we encounter a contrast between women *using* mirrors unworthily and women *serving* as mirrors worthily (even the Virgin Mary was so represented in some traditions)[4]. However, other traditions contrast two kinds of mirror *use*, as we can see in Thomas Salter's 1579 *A mirrhor mete for all mothers, matrones, and maidens*, where a kind of mental mirroring is associated with self-contemplation:

> In my iudgemente there is nothyng more meete, especially for yong Maidens then a *Mirrhor,* there in to see and beholde how to order their dooyng, I meane not a Christall *Mirrhor,* made by handie Arte, by whiche Maidens now adaies, dooe onely take delight daiely to tricke and trim their tresses, standyng tootyng twoo howers by the Clocke, lookyng now on this side, now on that, least any thyng should bee lacking needefull to further Pride, not sufferyng so muche as a hare to hang out of order, no I meane no suche *Mirrhor,* but the *Mirrhor* I meane is made of an other maner of matter, and is of muche more worthe then any Christall *Mirrhor;* for as the one teacheth how to attire the outwarde bodie, so the other guideth to garnishe the inwarde mynde, and maketh it meete for vertue, and therefore is intituled a *Mirrhor,* meete for Matrones and Maidens, for Matrones to knowe how to traine vp suche young Maidens as are committed to their charge and tuission, and for Maidens how to behaue them selues to attaine to the feate of good fame.[5]

Near the climax of *Purgatorio XXVII*, Dante, who "speaks of mirrors explicitly in thirty separate passages"[6], offers yet another valuation of females employing mirrors. Here the Biblical Leah appears to the narrator Dante in a dream vision saying that she "go[es] moving my fair hands around to make me a garland. / To please me at the glass [specchio] here I deck me". Leah adds next, "but Rachel my sister ne'er stirs from her mirror, and sitteth all day, / She is fain to behold her fair eyes, as I to deck me with my hands:

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4 See Mark Pendergrast, *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection*, New York, Basic Books, 2003, pp. 121-23.

5 Transcribed from Chadwyck Healey EEBO page images 6-7 of *A mirrhor mete for all mothers, matrones, and maidens, intituled the Mirrhor of Modestie no lesse profitable and pleasant, then necessarie to bee read and practiced* [STC (2nd ed.) / 21634]. This text is partially discussed in Carol Banks, "'The Purpose of Playing…': Further Reflections on the Mirror Metaphor in Shakespeare's Plays", *Signatures*, 2 (2000), pp. 1-12.

6 H. D. Austin, "Dante and Mirrors", *Italica*, 21:1 (1944), pp. 13-17: p. 13.

her, contemplation; me, action, doth satisfy" (ll. 97-108)[7]. I do not believe that there is any implicit condemnation here of Leah's active-life artistic use of a mirror to create beauty, even to adorn herself. The contemplative Rachel also pursues beauty (in "fair eyes", not a garland), and there may be a hierarchy implied favouring her mirror use for meditative retreat[8]. Yet Dante states explicitly in *Convivio* that "it is to be known that we can have in this life two happinesses by following two different roads, both good and excellent which lead to them; one is the Active life and the other is the Contemplative life"[9]. For further confirmation, we may consider the physical experiment proposed by Beatrice in *Paradiso II* (91-105)[10], in which three mirrors are arranged with the third further away from the viewer than the other two. The light source set up for this experiment will be reflected as smaller in the more distant mirror but will not be less bright in that refection – this purports to explain the true cause of variations of brightness on the surface of the moon but also may be read to suggest that the material world of action, located at a greater distance from the heavenly source of light, is no less bright than the nearer world of contemplation.

Dante's account of Leah's and Rachel's differing mirror usage, juxtaposing artistic and spiritual practices that are pursued in the material and immaterial realms respectively, does not denigrate either. In similar ways, many Renaissance artists, including Shakespeare, strove to convey complex impressions involving differing, or even contrary, visions of matters at hand. Let us next investigate how the depiction of mirror-imaging in the *Ritter vom Turn* woodcut brings that motif to life.

The geometry of the illustration

Mirrors produce what are known as 'virtual' optical images, which is to say images giving rise to the visual impression that an object

7 All references from *Purgatorio* are to Dante Alighieri, *The Purgatorio of Dante Alighieri*, London, J. M. Dent and Sons, 1941.

8 See the note in Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, pp. 345-46.

9 Alighieri, *Convivio*, IV.xvii.85ff, quoted in the note in Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, p. 345. The passage goes on to claim "supreme happiness" for the contemplative life.

10 Alighieri, *The Paradiso of Dante Alighieri*, London, J. M. Dent and Sons, 1941.

is located in a place other than where it is actually situated. Such displaced images may be produced by refractions due to non-uniformities of transparent media or by various sorts of reflection. Here we will consider only the least complex of such alternatives, situations where virtual images are formed by plane (flat) mirrors. We will also leave for consideration elsewhere the artistic and other impacts of circumstances in which mirrors are significantly imperfect in terms of flatness, reflectivity, or colouration[11].

Shakespeare's age spoke of "mirror images" and inherited a long tradition of catoptrics explaining their functioning but did not yet have the terminology of "virtual images". Thus we find in the second edition of the *OED*, under "image", subsection 2.a, a citation from Hall's 1548 *Chronicle of Richard III* (a text certainly familiar to Shakespeare): "As perfectely as I sawe my awne Image in a glasse" (*III* 34 v)[12]. The same edition of the *OED*, under "virtual a.", subsection 4.c., headed "*Optics*", dates its earliest citation for a "virtual […] image or focus" to 1704. The third edition of the *OED* quotes exactly the same passage from Hall's *Union* under its subsection "image n. 3.a." but cites a slightly earlier text illustrating "virtual a. 5" (a subsection headed "*Physics*"), noting the use of the term "virtual image" in William Molyneux's 1692 *Dioptrica nova*.

The earliest mentions of "virtual images" post-dated Shakespeare's age probably because the understanding of the distinction between a virtual image and the contrary sort of optical images that can be projected on a screen was not yet well formed[13]. However, in precisely Shakespeare's time, the understanding of the

11 Imperfect mirror-imaging will be considered in B. J. Sokol, "Mirrors, Pictures, Optics, Shakespeare", in *The Art of Picturing in Early Modern English Literature*, eds Camilla Caporicci and Armelle Sabatier, forthcoming. I will also reserve for discussion there considerations in detail of how stereoscopic vision locates the reflections of objects *behind* the plane of a flat mirror, and will simplify here by assuming that we are dealing with monocular vision.

12 This same subsection of *OED* explains in its headnote that a "*virtual image*" arises "when the rays from each point of the [seen] object [...] diverge as if from a point beyond the reflecting or refracting body".

13 See A. Mark Smith, "Reflections on the Hockney-Falco Thesis: Optical Theory and Artistic Practice in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries", *Early Science and Medicine*, 10:2 (2005), pp. 163-85, especially pp. 164-70, 174-76, which explains why, although the mechanisms of virtual mirror-imaging were very well understood from long before, the earlier Renaissance lacked an appreciation of the other sort of optical imaging that produces images that can be focussed and projected on a screen.

production of *virtual* images did take a great step forward. Such matters are worth examining in detail.

First, we should note that, because our topic will be geometrical "ray" optics, we will be free to overlook classical theories holding that visual perception arises when *eidola* or *simulacra* of seen objects proceed through the air[14]. Likewise, we need not consider distinctions between "extramission" and "intromission" (or mixed) theories of vision, that is to say, between theories proposing that eyes send out visualizing rays versus theories proposing that seen objects send light rays to eyes. Such much-discussed distinctions do not impact on ray geometry because the geometrical relations will be identical regardless of the direction in which the visual or light rays are thought to progress.

For convenience, we will assume the validity of the intromission model that was widely adopted by Shakespeare's time[15]. In fact, there was a great increment of understanding in Shakespeare's age regarding visual intromission, for, in 1604, Kepler established (following others' hints) that the boundary between the (geometrically traceable) light rays producing vision and the further physiological and psychological functions that enable visual perception lies precisely at the retina at the back of the eye. The realization that an interface between mechanism and organism lies exactly at a retina, which acts as a screen upon which material optical forces impinge, arguably constituted a great epistemological shift[16]. For then the light rays focused on the retina by the lens of the eye (upside down and reversed) will constitute the only and entire external stimulus to the visual system.

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[14] See Smith, *From Sight to Light: The Passage from Ancient to Modern Optics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015, pp. 30-31.

[15] This equivalence was long appreciated, for "[t]he identity of luminous and visual radiation seems to have been taken for granted throughout antiquity. It was specifically defended by Hero, Damianos, Theon, and apparently Ptolemy" (David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, note 16, p. 223).

[16] Lindberg maintains that Kepler's achievement extended already well-established themes of geometrical optics (see especially pp. 202-8), but Smith maintains, on the contrary, that it constituted a profound shift of understanding (see *From Sight to Light*). Lindberg does allow for that shift but perhaps understates it. Smith strongly emphasises it.

After considering the optical processing of physical inputs by the lens of the eye, Kepler's analysis leaves the remainder of human visual perception unexplained. However, Kepler does provide the crucial insight that whatever we see is produced by, and only by, light rays entering our eyes, so that, however much those rays are steered or deflected by external conditions, we will perceive them exactly *as if* they had proceeded directly (in straight lines) from *apparent* sources. This understanding served Kepler's initial aim, which was to analyse how atmospheric distortions of the paths of light rays impact on astronomical observations[17]. Pursuing this aim made Kepler into a profound optical scientist as well as a profound astronomical one.

The technical starting point for the geometrical optics of intromission is the principle that the visible surface of an illuminated object (or illuminating light source) is made up of innumerable bright points, each of which sends out light rays in straight lines in all directions. Such rectilinear rays may then be analysed using Euclidean geometry. The crucial principle that rays of light or vision follow straight-line paths in free space is enunciated in Euclid's *Optics*, is reiterated in the Euclidean *Catoptrics* (which deals with mirrors)[18] and is assumed by all geometrical optical writers.

We should appreciate that this straight-line principle was always understood in sophisticated ways. It could be taken to express how Platonic ideals are approximated when partaken of in an imperfect world, and, crucially for us, it was also used to provide an invaluable tool for making analysis and calculations possible. Such sophistication is made explicit in John Dee's *Mathematicall Praeface* to Billingsley's 1570 translation of Euclid's *Elements of Geometrie*: "there are other (very many) Methodicall Artes, which,

[17] Kepler's aim was to understand the bending of light rays by the atmosphere that makes astronomical objects appear to be wrongly located. That makes it incomprehensible to me why Melchior-Bonnet asserts that: "Descartes, like Kepler, still ignored the optical notion of the 'virtual image', a fictive extension of rays of light received by the eye differing from the real image" (p. 131). In fact, Kepler showed that virtual images are anything but "fictive" and indeed enter the perceptual process just exactly as if they had come from "real" sources.

[18] Smith discusses controversies over the authorship of "Euclid's" *Catoptrics*, which some attribute to "the fourth-century thinker Theon of Alexandria" (*From Sight to Light*, note 89, pp. 55-56).

declyning from the purity, simplicitie, and Immateriality, of our Principall Science of Magnitudes: do yet neuertheles vse the great ayde, direction, and Method of the sayd principall Science"[19].

Dee's "principall Science", Euclidean geometry, deals with pure immaterial points and lines that do not correspond exactly with that which can be actually seen and measured. For Euclidean lines may have orientations and locations, but no other dimensions except length, and Euclidean points have no dimensions at all, but only positions. However, certain objections heard that dimensionless points cannot emit light, or that an ensemble of discrete thin rays cannot delineate a continuous surface, are misconceived[20]. On the contrary, the visible surface of an illuminated or illuminating object can be quite exactly modelled as if it were made up of an infinite collection of infinitesimal points, each one emitting infinitely many infinitesimally thin rays. The *exact* logical justification for such long-used methods of analysis was at last fully expounded in the nineteenth century, but the methods were applied long before and found wholly adequate for use.

Indeed, the techniques of geometrical ray tracing have been pursued from Euclid's time to the present. Conceptualising and plotting the paths of infinitely narrow rays of light has not at all been replaced by more recent concerns with "pixels", which are tiny but not infinitely small areas of illumination; modern technologists do not shun Euclidean geometry (which is still of vital importance to them) but refer to discrete and countable light sources and receptors because current-day light sensing, light emitting, and light analysing devices and software are by nature constrained to dealing with finite numbers of positions or directions in space. Yet the aim of modern optical technologists is

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19 John Dee, *The Mathematicall Praeface to Elements of Geometrie of Euclid of Megara*, in *Euclid's Elements of Geometrie*, trans. Henry Billingsley, London, 1570, b.1. See also Smith, *From Sight to Light*, p. 169, which attributes to the ninth-century scholar Abu Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn 'Isḥāq aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ al-Kindī a realization that "the geometrical ray is an analytic convention".

20 When discussing Euclid's *Optics*, the generally excellent work by Smith seems to fall into such error (*From Sight to Light*, p. 53); or Smith may be paraphrasing (without noting it) the objections to Euclidean optics made by the ninth-century al-Kindī. Those objections are discussed in Lindberg, pp. 24-26, and Smith, *From Sight to Light*, pp. 166-67.

still to approximate (by means of discrete elements) the infinite continuum of an ideal Euclidean space.

Next, we come to the question of what happens when light rays encounter partial impediments such as mirrors or lenses that may alter their direction but will not stop their progress. Here, as stated above, we will concern ourselves only with reflections by plane mirrors. Again of great antiquity is the principle that a ray will bounce off a mirrored surface (one capable of "specular reflection") so that the angle between a line "normal" (that is perpendicular in all directions) to the mirrored surface and the original ray (the so-called "angle of incidence") is equal to the angle between the same normal and the reflected ray (the so-called "angle of reflection"). This principle was demonstrated upon one basis in proposition one of Euclid's *Catoptrics*[21] and upon another basis in propositions one and two of Hero of Alexandria's *Catoptrics*[22]. It was also the third principle of Ptolemy's *Optics*, where an ingenious experimental setup for its verification was proposed[23]. A different "systematic empirical verification" of this principle was also described in book four of Alhacen's *De aspectibus*, where the experiments proposed were arranged with "exquisite care"[24].

Showing that, long ago, the "two cultures" were not disjoint, a simile in Dante's *Purgatorio XV* provides an exact description of the equal-angle principle:

> As when a ray of light leaps from the water or from the mirror to the opposite direction, ascending at an angle similar to that which it descends, and departs as far as the line of the falling stone in an equal space, even as experiment and science shows. (ll. 16-22)

Here Dante envisions the reflecting surface of a body of water or of a mirror placed horizontally, so that "the line of the falling stone" will be normal to the plane of reflection, and he accurately describes the equality of the angles of incidence and reflection.

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21 See Smith, *From Sight to Light*, pp. 55-56.

22 See Smith, *From Sight to Light*, p. 66; the result is derived by Hero of Alexandria from the principle that light rays will travel "the shortest possible distance".

23 See Smith, *From Sight to Light*, pp. 93-97.

24 See Smith, *From Sight to Light*, pp. 195-200.

In addition, as Ptolemy showed explicitly[25], the incident and reflected rays and a normal meeting them on the surface of a mirror will all lie in one single plane. If we are considering a planar (flat) mirror, this plane containing the incident and reflected rays must be plane perpendicular to the plane that contains the mirror's surface (because it also contains a normal to the mirror's surface). In consequence, when viewing towards this plane containing the two rays and the normal, we will see the (flat) mirror's plane edgewise, and it will appear as a straight line segment. In Fig. 2, the line segment MM′ is the edge view of a mirror, and the line PN is the normal to the mirror's surface at the point P, where a light ray emanating from the illuminated object O is reflected toward a viewer at position V. The incoming light ray OP and the normal PN thus form the angle of incidence OPN, and the reflected light ray PV and the normal PN form the angle of reflection VPN. These two angles have been shown to be equal, as Dante put it, "even as experiment and science shows". Additionally, crucially, the reflected light ray PV will be projected onto the retina of an observer at V exactly as if it came from the direction of the line PV and its dotted extension:

figure 002

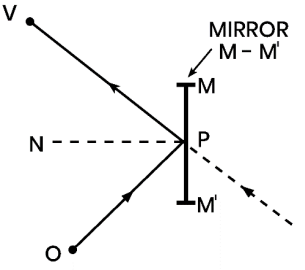

Fig. 2

Now let us add some additional dotted lines, the first being the extension in both directions of the mirror surface line MM′ to the long line AB – this line represents an edgewise view of an extension

[25] See Smith, *From Sight to Light*, p. 93.

of the plane surface of the mirror (we may for convenience call this extended plane the "mirror-wall plane", imagining it to be the edge view of an indefinitely large wall upon which the mirror is hung). Add also the line OR perpendicular to AB and continuing through it (in three dimensions, this perpendicular line will be normal to the mirror-wall plane because it is included in a plane that is perpendicular to the mirror-wall plane). Place the label Q on the point of intersection of OR with AB. Also extend the line VP to the right, carrying it beyond AB (that will correspond, in three dimensions, to an extension of the viewer's line of sight *beyond* the mirror-wall plane), and place the label I on the intersection of this line with line OR. It will be shown that OQ = QI. This is to say, the point I lies just as far behind AB (and thus behind the mirror-wall plane) as the illuminated point O stands in front of it (Fig. 3).

figure 003

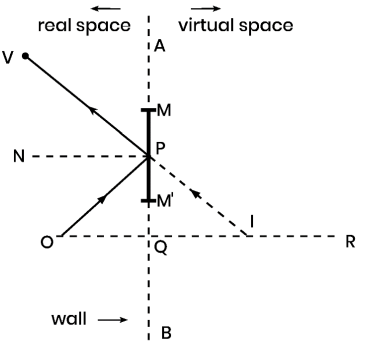

Fig. 3

The proof that OQ = QI is quite straightforward. Triangles OQP and IQP are congruent because they share the side PQ, while the angles PQO and PQI are equal (both being right angles) and the angles QPO and QPI are equal because of the rule that, in mirroring, the angle of incidence equals the angle of reflection (both angles are a right angle less the angle of incidence or reflection). The congruence then arises because the two triangles have two pairs of angles equal and the sides between these angles also equal. In consequence, the corresponding sides OQ and QI must be equal.

This means that point I lies exactly as far behind the mirror-wall plane (measured along the normal OR) as the bright point O is in front of the mirror-wall plane. Next, let us consider the significance of the fact that the point I occupies the same point in space *regardless of the vantage point of the viewer of reflections*.

Because (as long as the location of point O remains fixed) the location of point I behind the mirror-wall plane will be the same for any viewer-positioning point V, if a single observer sequentially moves to differing vantage points (or uses their two separate eyes at the same time), they will always view the mirror image of point O as if it lay *along a line* (not always the same line) that passes through the point I[26]. This behaviour of the various light rays that reach various observers, that all such rays point towards the fixed-in-space point I, is the exactly same as would obtain if an actual bright point were located at I. In Keplerian terms, and on the assumption that a plane mirror is perfect[27], the retinas of an observer or observers cannot distinguish between viewing a reflection of a point apparently at I and seeing an actual bright point located at I. Finally, because *each* reflected point will have these same properties regardless of the position from which it is viewed, "[entire] images in plane mirrors appear to be the same size as their objects and also appear to lie the same distance from the reflecting surface as their objects" (as Euclid and Claudius Ptolemy showed)[28].

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[26] Any viewer's line of sight toward the mirror image of a given point O will always join their vantage point V to the point I (which is fixed in position in relation to the mirror and O). This means that, if two different vantage points, say V and W, are considered, all the angles (of incidence, of reflection) in the diagram corresponding to our Fig. 3 may differ from one another, and yet the two (or any number of) lines of sight will intersect at point I. The intersection of the two reflected rays reaching a single person's two eyes must therefore also be point I, and that is the basis of that person's perception of the distance between their vantage point and point I on the image that they see.

[27] As Jonathan Miller explains in great detail, a perfect plane mirror will not betray its presence by revealing its surface, yet, in many artistic representations, as in life, either imperfections or circumstantial clues make mirrored surfaces apparent (see *On Reflection*, London, National Gallery Publications, 1998, pp. 57-133).

[28] Miller thus summarizes proposition nineteen of Euclid's *Catoptrics* (p. 61). Miller also summarizes an identical conclusion in Ptolemy's *Catoptrics* which is claimed to be demonstrated "with somewhat greater mathematical rigor" (p. 98).

To this we must append a significant caveat: all who gaze in a flat mirror – regardless of where they stand – will perceive the reflection of object point O in real space at the same position I in virtual (behind the mirror) space, *provided they can see the point I in the mirror at all*. And there is the catch: if a mirror is of finite size (as all real mirrors must be), it will present only a bounded window into virtual mirror space – this finitude is represented in our planar diagrams by the limited length of the line segment MM'. A consequence is that not all observers placed in all positions are be able to see all the image points visible to observers standing in other positions. To be exact, any observer standing outside of the shaded area in Fig. 4 below will not be able to see the image point I corresponding to the object point O when they look into the mirror MM'. Instead, when they look in the direction where they might see the virtual image point I, their eye will meet a blank section of wall where no reflection can be seen:

figure 004

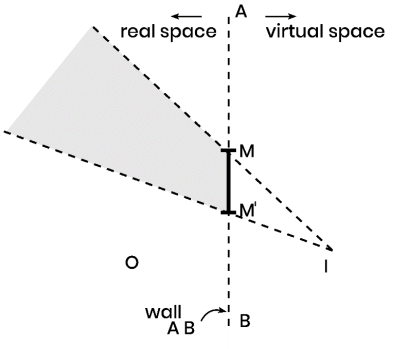

Fig. 4

But are we justified in applying to *all* mirror observers the above analysis showing the existence of unshaded areas filled with what automobile drivers call "mirror blind spots"? For, admittedly, the plane in our planar diagram contains some but not all possible observers. The answer is "yes", because, for any new observer, a new planar diagram can be drawn containing that observer's viewpoint and the normal OI. That new plane will therefore still

contain the object point O and the image point I, and these will remain in the same places in three dimensional (real or virtual) space as before. When looking toward our new plane, the flat mirror will still be seen edgewise (because this plane contains a normal to the mirror plane). So the mirror will still be represented in the new plane as a line segment, although one of perhaps a different length than the line segment MM′. Yet, if the mirror has a finite overall size, this must still be a line segment of finite length. Hence, by doing the same analysis in this new plane as before, we can show that the reflection of an object visible from one point of view can still be invisible from other points of view[29].

To summarize, we may enunciate the dual principles that: 1) *from any vantage point, any image of an illuminated point that is visible in a plane mirror will be seen exactly as if it lay at a distance behind the plane containing the mirror equal to the distance in front of the plane of the mirror of the point reflected;* and 2) *mirror-images that are visible from some places may be invisible from other vantage points*. These two principles allow us to illustrate exactly how an onlooker, a girl, a demon and a mirror may be arranged to produce the appearances shown in the *Ritter vom Turn* woodcut. In Fig. 5 below, G is a representative point on the girl (for simplicity, we will assume it is also the place from which the girl views the mirror), D is a representative point on the demon, V is the location of the observer, and MM′ represents the extent of a flat mirror hanging on the flat wall AB. Let G′ be the fixed position (in virtual behind-the-mirror space) of the mirror image of G and D′ be the fixed position (in the same virtual mirror space) of the mirror image of D. In our illustrative diagram, the line of sight GD′ meets the wall where

[29] A more dynamic way of stating this is to say that, if the viewing plane used for the analysis in our Fig. 4 is rotated around the normal line OI, then points on the series of planes thus formed will sweep out all of the space in front of the mirror wall AB (on its left in our diagrams). Therefore, at some point in its rotation, this swept-around plane will contain any place where an observer could be situated. Stop the rotation when the analysis plane contains any chosen observer's viewpoint and the diagram in Fig. 4 can be drawn anew to produce the same conclusion as ever – save that the line segment MM′ will not be exactly the same. But the segment will still be finite and will therefore still produce the same result. By the way, the segment MM′ will remain the same under all rotations of our swept analysis plane if and only if the frame of the mirror is circular and the normal OI passes through the centre of this circle.

there is no mirror so that the girl peering in her mirror will not see a reflection of the demon crouching behind her. However, the line of sight VD′ does pass through the mirror so that the reflection of the demon in the mirror *is* visible to the observer at V. The demon and girl are both directly visible to the observer at V along the lines of sight VD and VG. The line of sight VG′ strikes the wall where there is no mirror, so the observer cannot see a reflection of the girl in the mirror, but the line GG′ does pass through the mirror so that the girl can see her own reflection. In summary, our diagram shows it possible for the girl to see her own reflection in the mirror, but not the demon's, and for the observer to see the demon's reflection in the mirror, but not the girl's, while, at the same time, the observer can see both the girl and the demon directly.

figure 005

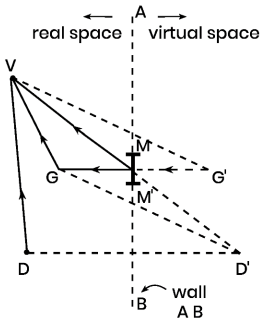

Fig. 5

Those who can easily envision three dimensional spatial relations may find the configurations diagrammed above obvious. However, the variability of mirror images according to a viewer's vantage point has elicited wonderment even in the extremely observant Leonardo da Vinci. For Leonardo presents as surprising the outcome of an experiment that he proposes involving two observers standing beside one another in front of the same flat mirror. After diagramming the equal-angle principle and showing how rays of vision can be traced interchangeably in either direction,

Leonardo concludes: "if you touch the eye of the other man in the mirror it will seem to him that you are touching your own [eye]"[30].

Many other Renaissance figures wondered at or found mystification in the effects of mirrors deliberately arranged to confound vision[31]. A. Mark Smith explains that the founding figures of geometrical optics seemed obsessed with how "mirrors could be manipulated in various ways to create startling illusions", and so reports that "[e]ven Euclid felt compelled to discuss such illusions in propositions thirteen to fifteen of the *Catoptrics*", while "the concluding eight" of the eighteen propositions in Hero of Alexandria's *Catoptrics* "are concerned how to arrange plane mirrors to produce startling visual effects". Smith cites the last of Hero's propositions as "a prime example" of his point. It "promises to show how 'to put a [flat] mirror in a given place so that everyone who approaches will see neither himself nor someone else, but only whatever picture someone has chosen in advance'"[32]. This and similar "fun-house" illusions, as Smith calls them, depend on magicians not revealing their arrangements of trick mirrors. However, in our woodcut above and also in certain Shakespearean scenes to be addressed presently, spectators are positioned so that they can actually perceive the processes whereby vision is distorted or deluded thanks to oblique outlooks. In such cases, the artist-

30 Leonardo da Vinci, *The Literary Works*, eds Jean Paul Richter and Irma A. Richter, London, Phaidon Press, 1970 (3rd edition), 2 vols, vol. I, p. 201. Because of stereopsis, this experiment will only be fully sucessfully if both persons regarding the mirror keep one eye shut and the first person touches the mirror-image of the other's open eye.

31 These included Giambattista della Porta, Giordano Bruno and, in England, John Dee, who, in his 1570 *Introduction* to Billingsley's *Euclid*, mentions the "part" of *Naturall Philosophie* "which dealeth with Glasses (which name, Glasse, is a generall name, in this Arte, for any thing, from which, a Beame reboundeth) is called Catoptrike: and hath so many vses, both merueilous, and proffitable: that, both, it would hold me to long, to note therin the principall conclusions, all ready knowne: And also (perchaunce) some thinges, might lacke due credite with you" (b.1). Here Dee does not allude to the "marueilous Glasse" or curved mirror that he has described just above, but rather to the scrying glasses used by several mediums, including Edward Kelley, that so fooled him. Pendergrast gives a sensational account of this (pp. 4-51), and R. Julian Roberts a more moderate one ("John Dee", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006).

32 On Euclid and Hero, see Smith, *From Sight to Light*, p. 64; Smith outlines Hero's last proposition in detail (*From Sight to Light*, pp. 64-65).

magician takes pains to reveal, rather than to conceal, the bases of false vision.

Why mirrors?

I believe that mirrors and mirror-imaging were obsessive topics for so long, and increasingly so in the late Renaissance[33], largely because they are capable of defamiliarizing the visual realm by drawing attention to the place of perceivers in perception. Thus, according to Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, a 1567 treatise finding the mirror "a master of illusion" demonstrates

> how relationships between objects could be made deceptive by the diversity of points of view and positions that mirrors made possible. Without a fixed, unique, and objective reference point, that embraces the totality of perspectives, the spectator could never verify the preciseness or accuracy of his point of view.[34]

However, a different often-heard claim is that mirrors became increasingly fascinating during the later European Renaissance because people increasingly viewed their own reflections, thereby "discovering" that they had selves. I have some doubts about this oddly Eurocentric position, for mirror uses of various sorts have been noted in nearly all cultures and throughout all eras of recorded history[35]. Moreover, mirrors can be used to reflect objects quite apart from a mirror-gazer's self and are indeed represented doing just that in many fascinating Renaissance works of visual art[36]. Deborah Shuger even asserts that "before the late seventeenth century, [mirror-viewing's] objectification of the viewing subject, allowing one to watch oneself, elicits virtually no interest", and that rather "[i]n the Renaissance, the self's internal mirror angles outward". She concludes that "early modern selfhood was not

33 See Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*, trans. Gordon Collier, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

34 Melchior-Bonnet thus describes the *Cosmolabe ou Instrument universel* of "French engineer Jacques Besson (1540-1576)" whose work followed "numerous treatises on optics published earlier in the sixteenth century" (p. 129).

35 See Pendergrast.

36 For examples, including famous works of Van Eyck and Velázquez, see Miller.

experienced reflexively, but, as it were, relationally"[37]. These remarks attach to controversies that are not our central concern here, yet it might be noted that, in the *Ritter vom Turn* woodcut, a mirror provides the girl with a view only of herself, while it also provides an onlooker with a view of a signifying demon (the former view may not be, but the latter *is* in line with what Shuger suggests).

To return to our main point, mirror-imaging in the *Ritter vom Turn* woodcut conveys a deliberately confusing or defamiliarizing vision because it explicitly demonstrates that what is seen may alter radically with the perspectives of viewers. To unroll this further, we may add that, because the onlooker's position precludes seeing the girl in the mirror, the girl equally cannot see the onlooker in the mirror (since ray-tracing produces equal results regardless of the direction in which the rays go). Because she has her back turned to him and seems entranced with her own image, she likely does not even know that the onlooker is there. Also because of reversible rays, we know that the demon cannot see the girl in her mirror, although he can see her directly. The onlooker (we) can see the demon in the mirror and also directly. The girl cannot yet see the demon at all.

It is because of such asymmetries that the *Ritter vom Turn* illustration of gazing in a mirror is much more complex than would be a depiction of gazing out of a window of identical size and shape as the mirror. It is true that for both window-gazers or mirror-gazers the same rules apply that sightlines cannot turn around corners unaided or pass through obstructions (be those the edges of a mirror or a window frame), and also that in virtual mirror spaces as well as in out-of-window spaces the rules of perspective apply. However, because both direct and reflected sightings of the same objects are made simultaneously in our *Ritter vom Turn* woodcut[38], something extra arises. This "something" is the

[37] Debora Shuger, "The 'I' of the Beholder: Renaissance Mirrors and the Reflexive Mind", in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, eds Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, pp. 21-41: p. 37.

[38] Neither the viewer of objects nor the objects viewed in a mirror (or equally through a window) need be directly in front of that window or mirror. Thus the shaded area in our Fig. 4 is a planar section of the interior of a truncated pyramidal three-dimensional segment of space with its apex at the object (or image) viewed and its outline determined by the limiting shape and size of the mirror. A looker-into a flat

possibility of a verification of the actual presence of objects that are at the same time invisible in a mirror. Thus, for example, the onlooker can verify by direct vision the presence of the girl although he cannot see her in her mirror. Even perceptions of affect may provide verifications of how mirror gazing may distort or fail to reveal the "whole truth" of a visible realm; thus the onlooker (we) may conclude from the girl's unperturbed expression that she does not see the demon in her mirror, although we cannot know this directly since we do not stand where she does.

The *Ritter vom Turn* woodcut presents only relatively simple perspectival enigmas, and there are more complex ways as well in which analyses of mirror-imaging may throw light on the processes of depiction and perception of images[39]. Nonetheless, considering how this illustration allows its spectators to identify defects or distortions of seeing may be instructive when we meet analogous misapprehensions in Shakespearean drama.

Crooked vision in two Shakespeare scenes

Finally, we will consider two particular Shakespearean scenes in which differing perspectives are seen to alter perceptions radically when, as Hamlet counselled the visiting players, a dramatic "mirror" is held "as 'twere […] up to nature".

Our contention in general will be that, by means of cunning dramatic and scenic construction, Shakespeare often gives audiences access both to what there is to be seen, and also to how this may be invisible (or seen quite variously) from differing dramatized standpoints. Sometimes such constructions possess actual optical aspects, and sometimes the multiple perspectives at issue are metaphorically optical. But here, when saying

mirror and a looker-out of a window of the same size and shape as the mirror will see the object or image only if they are positioned inside that pyramid. But one difference is that a mirror gazer may also see the same object both in a reflection and directly. Another difference is that front and back are reversed in mirror-imaging so that moving a reflected object north, say, toward an east-west oriented plane "wall" containing a mirror, will make its reflected image in the mirror move south; or, for a mirror mounted on the ceiling, moving an object upward toward it will cause the image to move downward.

39 I will be pursuing some of those other ways in Sokol, forthcoming.

"metaphorically optical", I do not mean rhetorically or poetically metaphorically but rather cognitively so. Deploying such a usage, a colleague who was blind from youth typically responded to gaining a new insight with the remark: "I see".

In fact, the two specific examples to be examined here do involve actual optical enigmas. One is located in a scene from the early play *Titus Andronicus* and the other in a scene from the mid-period *Troilus and Cressida*[40].

In *Titus*, the lustful empress Tamora first tries to tempt her reluctant lover Aaron into a sexual encounter in a forest glade, describing it thus:

> My lovely Aaron, wherefore look'st thou sad
> When everything doth make a gleeful boast?
> The birds chant melody on every bush,
> The snakes lies rolled in the cheerful sun,
> The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind
> And make a chequered shadow on the ground.
> Under their sweet shade, Aaron, let us sit,
> And whilst the babbling echo mocks the hounds,
> Replying shrilly to the well-tuned horns,
> As if a double hunt were heard at once,
> Let us sit down and mark their yellowing noise,
> And after conflict such as was supposed
> The wand'ring prince and Dido once enjoyed
> When with a happy storm they were surprised,
> And curtained with a counsel-keeping cave,
> We may, each wreathed in the other's arms,
> Our pastimes done, possess a golden slumber
> Whiles hounds and horns and sweet melodious birds
> Be unto us as is a nurse's song

[40] The examples of such configurations chosen here are not unique; several scholars have provided similar commentaries on other Shakespearean contexts. Thus Keir Elam discusses mirroring in *Twelfth Night*, and analyses "I am ready to distrust mine eyes" (IV.iii.13) and also the play's culminating "optical illusion" (William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. Keir Elam, London, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, 2008, p. 29). See also Allan Shickman, "The 'Perspective Glass' in Shakespeare's *Richard II*", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 18:2 (Spring 1978), pp. 217-28, which treats *Richard II*, and Stephen X. Mead, "Shakespeare's Play with Perspective: Sonnet 24, *Hamlet*, *Lear*", *Studies in Philology*, 109:3 (Spring 2012), pp. 225-57, which treats *Sonnet 24*, *Hamlet* and *Lear*.

Of lullaby to bring her babe asleep. (II.iii.10-29)[41]

But Aaron denies her request. His preferred alternative is to pursue vengeful schemes to murder the emperor's brother Bassianus, to lay the blame for this on Titus's two sons, and to arrange for the rape and murder of Titus' daughter Lavinia. Thus, just before exiting, Aaron reveals his plan to incriminate the boys by means of a forged letter (II.iii.30-50). It appears, however, that Bassianus and his wife Lavina have spied Aaron and Tamora consorting together in the forest, and so, when they enter just after Aaron's departure, they reproach Tamora for having intended to commit adultery ("your sport", II.iii.80). Lavinia's chiding of Tamora offers an alternate description of that locale: "This valley fits the purpose passing well" (II.iii.84). Next, when Tamora's two bestial sons enter, she claims that Bassianus and Lavinia have lured her to the present "vale" (II.iii.93), which she re-describes as dire and terrifying:

These two have 'ticed me hither to this place.
A barren detested vale you see it is;
The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
Overcome with moss and baleful mistletoe.
Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds
Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven,
And when they showed me this abhorred pit
They told me here at dead time of the night
A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes,
Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins
Would make such fearful and confused cries
As any mortal body hearing it
Should straight fall mad or else die suddenly.
No sooner had they told this hellish tale
But straight they told me they would bind me here
Unto the body of a dismal yew
And leave me to this miserable death. (II.iii.92-108)

41 All quotations from *Titus Andronicus* refer to the edition by Jonathan Bate, in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Woks*, eds Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan, London, Thomson Learning, 2001.

Tamora concludes by urging her not-unwilling sons to "Revenge it as you love your mother's life, / Or be ye not henceforward called my children" (II.iii.114-15). The sons reply by killing Bassianus and throwing him into the pit, and threatening to rape Lavinia. Lavinia begs to be simply murdered and not defiled and "tumbl[ed]" into "some loathsome pit" (II.iii.176). Tamora denies Lavinia this boon and allows her sons to drag her offstage to be raped atop her husband's corpse. After that, they mutilate her. Next, Tamora exits, and Aaron enters leading Titus' two sons, whom he has drugged, to the same locale as the rest of the scene. This he misleadingly identifies as "the loathsome pit / Where I espied the panther fast asleep" (II.iii.193-94). The drugged brother Martius falls into what his brother Quintus, still above, describes as a "subtle hole […] Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briars / Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood / […] A very fatal place" (II.iii.198-202). Martius asks to be helped out of "this unhallowed and bloodstained hole [...] this den [...] this detested, dark, blood-drinking pit" (II.iii.210, 215, 224), having seen therein the corpse of Bassianus. When asked "If it be dark, how dost thou know 'tis he?" (II.iii.225), he replies the corpse wears "A precious ring that lightens all this hole, / Which, like a taper in some monument, / Doth shine upon the dead man's earthy cheeks / And shows the ragged entrails of this pit" (II.iii.227-30). Martius' specification of the light source needed to allow visibility indicates that he adheres to an intromission, rather than an extramission theory of sight. His description of seeing "the ragged entrails of the pit", which he equates with a "fell receptacle / As hateful as Cocytus' misty mouth" (II.iii.235-36) brings in, beside optical observation, additional fantasies of anatomical orifices.

Again in an optical mode, the two drugged brothers remark "My sight is very dull, whate'er it bodes" and "And mine, I promise you" (II.iii.195-96). In consequence of that[42], or some other unsteadiness, while attempting to rescue his brother, Quintus himself finally falls into what he describes as "the swallowing womb / Of this deep pit" (II.iii.239-40). This fully completes a series

[42] It may well be implied that the effects of Aaron's poison impair especially the faculty of depth perception which is enabled by stereopsis – a topic to be explored in Sokol, forthcoming.

of optical and Freudian descriptions. Then Aaron arrives bringing the emperor Saturnius to view what Saturnius calls more neutrally "this gaping hollow of the earth" (II.iii.249), whereupon Saturnius discovers Titus' two sons trapped in the pit together with the murdered body of his brother Bassianus. Finally, Tamora re-enters bearing the forged letter incriminating the innocent boys.

We find in this scene of horrors several descriptions of the same forest "vale" that differ according to contrary viewpoints. So Tamora's first description is coloured by lustful intent; Lavinia's description is sarcastic and censorious; Tamora's second description intends to motivate murder; Titus' two sons' descriptions derive from corporal fantasies and dread provoked by drugging; the Emperor at first benignly notes the proximity of the same "hollow of the earth" to a "pleasant chase" (II.iii.255). That these variations of outlook might be not only psychological is implied by Marjorie Hope Nicholson's classic study *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* which shows that Renaissance perceptions of wild nature were self-divided[43] (as indeed they are in *As You Like It*, where the forest of Arden allows an idyll and is also made dangerous by resident snakes).

I would suggest that the frustrated Tamora actually sees two different places when she views the vale first as an outdoor boudoir and later as an apt venue for murder. The two boys' increasingly Freudian descriptions of the fringed pit show how drugging uncovers hidden terrors. Saturnius' at-first neutral description of the same "hollow of the earth" proceeds from a perspective noting a nearby "lodge / Upon the north side of this pleasant chase", where he thinks his (now murdered) brother and "his lady both" (II.iii.254-55) are happily ensconced. We the audience cannot see the variously described "pit", but are able to verify that none in the playworld see or describe it aright.

Troilus and Cressida (V.ii)[44] provides a still more complex depiction of how several onlookers have very different perceptions

43 See Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1959; on the connection of women with wild nature, see Jeanne Addison Roberts, *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus and Gender*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

44 All references to this play are from William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Kenneth Palmer, London, The Arden Shakespeare (Second Series), 1982.

when looking from differing optical and psychosexual positions. In this scene, the onlookers are hidden from a woman who is currently concerned about her own sexual allure and, in that way, resemble the onlooker in the illustration to *Der Ritter vom Turn*, who is invisible to the self-aware girl. However, the onlooker in the woodcut has apparently comprehensive vision, whereas the perceptions of all three of the unseen onlookers in *Troilus and Cressida* are severely distorted in ways that we the audience, the ultimate onlooker, can verify.

A basis for this verification has been detailed in a brilliant study by the psycho-analyst Angela Sheppard[45], part of which informs the discussion below. Sheppard's essay suggests that the male onlookers represented in *Troilus* variously distort or curtail their perceptions of what is in plain sight on account of inner obstructions or limitations that restrict their vision. Sheppard's essay further suggests that Shakespeare's dramatization of Cressida's plight allows readers or playgoers insight into what those three male spies cannot or will not see. Thus Sheppard details a perspective from which audiences can both take note of and wonder at the delusions of these dramatized characters.

The scene in question depicts a painful interaction between the Trojan captive Cressida and her Grecian captor and soon-to-be new lover Diomedes, and simultaneously presents commentaries on this interaction made by the three covert male witnesses. Chief among those spies is Cressida's former lover, the young Trojan prince Troilus. He is so overwhelmed by sexual jealousy that he at first denies that he has actually witnessed Cressida's half-reluctant allowance of Diomedes' advances. Thus Troilus at first bluntly proclaims that "this is not Cressida" (V.ii.135), denying the witness of his eyes, but then refines this to "This is and is not Cressida" (V.ii.149).

Troilus actually asserts the unreliability of his own visual and aural senses, insisting that his unshakable belief in Cressida's faithfulness: "doth invert the attest of eyes and ears" (V.ii.124). Observing this remark, the always scurrilous Thersites, another of

[45] See Angela Sheppard, "Soiled Mother or Soul of Woman?: A Response to *Troilus and Cressida*", in *The Undiscover'd Country: New Essays on Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare*, ed. B. J. Sokol, London, Free Association Books, 1993, pp. 130-49.

the spies, comments sarcastically: "Will a swagger himself out on's own eyes?" (V.ii.138-39). But Thersites himself displays distorted vision by characterizing the scene between Cressida and Diomedes in only ribald terms. Thus he sees Cressida's evident reluctance to betray her former lover only as a tease and come-on to sharpen Diomedes' desire, a "whetstone" (V.ii.77), and he concludes, sarcastically, that "A proof of strength she could not publish more / Unless she said, 'My mind is now turned whore'" (V.ii.115-16).

Ulysses, the third covert witness to the same encounter, is less gross in the presence of the distressed Troilus, whom repeatedly urges to leave off viewing the scene. Yet Ulysses himself previously misread Cressida's attractive liveliness as slutishness (IV.vi.55-64) and continues to regard her as easy with her affections (V.ii.10).

Ulysses shows himself particularly coarsely uncomprehending when Troilus concludes regarding Cressida's behaviour:

> 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.132-35)

To this Ulysses responds: "What hath she done, Prince, that can soil our mothers?" (V.ii.136), and it is from this point that Sheppard's interpretation takes its impetus or origin.

Paraphrasing Sheppard briefly, with much left out, and using the terms of psycho-analytic object relations theory, we see Troilus reacting to his disappointment by "splitting" his "internal good object", which is to say, cleaving in two his primal image of the perfect woman, the descendant of an infant's phantasized all-giving mother. This internal splitting accounts for Troilus' paradoxical remarks in which he denies his own sight: "This, she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida. / If beauty have a soul, this is not she", and then "This is and is not Cressid" (V.ii.140-41, 149).

Obtuse Ulysses, only puzzled, has no grasp of the process whereby Troilus' internal reflection of what he sees effectively splits Cressida into two. But, Sheppard implies, audiences may grasp this. Interestingly, the *Ritter vom Turn* woodcut may also be perceived to represent a splitting, by means of reflections, between a lovely lady and a hyper-sexual demon. Indeed, one of

Shakespeare's Thesites' obscene remarks made while viewing the Cressida-Diomedes scene can be read to imply very similar repugnant anatomical imagery to that seen in the woodcut[46].

Sheppard contends that the integration of Cressida as a "whole object" – as a woman who, to preserve her creativity, must make the best of a bad or sad situation and, for that reason, may not fully satisfy the demands made by others – may well be implied in Shakespeare's presentation of Cressida's difficult situation. But this re-integration is clearly not perceived by any of the spying men who witness her enigma from varied perspectives. Troilus in particular is shocked to encounter imaginatively a malign "part object", which he calls "Diomed's Cressida". His reaction is to intend bloody revenge against Diomedes on the battlefield (V.ii.166-79).

Indeed, Troilus soon after courts ruthlessness and rails against his elder brother Hector's chivalrous treatment of enemies, saying:

> For th' love of all the gods,
> Let's leave the hermit pity with our mother
> And, when we have our armours buckled on,
> The venomed vengeance ride upon our swords,
> Spur them to ruthful work, rein them from ruth. (V.iii.46-50)

To this Hector, who says he prefers "fair play", replies "Fie, savage, fie!" (V.iii.51). Yet, despite Shakespeare's Troilus' rejection of mercy or genuine ruth, this being associated by him with his "soiled" mother, his ensuing furious entry into the battlefield produces a peculiarly muted outcome. For, in Shakespeare's revision of the often told medieval Troilus and Cressida story, Troilus is not destroyed in battle by Achilles' Myrmidons or by any others. That his intended violence fails to be either effectual or fatal may well indicate the evanescent nature of furious so-called "part-object phantasies".

[46] Kenneth Palmer suggests that, when Ulysses remarks aside on Cressida "She will sing any man at first sight" and Thersites adds "And any man may sing her, if he can take her clef" (V.ii.9-11), the word "clef", spelled *Cliff* in the Quarto, puns on "*cleft* = female pudendum" (William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, note 11, p. 270).

Here Troilus' perceptions of it reveal only part of a scene, belying a wider reality. Similar occlusions of whole vision often fascinated Shakespeare, as is seen in his *Sonnets 93*, *137* and *138*. However, the speakers in these poems actually reveal an ironic awareness of the partial or splitting nature of their own inner reflections – and this, in turn, overthrows Ulysses' reductive judgment in *Troilus and Cressida* that man in general "feels not what he owes but by reflection" (III.iii.94).

The several audience-apparent imaging errors or omissions explored here involve either different Shakespeare characters having differing points of view or else a single Shakespeare character adopting different views at different times. These share with the girl-demon illustration to *Der Ritter vom Turn* the characteristic that we, as unseen viewers of the whole scene, can assess those varied figures' partial seeing.

There are also instances among Shakespeare's works where one and the same character takes simultaneous but contradictory views of the same scene or situation; these will be the topic of a further study where defamiliarization via mirrors will again be instructive when considered in relation to physical optics[47].

[47] The single viewer with two points of view will be explored in Sokol, forthcoming.

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"There is nothing sure in mortality – but mortality": Notes on Middleton's Way with Death

Daniela Guardamagna

The statement in the title of this essay (*The Revenger's Tragedy*, III.vi.85-86[1]), commenting on the vanity of the human wish to come to terms with mortality, unequivocally summarises Middleton's view of the issue. As usual in his work, however, the mode is unconventional, offering surprising and unusual elements – as this paper will try to prove.

The relation between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Middleton's most famous revenge tragedy has been tackled by a number of scholars[2]. Both plays, like most exemplars of this formulaic genre (from Thomas Kyd to John Marston and beyond), find the source

[1] The edition used is the one by MacDonald P. Jackson, in *Thomas Middleton. The Collected Works*, eds Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

[2] About the relation between the two texts, see Daniela Guardamagna, *Thomas Middleton, drammaturgo giacomiano. Il canone ritrovato*, Roma, Carocci, 2018, pp. 143-45; about Shakespeare and Middleton, see the last chapter, pp. 220-40.

of their structural features in Seneca[3], whose *Tenne Tragedies* were published in English in 1581[4] after being translated and published separately in the previous years. But it is Seneca's philosophy which is most relevant here. His stoicism and his acceptance of death may have inspired Hamlet's lines in V.ii:

> We defy augury. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. (V.ii.197-200)[5]

The *memento mori* and *danse macabre* elements characterise many of the protagonists' attitudes providing a focus on life and death. The pervasive imagery of rottenness is indeed an essential characteristic of *Hamlet*. From Marcellus' notorious sentence, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.90), to the "unweeded garden / That grows to seed" and the "things rank and gross in nature" in Hamlet's first soliloquy (I.ii.129ff), or, in I.v, "the fat weed / That [according to the Folio] rots itself […] on Lethe wharf" (I.v.32-33)[6] up to the "rank offence" (III.iii.36) smelling to Heaven which is mentioned by Claudius in his unsuccessful attempt at praying, rottenness is constitutive of the atmosphere of the play. However, all the elements which connect mortality with Hamlet's and Vindice's discourse need to be briefly isolated for a clearer vision of the theme.

Hamlet meditates on mortality from the very beginning, in particular from I.ii[7]: on his "sullied flesh" (if we accept this

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3 See, above all, the still fundamental study on revenge tragedy by Bowers: Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy: 1587-1642*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1940.

4 The apocryphal *Octavia* is comprised in the Elizabethan publication, as it was thought at the time to be certainly Senecan; only more recent philological research has relegated it to the field of apocrypha.

5 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, eds Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, London, Arden Shakespeare (Third Series), 2006 (based on Q2).

6 See the Folio edition in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, eds Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, London, Arden Shakespeare (Third Series), 2006. Q2's version "roots itself" is less pregnant as far as imagery is concerned; rottenness is sufficiently evoked, in any case, by the "fat weed" immersed in the stagnant waters of Lethe.

7 This is probably the reason why Peter Brook chose to stage his 2000-2002 versions of *Hamlet*, from the Bouffes du Nord in Paris to London Old Vic to the Venice Biennale,

convincing emendation for Q2's "sallied", which many editors suggest), on the frailty of the human condition (again in I.ii), and, later, on the corruption of the flesh in his exchange with Polonius:

> For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a god kissing carrion – have you a daughter?
> […]
> Let her not walk i'th' sun; conception is a blessing but as your daughter may conceive, friend – look to't. (II.ii.178-83)

or in his discussion about Polonius' body with Claudius, in IV.iii:

> CLAUDIUS
> Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?
> HAMLET
> At supper.
> CLAUDIUS
> At supper! Where?
> HAMLET
> Not where he eats, *but where 'a is eaten*[8]. *A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him.* (IV.iii.16-20)

And again:

> HAMLET
> *Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots*. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, *two dishes but to one table*. *That's the end*. (IV.iii.21-24).

Also the splendid "quintessence of dust" passage (II.ii.261-74), in spite of the elated consideration of man as a paragon, akin to God and the angels, ends as an epitome of the medieval vision of man as dust, to which he will return.

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and further, starting from this soliloquy, cutting all the previous paraphernalia on the castle ramparts and at Claudius' court. From his last version Brook derived the film *La tragédie d'Hamlet*, produced in 2002, with Adrian Lester in the title role.

[8] Here and elsewhere, italics are mine. One of the many echoes of *Hamlet* in *The Revenger's Tragedy* has been identified in these lines: when poison gnaws at the Duke's mouth, Vindice serenely contemplates his teeth, and adds: "Then those that did eat are eaten" (III.v.162). See also note 2.

The obsession with rotting corpses permeates most of the play. It is the first Gravedigger who jokes about rotting corpses (V.i), but the theme is amplified and developed by the protagonist. The same scene hosts the famous exchange about Alexander the Great:

> HAMLET
> Dost thou think Alexander looked o'this fashion i'th' earth?
> HORATIO
> E'en so.
> HAMLET
> And smelt so? Pah! […]
> To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander[9] till 'a find it stopping a bung-hole?
> HORATIO
> 'Twere to consider too curiously to consider so.
> HAMLET
> No, faith, not a jot. But to follow him thither with modesty enough and likelihood to lead it: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?
> Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
> Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.
> Oh, that that earth which kept the world in awe,
> Should patch a wall t'expel the water's flaw. (V.i.187-205)

A less grotesque, rather an affectionate meditation is the one about Yorick's skull:

> Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio. A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhorred in my imagination it is. My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now – your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? […] Now get you to my lady's table and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that. (V.i.174-84)

[9] "*Noble* dust": everybody's fate is supposed to be levelled by the Great Equaliser, but an emperor's dust remains nobler than the one of a citizen, whatever its uses after death.

Here, Hamlet's reflections on the sinfulness of female making up, typical of the times, connect with the thoughts on mortality that Vindice offers on the subject. The very first is the contemplation of Gloriana's skull, which led most critics to postulate an obvious derivation of Vindice from Hamlet, attributing the presence of the skull on the Globe's stage to the influence of the older playwright on the younger[10]:

> Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love,
> My study's ornament, *thou shell of death,*
> Once the bright face of my betrothèd lady,
> When life and beauty naturally *filled out*
> *These ragged imperfectïons,*
> When *two heaven-pointed diamonds were set*
> *In those unsightly rings* – then 'twas a face
> *So far beyond the artificial shine*
> *Of any woman's bought complexïon*. (I.i.14-22)

Elements of mortality resurface here: the skull, the orbits ("unsightly rings") now empty of Gloriana's luminous eyes, once sparkling like diamonds and, at the same time, associating her to piety ("heaven-pointed") but failing to share the gems durability[11].

Later, when Vindice is gleefully anticipating the Duke's killing, meditations on Gloriana's beauty again assume the tone of *memento mori*:

> HIPPOLITO
> Is this the form that living shone so bright?
> VINDICE
> The very same;
> *And now methinks I could e'en chide myself*
> *For doting on her beauty* […]

[10] Even though Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman*, where the father's skeleton is fondled by the protagonist, might also be responsible for the borrowing. On the relationship between *Hamlet* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, see note 2.

[11] See Brian Gibbons' edition of the play: "The diamond ring's durability is ironically contrasted to the eyes of the spiritually bright but tragically short-lived beloved. Vindice is imaginatively preoccupied with eyes and eye sockets" (Brian Gibbons, ed., *The Revenger's Tragedy*, London-New York, New Mermaids, 1991, note to I.i.19-20).

> Does every proud and self-affecting dame
> Camphor her face *for this*? And grieve her maker
> In sinful baths of milk, when many an infant starves
> For her superfluous outside – *all for this?* (III.v.67-87)

As in the first passage, the memory of Gloriana's virtue is strangely soiled when Vindice's praise seems to imply that it will inevitably induce men to sin: "Who *now bids twenty pound a-night*, prepares / Music, perfumes, and sweetmeats?" (III.v.88-89). As above, "the uprightest man" sins "with looking after her" (I.i.23-25). For Vindice, human ways cannot be but sinful: the "uprightest man" is one "[t]hat sin[s] but seven times a day". Chastity is only possible in death, and the mortal mask, grotesquely imagined as appearing in banqueting halls and lavish dinners, is the frightening reminder of impending doom:

> Thou mayst lie chaste now. It were fine, methinks,
> To have thee seen at revels, forgetful feasts,
> And unclean brothels. Sure 'twould fright the sinner
> And make him a good coward, put a reveller
> Out of his antic amble. (III.v.90-94)

Vindice's conclusion is a hard statement undeserved by the virtuous lady and, while insisting on the early modern condemnation of cosmetics, looks like an extempore quirk of the protagonist's somber mood: "[S]ee, ladies, with false forms / You deceive men, but cannot deceive worms" (III.v.97-98).

Echoes of the dance of death fill the speeches of the protagonists of both plays. The profound sentence which gives the title to this paper, instead, is pronounced in a very farcical moment by one of the most unreliable and ludicrous villains in the play. Ambitioso, the Duchess's oldest son, and his brother Supervacuo have just been thwarted in their attempt to have the heir to the Dukedom, the Duke's son Lussurioso, executed for his mistaken attack on the Duke; unwillingly they procure instead the death of their own brother Junior, who is in jail, subject to judgement for the rape of the virtuous wife of the noble Lord Antonio.

The two grotesque villains have just stopped gloating about the success of their plans; in fact they quarrel as to whose brilliant idea

it was to strenuously defend Lussurioso against the rage of the Duke ("O, how we pleaded!", III.vi.63). Cherishing the bundle which they think contains the head of their step-brother, they find that it holds their own youngest brother's severed head. One of the most frankly farcical and, at the same time, gruesome moments in the tragedy is the reaction they display when the officer who carried out Junior's execution tells them the truth. Supervacuo proceeds to threaten him, and Ambitioso pronounces the sentence which is being discussed:

OFFICER
The Duke's son,
My lord, had his release before you came.
AMBITIOSO
Whose head's that then?
OFFICER
His whom you left command for, your own brother's.
[…]
AMBITIOSO
Our brother's!
Oh, furies!
SUPERVACUO
Plagues!
AMBITIOSO
Confusions!
[…]
SUPERVACUO
Fell it out so accursedly?
AMBITIOSO
So damnedly?
SUPERVACUO
Villain, I'll brain thee with it.
OFFICER
Oh, my good lord! [*Exit Officer*]
SUPERVACUO
The devil overtake thee!
[…]
AMBITIOSO
A murrain meet 'em! There's none of these wiles that ever come to good: *I see now there is nothing sure in mortality but mortality*. (III.vi.70-77)

A severed head used as a weapon to hit an opponent is probably one of the most offensive elements in a gruesome play, and it is often cut in performance[12]. The sentence about mortality, instead, generally survives.

The contrast of this basic statement with similar ones in the majority of early modern plays is worth being briefly dealt with. When Hamlet expresses his evangelical meditations on the mysterious ways of Powers above ("There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow", V.ii.197-98)[13] or when Edgar convinces a healed Gloucester that suffering and death must be accepted and that "ripeness is all", the audience or the reader cannot but associate some of these reflections, expressed by the protagonists of the plays, with the author's thoughts: it is an understandable and probably justified attitude.

Even when Macbeth describes life as a story told by an idiot and acted by a poor player, it is difficult not to take his words as a statement of the playwright's vision. But Shakespeare was of course very effective in expressing an idea of life he did *not* necessarily share, to produce multi-dimensional characters whose existential parable leads them to nothingness. In any case, the public is bound to partake in the protagonist's nihilism.

It is, instead, very rare that a thought proposed to the audience's awareness of the human condition should be entrusted to a character as shallow as Ambitioso: one which the audience is not expected to sympathise with or feel respect for. The depth of the sentence is certainly in contrast with whatever else Ambitioso utters in the play. This is a rare phenomenon, which finds its cause

12 Even Declan Donnellan, in his recent production of *The Revenger's Tragedy* at the Piccolo Teatro di Milano (which opened on October 9, 2018, and afterwards toured Northern Italy, stopping at the Teatro di Roma in February-March 2019), revels in the grotesque elements of the play but avoids 'braining' the Officer with Junior's severed head, resorting instead to a fit where Ambitioso is only calmed by a cigarette that Supervacuo promptly lights for him, giving him the kind of solace a baby finds in his pacifier. In this production, Fausto Cabra played Vindice, Massimiliano Speziani the Duke, Ivan Alovisio Lussurioso, Pia Lanciotti both the Duchess and Vindice's mother Gratiana, David Meden Ambitioso, Christian Di Filippo Supervacuo, Errico Liguori Spurio, Raffaele Esposito Hippolito, Marta Malvestiti Castiza, Alessandro Bandini Junior.

13 The sentence derives from Matthew 10.29.

in a founding feature of Middleton's dramaturgy. It has relevant consequences.

First of all, its origin: alienation – both Swiftian and Brechtian *ante litteram* – is a typical strategy in Middleton's production[14], one which most critics had already recognised in his work in the last century, speaking of his "clinical detachment", his "photographic realism", his dispassionate attitude to his characters. None of the pity John Webster reserves to his protagonists – even the sinners – is explicit in Middleton, not even for the few innocents. In the corpus of his work, the innocent and the guilty alike are simply 'shown' (as in Brecht's *Strassescene*) to the audience, which is left free to choose its own stance. They are exposed, manifested, in a sort of epiphany[15].

There is no sentimental hierarchy between protagonists and minor characters. The choral voice resulting from the concourse of 'main' and 'secondary' characters is thus heightened, something which is often lost in the necessary economy of modern performance[16]. Middleton's original, multidimensional perspective

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14 Cf. Guardamagna, especially p. 45; see p. 25 for the definitions of which no reference is given here.

15 Middleton reserves this dispassionate attitude to most characters in his plays: suffice it to quote the detached glance which in *Michaelmas Term* contemplates both evil Quomodo and innocent, though unpardonably gullible, Mr Easy alike. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, where the protagonist Vindice is represented as slowly transforming himself from the wronged party into a villain in his own right, there is no explicit indication or comment about this descending curve. Bianca and Leantio in *Women, Beware Women*, Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores in *The Changeling* undergo the same kind of analysis. There are virtually no exceptions, from self-deceiving Vermandero, Alsemero and Alonso de Piracquo, to the latter's grim and willfully determined brother, up to sinful Livia, to the deceived and in turn deceiving Isabella and Hippolito. Even the virtue of Isabella in *The Changeling*'s subplot is simply 'made visible', with no comments or participation.

16 A *topos* of criticism on Shakespearean plays is a cautionary warning on the risk of highly reducing their impact in production when cutting secondary characters. Of course, an early modern play needs a cast which, even resorting to doubling, is more numerous than most private companies can afford. British actor-managers of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theatre, like the *mattatori* and *primedonne* in the Italian theatre, focused on protagonists and main plots to give pre-eminence to their role and to reduce the expenses. This aspect has survived in more recent performances. A number of reviews Agostino Lombardo wrote in his decade-long commitment to militant criticism dealt with this issue. Cutting minor characters like Cinna the Poet in *Julius Caesar*, torn to pieces by a senseless mob incensed by Antony's speech ("I am not Cinna the conspirator […] It is no matter, his name's

has the effect of drastically reducing the functional distance between protagonists and minor characters, thus enhancing the polyphonic quality of early modern drama.

The ending of most revenge tragedies, including *Hamlet* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, sees the corrupt rulers divested of power, and their nemesis – the revengers – losing their lives in the process, carrying to the grave with them innocent and guilty parties alike. The carnage on stage is a pregnant visual comment on the vanity of human wishes. The quest for power and the quest for justice are equally vain: King Claudius will have to relinquish the crown in death, while Lussurioso has no time to enjoy it before being stabbed to death by Vindice, after having lovingly anticipated it throughout the play. The revengers' progress is doomed to fail from the outset of the plot.

In these tragedies, the sequence of events unfolds like the voyage of a Narrenschiff ("Hieronymo's mad again") in a maze of vain anticipations, where the only realistic stance for the seamen is to be conscious of the expected wreck. Hamlet's lucid awareness of his fate is one with grotesque Ambitioso's glimpse of the human condition: hence the title of this paper.

Cinna; pluck but his name out of his heart, and turn him going"), risks lessening the radical representation of the irrationality of the mob, uncontrollable but at the same time easily orchestrated by the clever manipulator. To quote an example, Giorgio De Lullo's production of *Julius Caesar* in 1971 cut the episode, and Lombardo underlined how this 'emptied' and 'eroded' the impact of the play, limiting it to a more private, sentimental plane, thus neglecting the implicit fundamental reflections on the behaviour of the 'monster multitude'.

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Samuel Johnson, William Shakespeare, and the Vanity of Human Wishes

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By some measures, Johnson's work on his edition of Shakespeare's plays was the most extended effort of his lifetime of extensive work. He began the job in 1745, when he wrote *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth: with Remarks on Sir T. H.'s Edition of Shakespear. To which is Affix'd, Proposals for a New Edition of Shakeshear* [sic], *with a Specimen*. The completed work in eight volumes octavo finally came out twenty years later, in 1765. Although Johnson was horribly late in delivering his edition of Shakespeare, the two decades that elapsed from the beginning of the project to the end were the most productive of his life of writing. In 1746, he signed the contract to write *A Dictionary of the English Language*, and he was at work on the project by 1747, when he started marking up his copy of Warburton's edition of Shakespeare, published in that year. Seven of the eight volumes of Johnson's copy are now in the library of University College, Aberystwyth.

Johnson's copy of Warburton's Shakespeare is the most heavily marked of the extant fourteen titles that Johnson read and underlined for use in the *Dictionary*. One volume, alas, has gone missing. Johnson also makes occasional references to Hanmer's Shakespeare in the *Dictionary*, especially to its glossary and at least one reference to Pope's notes on Shakespeare[1]. Although Johnson principally used Warburton's Shakespeare in compiling his *Dictionary*, he occasionally looked at other editions, and it is fair to say that he was aware of Shakespeare throughout his work. E. J. Thomas closely inspected Johnson's copy of Warburton's Shakespeare and found about 17,000 quotations from it excerpted for use in the *Dictionary*. Some of these are used multiple times; Shakespeare is by far the most heavily quoted author in the *Dictionary*. One would be hard-pressed to find a single page in the *Dictionary* on which his name does not appear.

Consideration of Johnson's sojourn in the sea of the English language, important as it was, does not in itself get us to 1756, when he evidently resumed work on his edition of Shakespeare, publishing at that time his revised proposals for his edition. Before then, Johnson interrupted his work on the *Dictionary* to write two issues of the *Rambler*, every Tuesday and Saturday, from 1750-52 before diving into volume II on or about 3 April 1753, when he consecrated the resumption of that work with a prayer[2]. Shakespeare was not entirely forgotten by Mr Rambler, even if his most pressing unfinished task was the *Dictionary*. *Rambler* 156, on tragicomedy, for example, foreshadows parts of Johnson's 1765 preface to Shakespeare, as does number 121, on the impropriety of imitating Spenser and of anachronism in general. Number 168 comes straight from the *Observations on Macbeth*, focusing on the "Come thick night" speech and criticizing the low diction of "dun" and "knife".

After the revised proposals of 1756, Johnson was still unable to focus on his edition of Shakespeare full time, though it was always

1 For information on authors and works cited in the *Dictionary*, see the admirable webpage created and curated by Brian Grimes: https://www.sjdictionarysources.org/

2 See Samuel Johnson, *Diaries, Prayers, and Annals*, eds E. L. McAdam, Jr. *et al*., in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1958-2019, 23 vols, vol. I [1958], p. 50.

on his back burner. In that year, having spent everything he earned on the *Dictionary*, Johnson launched *The Literary Magazine*, for which he wrote thirty-six book reviews in a thirteen-month period. In 1757, meanwhile, Johnson wrote to Charles Burney about his progress on the edition of Shakespeare, predicting completion in 1758[3]; by the end of that year, in fact, two volumes were printed. Around the time that Johnson wrote for the *Literary Magazine* (1755-56), he also edited Thomas Browne's *Christian Morals,* and a little later, in 1761, by which time six volumes of Shakespeare were printed, he published an edition of the English works of Roger Ascham. In both of these other editions, as in his forthcoming edition of Shakespeare, Johnson wrote glosses that go beyond his work in the *Dictionary*, while drawing on it, of course, and resembling it in method. In 1759, in the midst of editing Shakespeare and all his other work, Johnson wrote *Rasselas*. In this oriental tale, the wise man Imlac's description of the poet's task (not to "number the streaks of the tulip") foreshadows parts of Johnson's preface to Shakespeare and even constitutes an exaggerated sketch of it[4]. Finally, after he received his pension from the king in 1762, Johnson was able to stop writing for immediate exigencies and work full time on Shakespeare. After a vacation with his friend Joshua Reynolds in Devonshire, Johnson got down to work and finished the job rather quickly. All eight volumes were in print by 1765[5].

There are many smaller works that I could have mentioned as preparing Johnson to write his edition of Shakespeare, but only one more demands serious consideration. Johnson's greatest poem, first published in 1749 and revised in 1755, is *The Vanity of Human Wishes.* This work obviously does not have the generic pedigree to be relevant to the edition of Shakespeare, but it plays into the edition nevertheless. The poem is an imitation – that is, a loose translation, with modern characters substituted for those in the

[3] See Johnson, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Bruce Redford, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992-94, 5 vols, vol. I, p. 158.

[4] See Johnson, *Rasselas and Other Tales*, ed. Gwin J. Kolb, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. XVI [1990], p. 43.

[5] For information on the printing history of Johnson's Shakespeare, see J. D. Fleeman, *A Bibliography of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Treating His Published Works from the Beginnings to 1984*, Oxford, Clarendon, 2000, 2 vols, especially vol. II, p. 1089.

original – of Juvenal's tenth satire. This poem is notable not for any mention of Shakespeare, but rather because it articulates one of the central themes in all of Johnson's work, a theme that Johnson found ways of inserting into both his fictional and his scholarly work. The *Vanity* comprises a series of vignettes in which the various vanities of life – wealth, power, learning, beauty, and long life – are shown to be short-lived and illusory. This is a key work in Johnson's oeuvre because it distills the theme that Johnson finds everywhere in literature and life. In his approximately seventy biographies, for example, the theme arises again and again as authors hope for comfort and relaxation just before death snatches them from their grasp. Otway chokes on a piece of bread that he has just begged and was trying to enjoy[6]; Pope dies after eating his favorite dish, potted lamprey[7]; and Ambrose Philips, "[h]aving purchased an annuity of four hundred pounds, […] now certainly hoped to pass some years of life in plenty and tranquility; but his hope deceived him: he was struck with a palsy, and died"[8]. Almost as strong a distillation of his quintessential theme is Johnson's *Sermon 12*. It takes its epigraph from Ecclesiastes 1.14 and begins thus:

> That all human actions terminate in vanity, and all human hopes will end in vexation, is a position, from which nature with-holds our credulity, and which our fondness for the present life, and worldly enjoyments, disposes us to doubt; however forcibly it may be urged upon us, by reason or experience.[9]

Hagstrum and Gray, the editors of the Yale edition of the sermons, call this one "a quintessentially Johnsonian sermon – a prose *Vanity of Human Wishes*, a *Rasselas* without narrative". It "exposes", they go on to say, "as does no other work of SJ, the orthodox Christian

6 See Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. John H. Middendorf, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. XXI [2010], p. 259.

7 See Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. John H. Middendorf, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. XXIII [2010], p. 1167. Johnson knows the story may be apocryphal, but his interest in the theme it exemplifies drives him to retail it anyway.

8 Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*, vol. XXIII, p. 1317.

9 Johnson, *Sermons*, eds Jean Hagstrum and James Gray, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. XIV [1978], p. 127.

foundation that underlies his philosophy of human life and effort and that supports the entire structure of his morality"[10].

The two points I have been trying to make here are that 1) Johnson spent a good part of his professional life thinking about Shakespeare, even when he was distracted from the project of editing his plays, and 2) that the vanity of human wishes is a key theme in his writing throughout this period of mulling over the works of Shakespeare and, indeed, throughout Johnson's life. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Johnson would want to find his key theme in his key author. This does not mean that he will. In fact, it may be only another vain wish. That this wish is not always gratified, however, is one of the reasons why Johnson found that

> Shakespeare with all his excellencies has likewise faults, and faults sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit […]. His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose.[11]

Not content with Shakespeare's failures in this regard – and this is the main point I want to make – Johnson sometimes steps in to make the moral explicit and to give us "Shakespeare improved", much as he may have been against that concept as an editor.

As a textual editor, Johnson was careful to keep his emendations in the margins (in footnotes), and, as a commentator, he was aware that "[n]otes are often necessary, but they are necessary evils"[12]. Even if he feared his notes would "refrigerate the mind"[13], however, Johnson could not resist adding them, especially when they enabled Shakespeare to become a book of moral teaching. In several of these instances, the moral that Johnson helps Shakespeare to articulate is the vanity of human wishes. Johnson does something similar in the *Dictionary* when he gratuitously positions quotations or adds comments to make a point. For

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10 Johnson, *Sermons*, note 1, p. 127.

11 Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. VII [1968], p. 71.

12 Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, vol. VII, p. 111.

13 Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, vol. VII, p. 111.

example, when he illustrates *brevier*, the typeface, with some lines in that style, Johnson chooses the pithy, religious advice of Michael to Adam in *Paradise Lost*: "Nor love thy life, nor hate, but what thou liv'st, / Live well, how long or short, permit to heav'n" (XI.553-54). He could have chosen any passage, so he chose one with a strong moral lesson.

Johnson often took the same approach in scholarly notes. His method is illustrated very handily in two that he could not resist adding to his friend Giuseppe Baretti's *Introduction to the Italian Language* (1755). As part of the *Lettere Familiari from Francesco Redi al Signor Egidio Menagio, a Parigi*, Baretti included the following:

> Non deve adunque questa Donna, per volersi far estimar buona ed onesta, esser tanto ritrosa; e mostrar tanto d'abborrir e le compagnie e i ragionamenti ancor un poco lascivi, che ritrovandovisi se ne levi, perchè facilimente si potrìa pensare, ch'ella fingesse d'esser tanto austera per nascondere di se quello, ch'ella dubitasse, ch'altri potesse risapere: costumi così selvatichi son sempre odiosi. Non deve tampoco per mostrar d'esser libera e piacevole, dir parole disoneste, nè usar una certa domestichezza intemperata e senza freno, e modi di far creder di se quello che forse non è. Ma ritrovandosi a tai ragionamenti, deve ascoltarli con un poco di rossore, e vergogna.

Johnson, who was only proofreading for Baretti (the book contains a facing-page translation and notes in English), cannot help but add a note on moral grounds:

> Though the design of these notes is rather to teach grammar than morality, yet, as I think nothing a deviation that can serve the cause of virtue, I will not forbear to observe, that this despicable argument has been from age to age the snare of women. They have been taught to fear reserve more than levity, and have in time become loose, because they durst not venture to be charged with hypocrisy. The true rule to be given to every human being, is to fly the appearance of evil, and so start back from the brink of guilt; for they who venture on the first step, will still more readily pass over the second.[14]

[14] Giuseppe Baretti, *Introduction to the Italian Language*, London, 1755, pp. 48-49. James Crossley first identified Johnson as the author of this note and a longer one on pp. 198-99 (*Notes and Queries*, first series, V, 1852, p. 101). He also attributed the preface to Johnson, but that has been disputed; for the details, see Fleeman, vol. I, p. 485.

Johnson epitomized this message in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, where he reveals the hidden dangers of the wish for beauty. The belle, afflicted with pride, gradually lets her guard down and in the end:

> In croud at once, where none the pass defend,
> The harmless Freedom, and the private Friend,
> The guardians yield, by force superior ply'd;
> By Int'rest, Prudence; and by Flatt'ry, Pride.
> Now beauty falls betray'd, despis'd, distress'd,
> And hissing Infamy proclaims the rest. (ll. 337-42)[15]

For Johnson, there is always an appeal open from grammar to morality, and he exhibits this frequently in his edition of Shakespeare, as in his *Dictionary* and, indeed, in all of his scholarly works. A pillar of Johnson's morality is the vanity of human wishes, and Johnson often finds it needs pointing out in Shakespeare. At *Cymbeline*, IV.ii.269ff, for example, there is a song: "Both the scepter, learning, physic, must / All follow this, and come to dust". Johnson finds the message indistinct but important, so he adds in a note: "The poet's sentiment seems to have been this. All human excellence is equally subject to the stroke of death: neither the power of kings, nor the science of scholars, nor the art of those whose immediate study is the prolongation of life, can protect them from the final destiny of man"[16]. Did Shakespeare mean to say, as the sermonizer in Ecclesiastes 1.14 says, "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit"? Is what Johnson says the same as what is said in Ecclesiastes? The answer to both questions must be "not quite", but it does seem clear that Johnson has translated (or imitated) Shakespeare and made him speak a Johnsonian version of Ecclesiastes. Johnson's more poetic version can be found in several

[15] Johnson, *Poems*, ed. E. L. McAdam, Jr., in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. VI [1964]. All references to *The Vanity of Human Wishes* refer to this edition.

[16] Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. VIII [1968], p. 898. Johnson added this note in his revision of the edition in 1773, but it illustrates the principle on which he acted all the same.

of the pithiest couplets of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Perhaps the most pithy of all are these:

> Fate wings with ev'ry wish th' afflictive dart,
> Each gift of nature, and each grace of art,
> With fatal heat impetuous courage glows,
> With fatal sweetness elocution flows,
> Impeachment stops the speaker's pow'rful breath,
> And restless fire precipitates on death. (ll. 15-20)

For another example of Johnson annotating Shakespeare to bring out the central theme of human vanity, consider *1 Henry IV*, V.iv.77-82, in Johnson's edition:

> HOTSPUR
> […]
> I better brook the loss of brittle life,
> Than those proud titles thou hast won of me,
> They wound my thoughts, worse than thy sword my flesh;
> But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool,
> And time, that takes survey of all the world,
> Must have a stop.

Johnson's comment is:

> Hotspur in his last moments endeavours to console himself. The glory of the Prince "wounds his thoughts", but "thought", being "dependent on life", must cease with it, and will soon be at an end. "Life", on which "thought" depends, is itself of no great value, being the "fool" and sport of "time"; of "time" which, with all its dominion over sublunary things, "must" itself at last "be stopped".[17]

There is an element of consolation here, but it is based on an acknowledgment of the vanity or evanescence of human wishes and, in fact, all human things. Wishes cease with life, and all things, including life and time, must end. Johnson's great imitation of Juvenal is much better at bringing out the vanity of wishes than offering any consolation concerning their term, so it is hard to find an exact parallel there. The lines that come closest are near the end

[17] Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, vol. VII, p. 488.

of the poem, when readers are exhorted to "pour forth" prayers for things that really matter: "For faith, that panting for a happier seat, / Counts death kind Nature's signal of retreat" (ll. 363-64).

But Johnson's gloss on Hotspur's lines is more reminiscent of the last *Idler* than anything in the *Vanity*. There he writes:

> The secret horrour of the last is inseparable from a thinking being whose life is limited, and to whom death is dreadful. We always make a secret comparison between a part and the whole; the termination of any period of life reminds us that life itself has likewise its termination. […] an end must in time be put to every thing great as to every thing little; that to life must come its last hour, and to this system of being its last day, the hour at which probation ceases, and repentance will be vain; the day in which every work of the hand, and imagination of the heart shall be brought to judgment, and an everlasting futurity shall be determined by the past.[18]

There is something consolatory too in the expression of vanity that Johnson finds in *Measure for Measure*, III.i.32-34, where the disguised Duke is consoling the imprisoned Claudio. As Johnson has it:

> DUKE
> Thou hast nor youth, nor age;
> But as it were an after-dinner's sleep,
> Dreaming on both.

His comment makes explicit what perhaps were better left metaphorical, but he finds the meaning too important to be left to the reader's interpretation:

> This is exquisitely imagined. When we are young we busy ourselves in forming schemes for succeeding time, and miss the gratifications that are before us; when we are old we amuse the languor of age with the recollection of youthful pleasures or performances; so that our life, of which no part is filled with the business of the present time, resembles

[18] Johnson, *The Idler and The Adventurer*, eds W. J. Bate, John M. Bullitt and L. F. Powell, in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. II [1963], pp. 315-16.

> our dreams after dinner, when the events of the morning are mingled with the designs of the evening.[19]

This is close to what Johnson says in *Sermon 12*, the one with the epigraph from Ecclesiastes 1.14:

> So great is our interest, or so great we think it, to believe ourselves able to procure our own happiness, that experience never convinces us of our impotence; and indeed our miscarriages might be reasonably enough imputed by us, to our own unskilfulness, or ignorance; if we were able to derive intelligence, from no experience but our own. But surely we may be content to credit the general voice of mankind, complaining incessantly of general infelicity; and when we see the restlessness of the young, and the peevishness of the old; when we find the daring and the active combating misery, and the calm and humble lamenting it; when the vigorous are exhausting themselves, in struggles with their own condition, and the old and the wise retiring from the contest, in weariness and despondency; we may be content at last to conclude, that if happiness had been to be found, some would have found it, and that it is vain to search longer for what all have missed.
>
> But though our obstinacy should hold out, against common experience and common authority, it might at least give way to the declaration of Solomon [the once putative author of Ecclesiastes], who has left this testimony to succeeding ages; that all human pursuits and labours, are vanity.[20]

One more example is pertinent. Here Johnson has to wrench the meaning of the text a bit to reveal that it is really about vanity. At *Romeo and Juliet*, V.i.3-5, Romeo says, as Johnson has it:

> My bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne,
> And, all this day, an unaccustom'd spirit
> Lifts me above the ground with chearful thoughts.

Johnson responds:

> These three lines are very gay and pleasing. But why does Shakespeare give Romeo this involuntary cheerfulness just before the extremity of

[19] Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, vol. VII, p. 193.

[20] Johnson, *Sermons*, pp. 127-28.

> unhappiness? Perhaps to shew the vanity of trusting to those uncertain and casual exaltations or depressions, which many consider as certain foretokens of good and evil.[21]

For faithful readers of Johnson, this interpretation recalls the powerful vignette of the suitors surrounding the man of the moment in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*:

> Unnumber'd suppliants croud Preferment's gate,
> Athirst for wealth, and burning to be great;
> Delusive Fortune hears th' incessant call,
> They mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall. (ll. 73-76)

Romeo's wishes are of course romantic rather than political, but the intellectual mechanism that causes delusion and the critic's need to point it out to vulnerable readers are the same in Johnson's edition and in his poem.

In concluding, it is important to point out that, as an editor or, indeed, as a lexicographer, Johnson is not always roused to comment on the vanity of all sublunary things, even when his text gives him an opportunity to do so. The *Dictionary* has many hidden gems in which Johnson speaks out in propria persona, and some of these gems concern the vanity of human wishes, but gems are rare, and most of the *Dictionary* is a work of lexicography without moral commentary. Likewise, Johnson's edition of Shakespeare is mainly a work of scholarly editing. When, for example, Johnson reads Ulysses' remark in *Troilus and Cressida* ("How some men creep in skittish Fortune's hall, / While others play the ideots in her eyes!", III.iii.134-35), he does not leap in to quote Juvenal's conclusion to his own *Vanity of Human Wishes* ("It is we who make Fortune a goddess"). He instead rejects Warburton's emendation of "sleep" for "creep" and shows how the meaning of "creep" suits the passage[22]. In other words, he is the philologer, and he feels no pressure here to relieve his reader from what he called in the *Dictionary* "the dusty desarts of barren philology"[23]. In sum,

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21 Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, vol. VIII, p. 954.

22 See Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare*, vol. VIII, pp. 924-25.

23 Johnson, *Johnson on the English Language*, eds Gwin J. Kolb and Robert DeMaria, Jr., in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. XVIII [2005], p. 94.

Johnson is a professional scholar, but he is a scholar with a powerful conscience who believes that the final ends of literature are morality and religion. On some occasions, he departs from his professional agenda to make this clear, and, when he does feel the need to moralize Shakespeare or any other writer, his text is often Ecclesiastes 1.14.

On Vanitas
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Falstaff as Vanitas

Keir Elam

In *Henry IV Part I*, V.iv., Shakespeare presents us with a veritable quartet of the vanities. The scene is the Battle of Shrewsbury. On one part of the battlefield two young leaders meet for a showdown; the rebel Hotspur, challenging Prince Hal, dismisses him contemptuously: "I can no longer brook thy vanities." (V.iv.73)[1]. The vanities in question are Hal's idling, drinking, whoring and above all his friendship with Falstaff. A duel ensues, in which, against the odds, Hal kills Hotspur, whose dying words are a further reflection on the *vanitas*, no longer addressed to his adversary Hal, but regarding his own vain military and political aspirations: "No, Percy, thou art dust, / And food for –". This final verbal effort itself proves vain, being interrupted by death, until Hal obligingly completes Hotspur's conventional *vanitas* sentiment: "For worms, brave Percy. Fare thee well, great heart. Ill-weaved ambition, how much art thou shrunk!" (V.iv.84-87). This is

[1] William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV, Part 1*, ed. David Scott Kastan, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2002.

a classic statement of the futility of human endeavor in the face of all-levelling death: *Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*.

Simultaneously, on another part of the battlefield – and of the stage – a lesser duel takes place, as the cowardly Falstaff appears to engage the valiant Earl of Douglas. Falstaff goes through the same motions as Percy, falling down "*as if he were dead*" (Quarto and Folio stage direction) at the very moment Hal kills Hotspur. Falstaff also earns an affectionate *vanitas* epitaph from Hal, in this case a meditation on the deceased himself as the embodiment of human vanity:

> What, old acquaintance! Could not all this flesh
> Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell.
> I could have better spared a better man.
> O, I should have a heavy miss of thee
> If I were much in love with vanity. (V.iv.101-5)

The semantic changes rung on the word 'vanity' in this double episode range from the excessive vainness of Falstaff to the multiple vices of Hal to the futility of human ambition as illustrated by Hotspur. All is vanity: these different meanings converge on the battlefield, which turns virtue into vice and courage into foolishness. At the end of the scene Falstaff, *solus*, is comically resurrected, thereby making a mockery of the solemn actions and somber discourses of the others. His performance of death is a way of overcoming it. Falstaff, the very epitome of vanity, avoids becoming a Hotspur-like *vanitas* picture: "But to counterfeit dying when a man thereby liveth is to be no counterfeit but the true and perfect image of life indeed" (V.iv.116-18). This is the fat man's masterpiece: by creating a perfect replica ("counterfeit") of a *vanitas* composition, he denies futility and becomes instead the image of life and of human resourcefulness. In this sense, he elects himself as the counter-image of the fallen Sir Walter Blunt, whose corpse he encounters earlier in the battle:

> Soft, who are you? Sir Walter Blunt.
> There's honor for you. Here's no vanity. (V.iii.32-33)

Falstaff's cynical comment is ambivalent: Blunt is an emblem of supposed honour, having died in battle, but also of vanity, having lost his life and his worldly prowess: "Here's no vanity", in the sense that death has put an end to his aspirations. Far better, from Falstaff's perspective, to lose one's honour and keep one's vanity, which at least is a testament to survival. To Falstaff, *vanitas* is synonymous with *vivacitas*.

Falstaff's endeavours to cheat death and defend the vanities gains added piquancy from its historiographical and dramaturgical contexts: on the field of battle and within a history play. Playing dead in a historically significant battle, and fooling Hal in the tetralogy that end with his apotheosis, is a double outrage. Falstaff is happy to sacrifice not only personal honour and dignity but also national pride and patriotic ideology in order to save his vain self. The presence within the second tetralogy of the theme of the vanity of human wishes was first signaled by Samuel Johnson, supreme connoisseur both of Shakespeare and of vanity[2]. Johnson's *Dictionary*, in glossing the adjective 'vain' as "Fruitless; ineffectual" (along with other definitions such as "Empty; unreal; shadowy", and "Idle; worthless; unimportant") quotes, by way of illustration, the conclusion to Richard II's long and elegiac "Let's talk of graves" meditation: "Let no man speak again / To alter this, for counsel is but vain" (*Richard II*, III.ii.213-14)[3].

Together with Hamlet, Falstaff is Shakespeare's main exponent of the *vanitas* theme, to the extent that he not only embodies the vanities but discourses knowledgeably on them, as well as being the object of others' discourse. To paraphrase the fat man, he is not only vain in himself, but the cause that vanity is in others, especially Hal. He is, moreover, fully aware of the fact that the *vanitas* is, among other things, a pictorial genre, as his discourse on "the true and perfect image" suggests. In III.iii, Shakespeare attributes to him his only allusion to the *memento mori* image as a variation on the *vanitas* theme:

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2 On Johnson, Shakespeare and *vanitas*, see Robert DeMaria's essay in this volume.

3 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), digital edition: https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/vain/ (accessed on 1 November 2019). The punctuation and line numbers are taken from William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Charles R. Forker, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2002.

BARDOLL
Why, Sir John, my face does you no harm.
FALSTAFF
No, I'll be sworn, I make as good use of it as many a man doth of a death's head or a *memento mori*. I never see thy face but I think upon hell-fire and Dives that lived in purple: for there he is in his robes, burning, burning. If thou wert any way given to virtue, I would swear by thy face. My oath should be "By this fire, that's God's angel". (III.iii.28-30)

Bardoll's face is a *vanitas* picture because it is as red and enflamed as hell, alerting beholders to their possible fate. Falstaff, with his allusion to the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31) situates it within a religious iconographic tradition, reminding us that before becoming an artistic genre the *vanitas* was a Biblical lesson. But, as Bardoll points out, much the same can be said of Falstaff's own body, whose hyperbolic proportions are a monument of – and to – flesh, and thus a potential emblem of human frailty:

BARDOLL
Why, you are so fat, Sir John, that you must be out of all compass, out of all reasonable compass, Sir John. (III.iii.21-23)

In this sense Falstaff is an incarnation of Matthew 26.41: the flesh is weak (and the greater the flesh, the greater the weakness). At the same time, he would be a fit early modern subject for a Franz Hals *vanitas* portrait of a fat man, such as his picture of the merchant Willem van Heythuijsen (1634). And yet the fleshy knight resists any such reduction to moral allegory.

Falstaff's paradox of the life-affirming *vanitas* underlines the complexity of the theme in Shakespeare. It is both a visual and a discursive phenomenon, in which, however, the visual (for example, the knight's conspicuous body) may contradict and undo the accompanying verbal discourse. Shakespeare appropriates the *vanitas* as a pictorial genre, but resituates the latter within a cultural and moral tradition – not least biblical – that makes it part of a broader dialectic. Hamlet holding Yorick's skull is not merely a trite icon of human caducity but the pretext for the Prince's meditation

on the ephemerality of performance itself, and also on its greater reality with respect to the illusory solidity that flesh is heir to.

Vanitas in Shakespearean drama is a Brechtian *gestus*, "[an] attitude, expressible in words or actions"[4]. It is a moral, philosophical and existential attitude or complex of attitudes, a perspective or weave of perspectives on life and death, that translate on stage into a rich dialectic of contrasting positions and actions. As this special issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare* goes to show, it is an ever-present theme that lends itself to a myriad of interpretations and historical contextualizations. All is vanity, but it would be especially vain to try to reduce or synthesize such a fruitful multiplicity of approaches to so multifarious a topic. This journal issue is therefore offered as a choral meditation on the rival claims of futility and vitality, or of mortality and resistance: "Tush, man,", in the words of Falstaff's moral lesson to Hal, "mortal men, mortal men" (IV.ii.66); and yet it is the fat knight himself who does more than any other Shakespearean character to keep mortality at bay.

[4] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. John Willett, London, Methuen, 1964, p. 42.

MISCELLANY

On Vanitas
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All Petrarch's Fault: The Idea of a Renaissance

Alessandra Petrina

"The Renaissance was a new beginning, a 'turning point'"[1]. This is what Jo Tollebeek wrote in the opening section of a 2001 article in which he discussed the positions of Jules Michelet (1798-1874), Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897), and Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) on the topic. Such a statement echoes what the three scholars affirmed in different stages of their respective works, and what has then been taken up by subsequent scholars: the idea of the Renaissance as a "passage au monde moderne", to use Michelet's words[2], does not sound too far away from recent statements about the 'swerve': by hitting on this wonderful, if not completely accurate, translation for Lucretius' word 'clinamen', Stephen Greenblatt forced us to look once more at the Renaissance as a sort of magical moment, a time

[1] Jo Tollebeek, "'Renaissance' and 'Fossilization': Michelet, Burckhardt, and Huizinga", *Renaissance Studies*, 15:3 (2001), pp. 354-66: p. 354.

[2] Jules Michelet, *Cours au Collège de France*, ed. Paul Viallaneix, Paris, Gallimard, 1995, 2 vols, vol. I, p. 351.

of radical change[3]. Throughout the modern history of scholarship we find this yearning for a rebirth – occasionally applied to other periods, and to more specific cases: one can make a good argument for a twelfth-century Renaissance centring around the *école de Chartres*[4], or an equally valid one for a twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance that finds quasi-contemporary parallels in the Irish Revival or the Harlem Renaissance[5]. The period between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century to which we most commonly apply the label of 'Renaissance', given its trans-European validity, poses more problems, and its definition as a turning point has repeatedly been questioned and challenged, with insistent voices proposing its substitution with the locution 'early modern': the debate on this choice of definition is still open, and the present contribution, in exploring these words and their use, may pose more questions than offer answers.

It is important, first of all, to understand the nature of the terms that are being used. 'Renaissance' is closely connected to 'humanism', a term that has its own history. Paul Oskar Kristeller reminds us that 'humanism' and 'humanist' have different origins[6]: 'humanism' is a late entry into our vocabulary, coined (as 'Humanismus') in 1808 by F. J. Niethammer, a German educator, "to express the emphasis on the Greek and Latin classics in secondary education, as against the rising demands for a more practical and more scientific training"[7]. Only towards the mid-nineteenth century, as shown in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, was this word applied to the intellectual movement associated with the Renaissance. The stress on Greek and Latin classics is expressive of a nineteenth-century (and late-eighteenth-century) view of the European cultural heritage that bypasses the medieval legacy; to this attitude we owe the radical distinction between Middle Ages

3 Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began*, New York, Norton, 2011.

4 R. N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999.

5 Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance*, Edinburgh, Chambers, 1964.

6 Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Humanism", in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, eds Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 113-37.

7 Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains*, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1961, 2 vols, vol II, p. 9.

and Renaissance, and perhaps even our penchant for such expressions as 'Dark Ages', though this particular expression also has a different story, as shall be seen presently. Humanism, in this perspective, marks the ideological change inherent in the Renaissance. However, as we reassess the relation between the late Middle Ages and what follows, we are also forced to reinvestigate humanism and the range of values it may be associated with. In order to do so we should leave aside the proto-romantic 'Humanismus', and concentrate instead on the word 'humanist' and its etymology. 'Humanista' is a fifteenth-century Italian word (first attested in 1484, according to *OED*) created to denote a teacher or student of the *studia humanitatis*, those subjects that promote the knowledge of mankind and man's intellectual development; as such, the word had a professional connotation rather than indicating a vocation or an inclination, as of one who would choose the humanities as an actual or possible profession (an analogous example would be 'jurista'); it is not necessarily connected with the universities, since humanists were not only academics, but also chancellors and secretaries, lay clerics or officials belonging to religious orders[8]. This means that the idea of a close association of the Renaissance with *humanae litterae*, as opposed to *divinae*, is slightly anachronistic, as are the idealistic connotations of the term 'Humanismus'.

This short exploration into words and their etymology is revelatory of our intellectual attitude. Our use of terms, when marking geographical, historical and above all cultural boundaries, is strongly influenced by our ideological approach – witness, for instance, the use of the term 'Italia' in Dante Alighieri and in present-day journalism. Does the same happen with 'Renaissance'? The word exists in fourteenth-century French to indicate a rebirth; only in the eighteenth century does it acquire (still in France) the meaning we usually associate it with, and in the following century, with this same meaning, it migrates to England. In 1824 the first *Musée de la Renaissance* was inaugurated in the Louvre; it is now incorporated in the larger collection, and it has lost its original

[8] On the earliest uses of the word 'humanista', see Augusto Campana, "The Origin of the Word 'Humanist'", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 9 (1946), pp. 60-73.

name, as the Louvre proposes itself more and more as "musée universel"[9]. It is interesting to note that a new *Musée de la Renaissance* was re-inaugurated, more recently: though its creation was decided by André Malraux, then Minister of Culture, in 1962, the website of the Château d'Écouen, where it is hosted, tells us that "Lorsqu'il inaugure le musée de la Renaissance d'Écouen en 1977, le président de la République Valéry Giscard d'Estaing en fait un élément de sa politique culturelle. Il entend ainsi satisfaire la demande du public pour la culture et le développement culturel de la France"[10]. In this passage we are presented with a French Renaissance whose definition appears to be more useful for the nineteenth- and twentieth-century French nation than for the *ancien régime*. Something analogous, if less politically connoted, happens in Italy: if Giorgio Vasari proposed the term 'rinascita' in his *Vite* (1550) to indicate a cultural rebirth, in his case applied to the visual arts (the term will be used again in the 1940s and 1950s to denote a political renovation), the word 'rinascimento' is adopted only in the nineteenth century. In Italy, its use is the domain of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians and literary scholars, from Francesco de Sanctis to Elio Vittorini – with a salutary moment of doubt in the case of Antonio Gramsci, who writes (using an interesting water metaphor when describing the Renaissance):

> pare giusta l'opinione che il Rinascimento è un movimento di grande portata, che si inizia dopo il Mille, di cui l'Umanesimo e il Rinascimento (in senso stretto) sono due momenti conclusivi, che hanno avuto in Italia la sede principale, mentre il processo storico più generale è europeo e non solo italiano.[11]

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9 https://www.louvre.fr/missions-et-projets (accessed on 9 June 2019).

10 "As he inaugurated the Musée de la Renaissance in Écouen in 1977, the President of the Republic, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, made it into an element of his cultural policy. He also intended to satisfy the demand of the public for the culture and cultural development of France". See https://musee-renaissance.fr/le-chateau/inauguration-du-musee-de-la-renaissance (accessed on 6 June 2019). Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

11 "I agree with the opinion that the Renaissance is a movement of great scope, beginning after the year 1000, within which Humanism and Renaissance *stricto sensu* are two concluding moments, with their main seat in Italy, while the more general historical process is European and not simply Italian". Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Quaderno 17 (IV), § (8),

In England, the early uses of the word 'Renaissance' are associated with Walter Pater, John Ruskin, or John Addington Symonds: this use tells us more about these nineteenth-century intellectuals than about the Italian sixteenth century, exactly as the term 'Humanismus' speaks to us very clearly of German idealism.

This analysis takes its origin from an examination of the English Renaissance; however, as the term emerges and acquires currency, most of the theoretical discussion around it does not belong to English scholarship, but rather (like the term itself) to France first, and then to Germany – countries in which the debate on historiography develops much earlier. We traditionally focus on the names evoked by Tollebeek – Huizinga and Burckhardt in particular – but less frequently do we set these names against their own cultural background. As we turn to the development of this concept in the British Isles, we find a certain amount of simplification, as shown by the definition of Renaissance offered by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

> **Renaissance** (French: "Rebirth"), period in European civilization immediately following the Middle Ages and conventionally held to have been characterized by a surge of interest in Classical scholarship and values. The Renaissance also witnessed the discovery and exploration of new continents, the substitution of the Copernican for the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, the decline of the feudal system and the growth of commerce, and the invention or application of such potentially powerful innovations as paper, printing, the mariner's compass, and gunpowder. To the scholars and thinkers of the day, however, it was primarily a time of the revival of Classical learning and wisdom after a long period of cultural decline and stagnation.[12]

If we consider the various events listed here as determining factors, we realise that the problem with this definition is the extreme mobility of its time span: America was conventionally 'discovered' in 1492, while the first landing on the part of European navigators in Australia is dated 1606, and the Dutchman Abel Tasman

https://quadernidelcarcere.wordpress.com/2015/02/12/umanesimo-e-rinascimento-3 (accessed on 6 June 2019).

12 https://www.britannica.com/event/Renaissance (accessed on 8 June 2019).

'discovered' Van Diemen's land, now Tasmania, in 1642; Nicolaus Copernicus published his theory on heliocentrism in 1543; Wikipedia tells us that "feudalism effectively ended by about 1500"[13], while common sense tells us that commerce never ceased to grow; paper, printing, the mariner's compass and gunpowder were never European inventions, nor were they recently developed when they arrived to Europe.

The result is that 'Renaissance' is an extremely slippery signifier, as we can easily see if we consider the chronological difficulty: if the Renaissance was born with humanism in Italy in the fifteenth century (although there is scholarly agreement that the villain of my piece, Petrarch, might also be called proto-humanist), in England the situation is completely different, and we move at least a century on, creating incidentally a curious dichotomy between the term 'Tudor' and the term 'Elizabethan': the latter is perceived as fully belonging to the Renaissance, the former is understood as an earlier period. In his *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (first published in German in 1860), Burckhardt set a span for his examination of the Italian Renaissance that went from the middle of the fourteenth century to the *sacco di Roma* in 1527. History and geography resoundingly clash.

The term indicates both a span of time and a moment. The span of time, we have seen, is hard to pin down; the moment is equally difficult to define. If we agree with the statement inserted at the beginning – the Renaissance was a new beginning, a turning point – then we are left with a chase for a turning point, a new beginning, that has a wonderfully desperate quality. It is possible that these perceptions may belong solely to nostalgia – a central concept in this analysis, and another term that did not exist before the late seventeenth century:

> The Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer created the word in 1688, introducing it in his *Dissertatio Medica de Nostalgia, oder Heimweh* to describe a mental and physiological disease Swiss soldiers suffered in their military service; his dissertation also draws on civilian evidence and concludes that nostalgia could affect anyone […]. Hofer joined the Greek 'nostos'

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism (accessed on 8 June 2019).

> (to return home) and 'algos' (pain, or sorrow) to establish the word's connection to a longing to return 'home'.[14]

Nostalgia requires us to look back at a mythical past, or transpose this myth into a utopian future: the actual rebirth never happens as we speak, in the here and now. It is the exact equivalent of the German 'Heimweh' – a state of elsewhere. Seen in these terms, 'Renaissance' begins to sound dangerously like a great alibi. The narrative commonly associated with this moment of rebirth partakes of the mythical quality of nostalgia, as shown by Jacob Burckhardt's famous passage:

> In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness – that which was turned within as that which was turned without – lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an *objective* treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of this world became possible. The *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual *individual*, and recognized himself as such.[15]

Jason Scott-Warren comments thus:

> What Burckhardt offers us in this hugely influential passage, first published in 1860, is a fairy story. The princess slept for more than a thousand years (the 'Middle Ages'), but eventually she woke up, shook her head free of childish dreams, and assumed her responsibilities. The veil melted away; illusions of communal identity gave way to the truth of individuality, 'spiritual' individuality of a lofty, noble, adult kind.[16]

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[14] Kristine Johanson, "Never a Merry World: The Rhetoric of Nostalgia in Elizabethan England", in *Representations of Elizabeth I in Early Modern Culture*, eds Alessandra Petrina and Laura Tosi, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 210-27: pp. 210-11.

[15] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1890 (2nd edition), p. 129.

[16] Jason Scott-Warren, *Early Modern English Literature*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005, p. 223.

Scott-Warren's rejoinder is timely, but it exposes another huge lexical problem: not the word 'Renaissance', but the locution 'Middle Ages'. In trying to establish a chronology and a sense to our idea of Renaissance, the stumbling block resides exactly with this unwieldy expression. Whether we are thinking of the Middle Ages in terms of the desiccated fossilization evoked by Michelet, or rather with a look at the "bizarre and overcharged forms" and the "worn-out imagination" of the decadent, quasi-Byzantine vision evoked by Johan Huizinga[17], we are faced with a deeply unsatisfying description. We now repudiate definitions such as this:

> The *Dark Ages* is a term applied in its widest sense to that period of intellectual depression in the history of Europe from the establishment of the barbarian supremacy in the fifth century to the revival of learning about the beginning of the fifteenth, thus nearly corresponding in extent with the Middle Ages.[18]

But perhaps we react to the wrong terms. As we eschew the *grand récit* of history as a continuous progress, we look askance at terms such as 'Dark Ages' (together with a host of terms that were in favour at different times over the past three centuries, from 'Barbarous Ages' to 'Leaden Ages', 'Obscure Ages', 'Monkish Ages', 'Muddy Ages' and 'Gothic Period')[19]. We are uncomfortable with the words 'barbarian' or 'depression'. But the real problem is the time span. The Middle Ages are an ungainly "millennium of middleness, a space that serves simply to hold apart the first beginning of antiquity and the Renaissance rebeginning"[20]; tentative divisions into high, middle and low simply underline the trouble we have with it. The temptation to subsume the whole millennium in a swamp of discontent is understandable, and medieval studies, with an objective limitation of documentary

17 Quoted in Tollebeek, p. 358.

18 *The American Cyclopaedia*, 1883-1884, 16 vols, vol. I [1883], p. 186, quoted in Theodor E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'", *Speculum*, 17:2 (1942), pp. 226-42: p. 226.

19 Fred C. Robinson, "*Medieval, the Middle Ages*", *Speculum*, 59:4 (1984), pp. 745-756: p. 749.

20 Lee Patterson, "On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies", *Speculum*, 65 (1990), pp. 87-108: p. 92.

evidence, and with their insistence on codicology, philology, linguistic expertise and utter repudiation of the error, have cooperated in insulating the period in a cocoon of cold unknowability[21]. Yet, if we try approaching the period from its concluding centuries, the 'late' Middle Ages, we may make some interesting discoveries.

In the *American Cyclopaedia* definition quoted above, we react strongly to the term 'Dark Ages', even more than to its almost automatic identification with the Middle Ages. Yet, ultimately we owe this expression to one of the great writers of the Middle Ages, Petrarch. The expression 'Middle Ages' was actually used by medieval writers – from Augustine, who writes "in hoc interim saeculo", to Julian of Toledo, who uses "tempus medium" – to refer to the time between the Incarnation and the Last Judgement[22]. In this sense, our own usage is simply a contraction, a reduction to historical terms of what transcends history. As shown as early as 1942 by Theodor Mommsen, 'Dark Ages' is not simply the battle cry of the moderns, of the Enlightenment, or even of the Renaissance. If the contrast between light and darkness is a staple of Christian allegory, we find it being used with reference to explicitly classical, pre-Christian culture in Petrarch. In his *Apologia contra cuiusdam anonymi Galli calumnias*, probably completed around 1370, Petrarch explicitly borrows the image with reference to the ancient Romans:

> Nullo enim modo diuinarum illis uerum ueritas apparere illis poterat, quibus nondum uerus sol iustitiae illuxerat. Elucebant tamen inter errores ingenia, neque ideo minus uiuaces erant oculi quamuis tenebris et densa caligine circumsepti, ut eis non erranti odium, sed indignae sortis miseratio deberetur.[23]

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21 Thus Patterson in the concluding section, and *pars construens*, of his article.

22 Robinson, p. 749.

23 "In no way could divine truth appear to them, since the true sunlight of justice had not yet illuminated them. Yet amidst the errors there shone forth men of genius, and no less keen were their eyes, although they were surrounded by darkness and dense gloom; therefore they ought not so much to be hated for their erring but pitied for their ill fate". Petrarch, *Apologia contra cuiusdam anonymi Galli calumnias*, in *Opera omnia*, Basel, 1554, p. 1195, quoted in Mommsen, p. 227. My translation is an adaptation of Mommsen's.

Petrarch, as well as a poet, was a proto-humanist in the sense that he was participating in the first attempts at a rediscovery of the classical literary heritage – how great must have been his despair at realizing the loss of probably the greatest part of the ancient Greek and Latin texts, and the impossibility, in the absence of a systematic recovery of the classical Greek language, to approach the surviving texts in anything like equal terms. By looking back at Roman greatness Petrarch does not simply evince a sense of nostalgia, of *ubi sunt*: "To him those ruins evidently bore witness to the time when Rome and the Romans had been great"[24].

What Petrarch draws from his contemplation of the ever-vanishing legacy of the past is a new sense of history: "Quid est enim aliud omnis historia quam Romana laus?"[25]. The Roman past can be a model for the future, rather than simply inspiring nostalgia for the past. Man builds his own future on what he remembers of the greatness of the past; to understand Petrarch's perception of this idea we should look back once more at the origin of the word 'humanist'. It is, so to speak, a pro-active word, indicating active engagement with contemporary society by means of one's learning and rhetorical ability. Thus 'humanist' coincides with 'intellectual', but also with a word loved by late medieval English poets, 'clerk'. Offering his reflections on this role, Petrarch tried to find a meaning for his own time not only in relation with the greatness of the Roman past, but also with the future. As we have seen, Mommsen used these reflections to contend that Petrarch invented 'the Dark Ages'; I would rather suggest he offered new possibilities for the development of man, based on human and not divine history. In his reflections there is a sense of renewal, of rebirth of the past, that can be associated with what we read in some Chaucerian passages:

> For out of olde feldes, as men seyth,
> Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,

[24] Mommsen, p. 233. On this point see also Margaret Bridges, "Writing, Translating and Imagining Italy in the *Polychronicon*", in *Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations in the Later Middle Ages*, eds Michele Campopiano and Helen Fulton, Woodbridge, York Medieval Press, 2018, pp. 8-39: p. 36.

[25] "What else, then, is all history, if not the praise of Rome?" Petrarch, *Apologia contra cuiusdam anonymi Galli calumnias*, in *Opera omnia*, Basel, 1554, p. 1187, quoted and translated in Mommsen, p. 237.

> And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
> Cometh al this newe science that men lere.[26]

What both the Petrarchan and the Chaucerian lines show is a detachment from the model proposed by Jerome in his *Commentaries* and Augustine in his *City of God*: the vernacular poets present a model of universality and continuity in history, within a fundamentally cyclical rhythm superimposed over the cyclical rhythm of nature[27]. Petrarch introduced a new demarcation in history, in which the concept of *declinatio imperii* has a historical valence that parallels and sometimes contradicts the universalizing vision of history centred upon the Incarnation. He proposes a human history in which the Renaissance can be envisaged as the work of man. His reflections on fame and the legacy of classical tradition prompted the inscription of poetry (his own, as well as his forebears' and contemporaries') within the wider structure of human history. This must be negotiated against the Augustinian legacy, in order to understand the evolution of this concept.

In the eleventh book of the *Confessions*, Augustine interrogates himself on the human perception of the past and future: both, he argues, exist in the present, in the here and now. This informs his view of history: the past belongs to human narration and human memory, while the future is in prophecy, premeditation, and in the images created by imagination. Human writing encompasses time. The various faculties of the human mind, in this perspective, exercise control on three modes of time which all exist in the present: in collective terms, if history and national consciousness belong to the 'past of the present', strategy and policy belong to the 'future of the present'[28]. While keeping faith to Augustine's view of time and history, Petrarch also strove to comprehend a development of culture that clamoured to be understood in its own terms, beyond the inescapable reference to the divine plan. The memorial function of history entailed also a never-ending struggle against time. In keeping with Petrarch's vision of himself as a *humanista*, we can inscribe his literary effort within what William

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[26] *The Parliament of Fowls*, ll. 22-25. Quotations from Chaucer are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988.

[27] On this point see Mommsen, p. 238.

[28] Aurelius Augustinus, *Confessioni*, ed. Giorgio Sgargi, Siena, Barbera, 2007, 11.18.23.

Kennedy calls "a shared sense of experience and application, calling and vocation, conveyed through an emergent sense of profession and a still unformed sense of professionalism"[29]. Thus he posited the continuum between the Dark Ages and the Renaissance, by living the former and posing the basis for the latter.

This also means that Petrarch created a feeling of expectation that made the emergence of the golden moment, the rebirth, the turning point, more and more desirable: he proposed an idea of Renaissance that, rather than a turning point, is a tension. In this view the term 'Renaissance' can contain a more articulate meaning: it expresses the long preparation, labour and pain of rebirth, rather than the mere point of arrival. As we look back at his legacy, as we recognize with some amazement the prophetic quality of works such as his *Epistula Posteritati* – in which prophecy is exploited to construct a sense of the role of poetry in history, and to offer indications on the active participation of the intellectual in the progress of history – we also tend to strive and identify that rebirth that he was so eagerly awaiting. A rebirth of which, of course, he was also an element. The problem becomes particularly clear when we think of a possible opposite to the term 'Renaissance': Petrarch of course would posit 'Renaissance' as the opposite of his own 'Dark Ages', but in so doing he contradicted Aristotle's law of non-contradiction – by recognizing the possibility of a renaissance he negated the very darkness of his own age.

It may be posited that this is part of Petrarch's legacy to English poetry. Something analogous to the considerations formulated above happens in the English fifteenth century, in which an insistence on the part of writers on their own dullness has generated a fundamental misreading on the part of modern scholarship, which recent studies have re-discussed; as David Lawton admirably shows, such "dullness" refers to

> the favourite guise in which its poets present themselves: as "lewed", "rude", lacking in "cunnyng", innocent of rhetoric and social savoir-faire, bankrupt in pocket or brain, too young or too old, feeble, foolish and fallen – in a word dull. This is a humility topos of an intensely

[29] William J. Kennedy, *Petrarchism at Work: Contextual Economies in the Age of Shakespeare*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 2016, p. 6.

> specific kind. It owes much to Chaucer, but it is used to a very different end […] to reclaim access to a public world.[30]

The dullness of the poet confronted with the legacy of the past becomes, in fact, a form of leverage to reclaim the role of writing, as shown by the most erudite of English poets, John Lydgate:

> Shortnesse of lyff and foryetlnesse,
> The wit of man dul & ay slidyng,
> Necligence and froward idilnesse, –
> Echon stepmooder to science and konnyng,
> That I dar sey[e]n, nadde be writyng
> Onli ordeyned for our auauntages,
> Ded wer memorie & mynde of passid ages.[31]

What is extraordinary is that these intellectual attitudes were being developed at the time in which intellectuals, from Petrarch to Lydgate, were reacting against a cultural status quo and setting in motion the very forces that would then condemn them as irretrievably retrograde. The very idea that these poets felt the desolation, darkness, dullness of their own times speaks of a teeming restlessness. The vision of scholars such as Michelet, wedded to an image of the Middle Ages as fundamentally dead, and therefore unable to be killed[32], shows us the paradox of the Renaissance.

It is easy to see why, in these vastly changed times, we should react against the use of this word. We can find, I suspect, much more significance in our use of the term 'Renaissance' at different moments of our recent history than in the application of the term to a vague period between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century. The recent and rather peremptory re-acquisition of the term on the part of Greenblatt *et al.* should perhaps be read as a reaction to the feeling of desolate helplessness that gripped us all when we realised that Francis Fukuyama's triumphal end of

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30 David Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century", *ELH*, 54:4 (Winter 1987), pp. 761-99: p. 762.

31 John Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, London, Oxford University Press, 1924, IV.148-54.

32 Tollebeek, p. 357.

history was not the climax of a dream, but the beginning of a nightmare[33]. In the same years in which Fukuyama was conceiving his anti-historicist utopia, the medievalist Lee Patterson was writing a salutary caveat:

> As Paul de Man explained, whenever the cultural imperative of modernity was posited, as, for instance, in the Renaissance or in early-twentieth-century Modernism, it took the form of "a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure". Nor was it simply the immediate past that had to be effaced; historicity itself came under attack. Modernity is the Demanian desire for "the unmediated, free act that knows no past", what Jürgen Habermas calls "a longing for an undefiled, immaculate, and stable present", the Heideggerean condition in which "the self, as a living presence, is in free possession of itself and its actions". And so it must efface all those social determinants that reveal not merely the impossibility of originality but the illusoriness of "the unmediated, free act" per se.[34]

Fundamentally, the impulse is an anti-historicist one.

Equally fraught, in this perspective, is the locution that has come to replace, at least in part, the much-abused 'Renaissance': 'early modern'. Less rewardingly beautiful than 'Renaissance', apparently more neutral, it is possibly equally problematic, if we consider the two terms that compose it one by one: if modernity is a moment of change, how can there be an *early* modernity? To borrow from two Italian poets, 'Renaissance' sounds as if one was saying, with Dante, "Democrito che il mondo a caso pone"[35]; 'early modern' resounds, with Leopardi, of "le magnifiche sorti e progressive"[36], since 'early modern' implicitly equates 'modern' with 'positive' or 'progressive'. Like 'Renaissance', the locution 'early modern' opens itself up to the charge of anti-historicity: modernity as a starting point negates the sense of history as change.

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33 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, Free Press, 1992.

34 Patterson, p. 88.

35 "Democritus, who ascribes the world to chance". Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, IV.136. Text and translation are taken from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey L. Bickersteth, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981.

36 "Our magnificent and progressive destiny". Giacomo Leopardi, *La ginestra*, l. 51 (*Canti*, ed. Giulio Augusto Levi, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1928).

Inevitably, the counterpart of the definition of 'early modern' is a new coinage for the late Middle Ages, 'pre-modern'. Patterson falls prey to understandable irritation when he writes, with reference to these definitions:

> That medieval texts do not figure in these discussions is precisely the point: the Middle Ages is not a subject for discussion but the rejected object, not a prehistory whose shape can be described but the history – historicity itself – that modernity must reject in order to be itself.[37]

If 'Renaissance' presupposes a turning point, 'early modern' presupposes a starting point, an event – of cultural, sociological or political import – that set things going. Both terms express a deeply felt human need, rather than describing a chronological sequence or a factual reality. Once again we turn to those events that may be said to have changed the course of Europe: we can focus on the printing press, praised by Luther with interestingly millenarian language as "God's highest and extremest act of grace [...] the last flame before the extinction of the world"[38], on the Reformation, on the rise and establishment of the universities, on the rise of a middle class that becomes stronger and stronger in the cities as a reaction to the emptying of the countryside after the plague in the fourteenth century. None of these things 'started': they were found to be needed at that time, their combination was necessary and unique. We are still faced with the impossibility of linking any of these phenomena to one specific time, but we also begin to see patterns of analogy that allow us to identify a long turning movement, rather than a turning point. We find that the swerve, the idea of the turning point, creates a facile, attractive but perhaps banal narrative. So perhaps we should change our metaphors, use less mechanical and inorganic ones. The image I would like to use at this point is very far from the swerve, and it is borrowed from a novella Salman Rushdie wrote in 1990, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*:

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37 Patterson, p. 99.

38 Quoted in Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 304.

> He looked into the water and saw that it was made up of a thousand thousand thousand and one different currents, each one a different colour, weaving in and out of one another like a liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity; and Iff explained that these were the Streams of Story, that each coloured strand represented and contained a single tale. Different parts of the Ocean contained different sorts of stories, and as all the stories that had ever been told and many that were still in the process of being invented could be found here, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was in fact the biggest library in the universe.[39]

This, I believe, is the flexible and organic model we should work on, and it suits also a different approach to the writers we are concerned with. We can see this constant crossing of currents in this (semi-random) collection of poetic fragments from different times, places, and languages, all focusing on the paradoxical feeling of love:

> The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
> Th'assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,
> The dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne:
> Al this mene I by Love, that my felynge
> Astonyeth with his wonderful werkynge
> So sore, iwis, that whan I on hym thynke
> Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke.[40]

> For thee, against myself, I'll vow debate;
> For I must ne'er love him whom thou dost hate.[41]

> Odi et amo. Quare id faciam, fortasse requiris.
> Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.[42]

> If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
> And if love is, what thing and which is he?
> If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?
> If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,

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39 Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, London, Granta, 1990, pp. 71-72.

40 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, ll. 1-7.

41 William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 89*, ll. 13-14 (*The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002).

42 "I hate and I love. Why do I do it, you might ask? I don't know, but I feel it happening, and I'm burning". Catullus, *Poem 85* (*Catullus: The Shorter Poems*, ed. and trans. John Godwin, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1999).

> When every torment and adversite
> That cometh of hym may to me savory thinke,
> For ay thurst I, the more that ich it drynke.[43]
>
> My spirites / laboured bisily
> To peynte contenance / cheere and look
> For that men speke of me / so wondryngly;
> And for the verray shame / and fere I qwook.
> Thogh myn herte had be / dippid in the brook
> It weet and moist ynow was / of my swoot,
> Which was now frosty cold / now fyry hoot.[44]
>
> E tremo a mezza state, ardendo il verno.[45]

The examples are of course not completely random, as they tend to underline the continuity between the 'waning of the Middle Ages' and the 'flourishing of the Renaissance' in England – an autumn and a spring which seem to have known very little winter in between. Such continuity can also be identified in more theoretical terms. A wonderful case in this sense has been made by Helen Cooper in her inaugural lecture, *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, delivered upon the occasion of her becoming Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at the University of Cambridge in 2005:

> It is worrying enough that we can so easily practise the doublethink that at once condemns the Middle Ages for their lack of technological advance even while we marvel at the great cathedrals; but at least cathedrals are visibly medieval, whereas that other great technological wonder, the mechanical clock, is just too familiar to see at all, though its invention in the fourteenth century had colossal implications for the secularisation and commodification of time – for our modern understanding of time, in fact.[46]

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43 Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I.400-6.

44 Thomas Hoccleve, *Complaint*, ll. 148-54 (*Thomas Hoccleve's Complaint and Dialogue*, ed. John A. Burrow, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).

45 "And I shiver in midsummer, burning in winter". Francesco Petrarca, *Sonetto 132* (*Canzoniere*, eds Paola Vecchi Galli and Stefano Cremonini, Milano, Rizzoli, 2012).

46 Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the University of Cambridge, 29 April 2005*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 6.

Cooper mentions a number of other instances, from common law to the universities, from parliamentary democracy to the alphabetical index, to the European vernaculars, before moving to more strictly literary matters. Her point is that much of the wonder of the Renaissance is based upon the medieval foundational thinking, a slow and powerful elaboration that has indeed caused a radical reversal in European cultural approaches to reality, politics, time, education, writing.

When René Descartes formulated his "cogito, ergo sum", his friends were quick to point out that he was eleven centuries late: the sense of subjecthood had already been formulated by Augustine[47]. This has also literary implications: as we turn to the inner life, Neil Corcoran reminds us that

> [t]he word *soliloquium* was first used by Augustine in his *Liber Soliloquiorum* (*Book of Soliloquies*) in the fourth century AD, which was freely translated into Old English under Alfred in the ninth century. In Augustine, however, the word means not 'speaking alone', but entering into a particular kind of dialogue – between the soul and God, for instance, or between different faculties of the mind itself, such as the reason and will.[48]

This article was born of a talk given during a celebration of the journal *Memoria di Shakespeare*. When *Memoria di Shakespeare* took a new lease of life, in 2014, the first volume of the new series was introduced by an editorial, by Rosy Colombo and Nadia Fusini, re-proposing questions that we have been struggling with for quite a few decades. Provocatively, Fusini opened the issue with a question to be asked to "our friends, philosophers by profession":

> "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". 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

47 Cooper, p. 9.

48 Neil Corcoran, *Reading Shakespeare's Soliloquies: Text, Theatre, Film*, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 57.

> our philosopher friends if, in order to think, they *must* go to Shakespeare. Or whether they *can* think without Shakespeare.[49]

Bloom's point was meant to reassure us rather than Shakespeare. But scholars have the duty of eschewing facile answers and, perhaps even more so, facile questions. In terms of the philosophy of the individual, it may be argued that Boethius, whether via Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* or simply in and of himself, exercised a greater influence on Shakespeare than did Thomas More. The struggle of identity and desire, formalised by Augustine in his proposed dichotomy between *cupiditas* and *caritas*, may be linked back to Sappho or Catullus – only, in the case of some classical poets our sources are scarce and limited to lyrical fragments, without the systematic philosophical discussion that we find in the Middle Ages, and without the corollary offered by the huge courtly tradition. In our exploration of the invention of the self in Western thought we have a watershed: the sacrament of confession, discussed in the New Testament but formalised as early as the fifth century, with the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 establishing that every Christian should confess at least once a year. One can see the offshoots of this practice in texts as diverse as Augustine's *Confessions*, Petrarch's *Secretum*, *The Book of Margery Kempe* or Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. So, in terms of Shakespeare in his own time, the question is simplistic.

However, Harold Bloom's question puts emphasis on the reading subject, that is, on us reading Shakespeare, not on Shakespeare as the object of reading. As Scott-Warren has perceptively written, "this narrative is suspect because it places 'us' […] in the position of history's heroes"[50]. We need reassurance; we need to find our new centre: a position that is curiously Ptolemaic. It is as if the Copernican revolution required us to find a new centre no longer in the universe, but in ourselves, as Luigi Pirandello shows us in his *Il fu Mattia Pascal*:

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[49] Nadia Fusini, "Myriad-minded Shakespeare", in *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies*, 1 (2014), pp. 7-20: pp. 7-8. The quotation is taken from Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, London, Fourth Estate, 1999, pp. xvii-xviii.

[50] Scott-Warren, p. 225.

> *Maledetto sia Copernico!*
> – Oh oh oh, che c'entra Copernico! – esclama don Eligio […]
> – C'entra, don Eligio. Perché, quando la Terra non girava…
> – E dàlli! Ma se ha sempre girato!
> – Non è vero. L'uomo non lo sapeva, e dunque era come se non girasse. Per tanti, anche adesso non gira. L'ho detto l'altro giorno a un vecchio contadino, e sapete come m'ha risposto? ch'era una buona scusa per gli ubriachi. Del resto, anche voi scusate, non potete mettere in dubbio che Giosuè fermò il Sole. Ma lasciamo star questo. Io dico che quando la Terra non girava, e l'uomo, vestito da greco o da romano, vi faceva così bella figura e così altamente sentiva di sé e tanto si compiaceva della propria dignità, credo bene che potesse riuscire accetta una narrazione minuta e piena d'oziosi particolari. Si legge o non si legge in Quintiliano, come voi m'avete insegnato, che la storia doveva essere fatta per raccontare e non per provare?[51]

Medieval texts like *The Peterborough Chronicle* could testify to the exactness of Pirandello's intuition: if man is already assured of his place at the centre of the universe, then he will simply want to tell his story, not to use it as proof. Our twenty-first-century search for a Renaissance exposes a very twenty-first century need for the justification of our own existence.

[51] "*A curse on Copernicus!* 'Now, now', Don Eligio exclaims […] 'what has Copernicus got to do with it?' 'More than you realize; for, in the days before the earth began to go round the sun…' 'There you go again! It always did go round the sun!' 'Not at all. No one knew it did; so, to all intents and purposes, it might as well have been sitting still. Plenty of people don't admit it even now. I mentioned it to an old peasant the other day, and do you know what he said? "That's a good excuse when you're drunk!" Even you dare not doubt that Joshua stopped the sun. But that's neither here nor there. I was saying that when the Earth stood still, and man, dressed as a Greek or Roman, had a reason for thinking himself the most important thing in all creation, there was some justification for writing a detailed and rambling narrative. Doesn't Quintilian say, as you taught me, that history is made for telling, and not for proof?'" Luigi Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, in *Tutti i romanzi*, ed. Giovanni Macchia, Milano, Mondadori, 1973, 2 vols, vol. I, p. 322.

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'False Latin', Double Dutch: Foreign and Domestic in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday*

Rui Carvalho Homem

This paper offers a discussion of linguistic diversity as a source of laughter in two early modern English comedies, Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* and Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. When read together, the two plays provide a case in point for the bonds between languages and perceived identities in early modern cultures. Indeed, in both texts particular verbal practices carry a potential for laughter that relates closely to the playwrights' dramatisation of tensions between a sense of the foreign and an assertive vernacular Englishness; but I want to suggest that the two comedies construe those tensions in revealingly different ways.

The plays are almost exactly contemporaneous – Shakespeare's comedy probably first performed in 1597 and first published the following year; Dekker's with a first performance also in the late 1590s and a Quarto publication in 1600. In broad terms, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday* emerge from a moment in

European cultural and political history that proved crucial for the development of commonplace perceptions of national identities, a historical process that has obtained significant attention within imagology (or 'image studies'). Indeed, as pointed out by Joep Leerssen,

> [i]n the course of the late sixteenth century and the seventeenth century, a systematization took shape in European attitudes toward nationality, whereby character traits and psychological dispositions were distributed in a fixed division among various 'nations'.[1]

The ensuing perceptions became a standard, mostly unchallenged dimension of European cultures in their auto- and hetero-images for at least two centuries[2] – and this on the basis of a "binary relationship" through which "one nation's view of the character of another provides an insight into its own self-estimate as well"[3]. The historical rise of vernaculars was a key element in this delineation of a system of national representations, even when it occurred long before the claims of linguistic legitimation that two centuries later, in the age of Romanticism, were to mark dominant perceptions of national identity.

When viewed from the standpoint of the sceptical, anti-essentialist discourses on self and community that have conceptually prevailed in recent intellectual and political frameworks, those early modern developments carry a particular fascination – to the extent that they validate arguments for the constructed nature of national profiles. As described by Leerssen (in a more recent study than the essay quoted above), national

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1 Joep Leerssen, "The Rhetoric of National Character: A Programmatic Survey", *Poetics Today*, 21:2 (Summer 2000), pp. 267-92: p. 272.

2 Indeed, "[t]he informal, anecdotal belief in different national characters formed the unquestioned cognitive ambience of cultural criticism and reflection until the late eighteenth century" (Joep Leerssen, "Imagology: History and Method", in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*, eds Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2007, pp. 17-32: p. 17).

3 A. J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: A Study of Stage Characters and National Identity in English Renaissance Drama, 1558-1642*, London-Toronto, Associated University Presses, 1992, p. 15.

images tended to confirm the normative assumptions of the culture that generated them, which proves decisive for an understanding of the significance of notions of national identity – including its linguistic manifestations – in early modern cultures:

> The default value of humans' contacts with different cultures seems to have been ethnocentric, in that anything that deviated from accustomed domestic patterns is 'Othered' as an oddity, an anomaly, a singularity. Such ethnocentric registrations of cultural difference have tended to stratify into a notion that, like persons, different nations each have their specific peculiarities and 'character'.[4]

Concomitantly and by necessity, national images are found to be relational in their structure – since "national characterizations take place in a polarity between self and Other"[5]. As argued below, the risibility and hence dramatic effectiveness of the verbal practices to be considered indeed find a defining and ever-confirmed principle in their relationality.

The rise of this interest in the construction of identities as relational processes roughly overlaps, in recent academic history, with the disciplinary delineation of translation studies, which involved a dominant focus on intercultural processes. Edwin Gentzler has stressed this point, by recollecting how "translation studies […] took the 'cultural turn'"[6] in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period that proved indeed foundational for this area of inquiry (as construed since); and the discipline then came of age pointedly by developing the claim that "the study of translation *is* the study of cultural interaction"[7]. This equation further boosted the case for translation, in the intellectual environment of the 1990s, by proving to be reversible, as in an often cited remark by Wolfgang Iser: "cross-cultural relations seem to be guided by a great many different intentions – all of which, however, appear to be modes of

4 Leerssen, "Imagology", p. 17.

5 Leerssen, "The Rhetoric of National Character", p. 271.

6 Edwin Gentzler, "Foreword", in Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1998, pp. ix-xxii: p. xi.

7 Gentzler, p. ix.

translation […]. Thus translatability turns out to be the hallmark of any cross-cultural interchange"[8].

A conceptual framework grounded on these foundational arguments, instrumental as they have been both for translation and comparative studies, can prove critically productive for confronting the challenges posed by *Love's Labour's Lost*[9]. This comedy has enjoyed an uncertain reputation, both with readers and audiences, that has directly reflected the rich complexities of its language. The play's puns and 'tricks with words' have long been the object of studies that, in earlier stages of its reception, earned it such diagnoses as "a youthful debauch of the poet in word-plays"[10]. Indeed, an attraction to the play's verbal vitality has historically coexisted with dismissive pronouncements on its supposed pedantry, which, in the early nineteenth century, obtained the following from Hazlitt: "If we were to part with any of the author's comedies, it should be this"[11]. From the late twentieth century, however, there has been a marked recovery in the play's critical and theatrical favour, and this has centred precisely on its "verbal virtuosity"[12] or rather the extent to which, "[i]n our image-oriented era, *Love's Labour's Lost* refreshingly challenges our verbal skills", offering "the modern theatregoer" a gratification that will not require him/her to "understand every word or all the puns in this play"[13]. In sum, at a moment in history (ours) that has witnessed so many challenges to the notion that language can transparently appropriate and convey the real, verbal practices that another era

8 Wolfgang Iser, "On Translatability: Variables of Interpretation", *The European English Messenger*, 4:1 (Spring 1995), pp. 30-38: p. 31.

9 The paragraphs below revisit and update some of the critical points made in my earlier and more extensive discussion of the play in "The Feast and the Scraps: Translating *Love's Labour's Lost* into Portuguese", in *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*, ed. Ton Hoenselaars, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2004, rev. edition 2012, pp. 114-29.

10 Thomas R. Price, "Shakespeare's Word-Play and Puns: *Love's Labour's Lost*" (1889), in *Love's Labour's Lost: Critical Essays*, ed. Felicia Hardison Londré, New York-London, Routledge, 2001, pp. 71-76: p. 71.

11 William Hazlitt, *"The Round Table" and "Characters of Shakespear's Plays"*, ed. P. P. Howe, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, eds P. P. Howe, A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, London-Toronto, Dent, 1930-1934, 21 vols, vol. IV [1930], p. 332.

12 William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, ed. John Kerrigan, London, Penguin, 1982, p. 7.

13 Londré, ed., p. 4.

might have dismissed as empty verve are bound to appear as mere corroboration that language cannot but refer to itself; and this process of self-reference can be accepted and indeed cherished as a source of uncomplicated enjoyment.

A highly elaborate use of language is the play's key source of literary and theatrical enjoyment, operating at two culturally distinct but concomitant levels. On the one hand, *Love's Labour's Lost* draws on the legacy of the classics, central as it was to Renaissance literary culture, largely to offer a satirical view of its significance in education through the figure of the schoolmaster as pedant, a long-lived comic type. On the other, this comedy plays several European vernaculars against one another, a set of antagonisms that also involves the national stereotypes associated with the languages in question. Dialogues in English, which seize opportunities for laughter afforded by English language and culture, are thus deployed in the characterisation of royals and noblemen with French names, as they move about a nominal court of Navarre; while this aristocratic setting also hosts a Spanish knight who stems, within the dramatic fiction, from the battlefields – but probably also from Italian comedy, when one probes the lines of theatrical descent that *Love's Labour's Lost* explores.

Throughout the play, a perception that the foreign is inevitably risible proves fundamental for cultural and linguistic diversity to retain its confrontational capacity – or, in other terms, to activate that "binary relationship" through which "one nation's view of the character of another provides an insight into its own self-estimate as well"[14]. As suggested above, this process extends beyond the various vernaculars that make up the play's linguistic range, since the text is rife in Latinisms and a mock-learned, sometimes abstruse English lexicon of classical descent. This crucially defines Holofernes, the schoolmaster who ravenously attends the play's "great feast of languages" but is ultimately left with only "the scraps" (V.i.35-36), and the orotund Don Adriano de Armado, the Spanish braggart who boasts his way through life with "high-born words" (I.i.170)[15].

[14] Hoenselaars, p. 15.

[15] All passages from the play will be quoted from the Arden Shakespeare Third Series edition, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen, 1998.

Armado indeed offers the play's earliest instances of a remote Latinate vocabulary punctuating the vernacular. Examples of this include his comment on the phrase "tender juvenal" as "a congruent epitheton" (I.ii.13-14)[16] for the young page Moth; or in his lexical choice, when referring to the tip given to Costard, the clown, of the resonant "remuneration" (III.i.128) – an occurrence that the dialogue then risibly explores. Additional opportunities for humour arise from an over-elaborate syntax that boasts classical erudition, as in some of Holofernes's postpositive constructions: "A soul feminine saluteth us" (IV.ii.78-79), says the schoolmaster on Jaquenetta's entry. This is compounded by the character's ostentatious Latin glosses, fundamental for the authority he claims, in several lines from Act IV, scene ii: "*sanguis*, in blood" (3-4), "on the face of *terra*, the soil, the land, the earth" (6-7), "to Luna, to the moon" (39).

It is with Armado, however, that the risible potential of linguistic difference converges with the dramatic power of cultural stereotypes. On the one hand, he embodies the 'proud' Spaniard, a stereotype that at the close of the sixteenth century was developing towards its later culmination in the 'black legend' of a nefarious Spanishness[17]. On the other, he stands for a rather indistinct cultural and linguistic southernness as contemplated from the playwright's northern European location. A case in point is provided by a lexical particularity in his reference to "my excrement, […] my *mustachio*" (V.i.96-97, my emphasis). The 'i' in its standard anglicized spelling (to be found in the 1623 First Folio edition) flags the word's derivation from Italian *mostacchio* or *mustachio*; against this, however, the single rather than double consonant (the latter, in the Italian form, indicates the hard 'c' or velar stop consonant [k]) hints at a pronunciation closer to Spanish *mostacho* (since the nearly homophonous Italian form *mostaccio* refers to a snout, rather than a moustache). To complicate matters further, the spelling "mustachio" in the 1598 Quarto edition may indicate a corrupt form of the French *moustache*.

16 The form "epitheton", adopted in most modern editions, first appears in the 1632 Second Folio in lieu of the 1598 Quarto's "apethaton" and of the First Folio's "apathaton".

17 See Hoenselaars, p. 17.

Incidental though it may seem, 'mustachio' is one of a range of words in *Love's Labour's Lost* the origins of which highlight the uncertainties surrounding this character. Indeed, Armado boasts his Spanishness but has found his home in a French-speaking royal court, while he may also (through the dramatic lineage of the *miles gloriosus* or braggart soldier of Latin New Comedy, as reworked in the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*) embody one of Shakespeare's many debts to Italian culture. After all, as noted by Keir Elam, Italy is no less than "a source of sources, or a metasource for Shakespearean drama"[18], regularly representing a generic foreignness and the attractions of an intra-European exoticism.

Characterisation and lexis thus construe a rather motley southernness or Mediterraneanness throughout *Love's Labour's Lost*. Such traits could not contrast more starkly with the manner in which a London setting is played off against a nominal foreign presence and language in Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, the cultural geography of which is firmly centred on the North Sea. The play is a quasi-emblematic example of city comedy, a phrase that (as is well known) at base level refers to plots that find their location in London – vis-à-vis those comedies (prominent among which Shakespeare's) the plots of which are set in courtly or otherwise socially rarefied locations primarily associated with the Romance languages[19]. Against this, Dekker's comedy involves the City, a traditional craft (shoemaking) and a neighbourly, quasi-homebred foreignness in the form of Dutchmen – one of them a 'real' (within the dramatic fiction) but rather incidental Dutch sea

[18] A phrase employed in *"Vail your stomachs": Self-restraint in Fruitful Lombardy*, a lecture given at the *VII World Shakespeare Congress: Shakespeare and the Mediterranean*, Valencia, April 2001.

[19] Robert Shaughnessy, to whose edition of the play all quotations below will refer, offers a concise reminder of this long-established perception by noting that "the social milieu" of Shakespeare's comedies "is primarily aristocratic rather than bourgeois, its geographical setting fabled or romantically foreign […] rather than localised, its general tenor rural and pastoral rather than civic" (*Four Renaissance Comedies*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. xviii). For a relatively recent critical reassessment of the role of language in defining the sub-genre city comedy, with a special focus on the centrality of "the English vernacular" to "plays that regularly stage the city precisely as language or languages", see Heather Easterling, *Parsing the City: Jonson, Middleton, Dekker, and City Comedy's London as Language*, New York-London, Routledge, 2007, p. 1 and *passim*.

captain; the other a fake Dutchman, the disguise taken on by a young English nobleman, Lacy.

The main plot is relatively simple: Lacy, nephew to the Earl of Lincoln, and Rose, the Lord Mayor's daughter, are in love and mean to get married, but face the opposition of Lincoln and the Mayor, who separately find such social intermarriage detrimental to their interests. Lacy's uncle decides to dispatch him to the wars in France (the play is set roughly at the time of the final stretch of the Hundred Years' War). Lacy, enabled by a prior experience with 'the gentle craft' (as shoemaking is described), circumvents his uncle's decision and, disguised as a Dutch shoemaker, seeks and obtains employment in the shop of Simon Eyre – the name, indeed, of a historical Master Shoemaker who rose from the ranks of ordinary craftsmen to become Lord Mayor. The lovers manage to get married in secret and, immediately after, obtain royal support for their union, overcoming last-minute opposition from their relatives – their success coinciding with Eyre's rise to his new position, through which he replaces Rose's father.

Fundamentally for my argument, this love plot, and its parallel didactic tale of middle-class mercantile merit rewarded by upward social mobility, is enveloped and indeed aided by the Dutch connection, largely signified through language. The play found its source in the stories of shoemakers that Thomas Deloney had published as *The Gentle Craft* (1597). Dekker, himself probably of Dutch origin[20], duly noted that Deloney's narrative about Simon Eyre drew on mock versions of several foreign languages – that fascination with 'mixing languages' that made macaronics a prominent strand in early modern cultures of laughter[21] – but chose to reduce it to Dutch. Together with other features of the play, Dekker's use of Dutch matters less for the degree of its

[20] Lawrence Manley, "London and Urban Popular Culture", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, eds Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock and Abigail Shinn, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014, pp. 357-71: p. 369; Christopher Joby, *The Dutch Language in Britain (1550-1702): A Social History of the Use of Dutch in Early Modern Britain*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2015, pp. 316-17.

[21] Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 111, 133-38.

'authenticity'[22] than for its dramatic effectiveness. This ranges from the element of wordplay in references to "the Netherlands" and "the Low Countries", which prompt Marjorie Rubright to claim that "to speak of things 'Dutch' in early modern English was almost always to traffic in double meaning"[23], to a broad acceptance that the urban space could thrive on cultural and linguistic mingling. At its most general, Dekker's use of the language and stereotypical traits of England's neighbours from across the North Sea shows him aware of the dramatic potential in the ambivalence that marked Anglo-Dutch perceptions:

> The Dutch occupied a particularly conflicted place in the English imagination throughout the period as both co-religionists and economic rivals. As fellow Protestants facing a common enemy in Catholic Spain, the Dutch might expect English sympathy but as maritime traders increasingly competing for the same markets, sporadic hostility would develop into outright enmity and warfare in the succeeding century.[24]

The socio-dramatic implications of the use of Dutch – or, rather, stage Dutch – come to the fore in sections of the dialogue that thrive on wordplay, arising from a risible rapport between foreign and vernacular. The mock foreignness of such passages is of a kind that, rather than creating remoteness and othering the characters, bridges the gap between same and other. Paradoxically, the 'foreign' here confirms the sturdiness of domestic values – since it turns out to be eminently recognisable, the intriguing quirkiness of a close relation, rather than the insurmountable, quasi-adversarial difference of an outright stranger. Dutch, a language from the same latitude as the play's setting, a language that arrives in England from just across the North Sea, proves ideal for this confirmation –

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22 As approached, for example, in Christopher Joby's discussion of Dekker's contacts, experience and (possibly) real-life dialogues as sources for his Dutch in this as in other plays (Joby, pp. 320-23).

23 Marjorie Rubright, *Doppelgänger Dilemmas: Anglo-Dutch Relations in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, p. 2.

24 Matthew Birchwood and Matthew Dimmock, "Popular Xenophobia", in Hadfield, Dimmock and Shinn, eds, pp. 207-20: p. 212.

as if the descent into shared Germanic, rather than Latinate, roots entailed a reassuring and entrenched sameness.

This is all the more striking because, in its general contours and implications, foreignness is far from celebrated, or even positively represented in the play[25]. One of the first occurrences of a phrase in another language in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* involves an obscene epithet for the French (the enemy, unsurprisingly), when a newly conscripted soldier is encouraged to "[f]or my sake, firk the *basa mon cues* [i.e. *baisez-mon-culs*]" (i.215-16); and later, when the same soldier returns wounded in his leg, the stereotypical connection between France and venereal disease prompts the remark: "The left leg is not well; 'twas a fair gift of God the infirmity took not hold a little higher, considering thou camest from France" (x.61-63). More broadly, an urge to travel and see the world becomes associated, in an early stretch of dialogue, with dissipation and profligate behaviour, when the Earl of Lincoln recalls that his nephew

> requested
> To travel countries for experience.
> I furnished him with coin, bills of exchange,
> Letters of credit, men to wait on him;
> Solicited my friends in Italy
> Well to respect him. But, to see the end,
> Scant had he journeyed through half Germany
> But all his coin was spent, his men cast off,
> His bills embezzled. (i.19-27)

This edifying tale of a prodigal includes, however, redemption – which significantly came not from a patron's munificence but from the earnings afforded by humble work. No less tellingly, the

[25] I differ, in this regard, from Marianne Montgomery when she claims that "*The Shoemaker's Holiday* acknowledges and even celebrates England's openness to linguistic and commercial influences from abroad" (Marianne Montgomery, "Speaking the Language, Knowing the Trade: Foreign Speech and Commercial Opportunity in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*", in *The Mysterious and the Foreign in Early Modern England*, eds Helen Ostovich, Mary V. Silcox and Graham Roebuck, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2008, pp. 139-49: p. 140): as shown below, the treatment given to France and the French language, and the links between Italy, dissipation, and 'Romish' commodities, entail that cultural and linguistic foreignness is here markedly diverse in the representations it obtains.

redemptive environment is not that of Italy (Lacy's desired destination), but rather the northern, Germanic context of an honest craft, learned and practised in a city with a set of earnest historical and confessional associations:

> and my jolly coz,
> Ashamed to show his bankrupt presence here,
> Became a shoemaker in Wittenberg. (i.27-29)

This is the experience through which Lacy regenerates himself socially and economically, while learning the skills (a craft *and* a language) that allow him convincingly to adopt the disguise that will bring him success in his love pursuits. As pointed out by Marianne Montgomery with regard to the blurred relationship between Dutch and the German venue of Lacy's redemption, "the geographical identity of the Netherlands was in flux during the wars with Spain", and, linguistically, "the distinction between early modern German and Dutch would not be easy for Dekker's audience to hear"[26]. Dramatically, what matters is that being able to speak Dutch – or be perceived as speaking Dutch – allows Lacy to sound foreign while yet making himself understood. And to this one should add, from a perspective afforded by historical linguistics, that all the characters in the play are speaking variants of the same language, 'Low German'; as glossed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this includes all "those forms of German that are not High German; = PLATTDEUTSCH *n*. Also more widely: West Germanic dialects other than High German (including, e.g., English, Dutch, and Frisian)"[27].

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[26] Montgomery, p. 145.

[27] "Low German, *n.* and *adj.*", *OED* Online, https://www-oed-com.chain.kent.ac.uk/view/Entry/291888?redirectedFrom=low+german (accessed on 21 September 2019). In her discussion of historical 'contact' between English, German and Dutch, Jennifer Hendriks ponders the terminological/conceptual complexities that envelop her topic, and favours the use of "the label *Low Dutch* […] to refer collectively to Flemish, Dutch, Frisian, and Low German" (Jennifer Hendriks, "English in Contact: German and Dutch", in *English Historical Linguistics: An International Handbook*, eds Alexander Bergs and Laurel J. Brinton, Berlin-Boston, Walter De Gruyter, 2012, 2 vols, vol. II, pp. 1659-70: p. 1661). Her discussion of a variety of scholarly sources also suggests that early modern conditions include the development of a previously non-existent differentiation, since "[f]or the Middle

Functionally, as regards Dekker's construction of his plot, Lacy's command of the language also facilitates this character's complicity with the Dutch sea captain whose cargo brings additional prosperity to Simon Eyre in his rise to presiding over the City:

> LACY
> *Godden day, mester; dis be de skipper dat heb skip van marchandise; de commodity ben good*.
> […]
> FIRK
> To him, master: O sweet, master! O sweet wares, prunes, almonds, sugar-candy, carrot roots, turnips! O brave fatting meat.
> (vii.113-21)

Lacy's stage Dutch thus mingles with and slides into English, generating a medium of blurred contours that seems just right for that concomitance of stage and commercial business that appears to have always fascinated Dekker[28]. This shared vernacular ensures an emplaced mercantile affluence – rather than the displacement and profligacy associated with languages thoroughly perceived and represented as alien. The ease with which that linguistic commuting happens prevents the foreign code from fully activating an oppositional nexus vis-à-vis the domestic, operating rather as a variant that domesticates the foreign.

Lacy's first appearance in disguise entails, at every level, a sense of the domestic and homely – even of the rustic. The stage direction describing Lacy's entrance "*like a Dutch shoemaker*" suggests (as argued in Eugene Giddens's notes to James Knowles's edition) that he would be wearing the garment known as a "great Dutch slop"[29], slops or baggy breeches operating as the exact – and dramatically relevant – opposite to an elegant streamlined foppishness, associated with French or Italian fashion; indeed, and as regards

English period" it would be futile to try and "make the distinction between words from Low German dialects and English due to their close resemblance" (Hendriks, p. 1660).

28 Mark Netzloff, "Work", in Hadfield, Dimmock and Shinn, eds, pp. 163-77: p. 174.

29 Thomas Dekker, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, in *The Roaring Girl and Other City Comedies*, with an introduction by James Knowles, notes and glossary by Eugene Giddens, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 315.

the latter, much earlier in the play Rose refers to her "Romish gloves" (ii.54) as a sophisticated item, using a synonym for Italian that equated it with Catholicism – exacerbating a sense of the foreignness as alien on all fronts. In this light, it is fitting that Lacy should enter singing of peasants – literally, "boors" – and drunken frolics, explicitly bringing an uncouth boisterousness into close association with that reassuring sense of the vernacular which the play ultimately celebrates:

> *Enter Lacy singing.*
> LACY
> *Der was een bore van Gelderland,*
> *Frolic si byen,*
> *He was als dronck he cold nyet stand,*
> *Upsolce se byen,*
> *Tap eens de canneken,*
> *Drincke, schone mannekin.*[30] (iv.35-40)

In its dramatic consequence, this instance of the other comfortably recognized as the same does not assist that satirical rejection which other forms and representations of foreignness might obtain. On the contrary, it prompts in one of Eyre's journeymen the wish to learn languages – one of the clearest manifestations, after all, of an interest in reaching out to elsewheres and communicating with others: "He's some uplandish workman; hire him, good master, that I may learn some gibble-gabble" (iv.42-44).

The particular difference that Lacy embodies is so much at home in the world of the City that it goes together with material success – rather than with the notions of waste and dissipation that otherwise foreignness would seem to conjure. Even more revealingly, a later passage suggests the erotic potential carried by such difference. Indeed, Eyre's wife admits to feeling aroused by news of her imminent upward mobility, in a passage that opens with her journeyman Firk citing Lacy's mock Dutch:

[30] "There was a boor from Gelderland / Merry they are / He was so drunk he could not stand / Drunk they all are / Fill up the little mug / Drink, fine little lad".

> FIRK
> Yaw heb veale ge drunck[31], quoth 'a! […] But come, dame, I hope you'll chide us no more.
> WIFE
> No, faith, Firk; no, perdie, Hodge; I do feel honour creep upon me, and which is more, a certain rising in my flesh. (vii.128-32)

As argued above, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday* partake in an ambivalent construction of the foreign as a source of misgivings that inspire both fear and laughter. This construction prominently includes language, as offering primary evidence of a dual, perplexing mechanism: the primary resource for communication can also be a primary site of failed communication, or at best of misunderstanding – in some cases explored as dramatically creative misunderstanding. The resulting expressive possibilities are enhanced both by the generic characteristics of drama, and by defining conditions of the period in question.

The two plays process the tension between domestic and foreign, however, in starkly different ways. In Shakespeare's comedy, a sense of the English vernacular is variously mediated, since, within the dramatic fiction, the setting is aristocratic and foreign, and French is the language nominally spoken by the motley gallery of characters of this English play – punctuated by an incidental lexicon from other Romance languages. None of the characters in *Love's Labour's Lost* emerge as normative, since the playwright's handling of their risible traits, largely brought out through their use of language, keeps them (albeit to varying degrees) at a satirically managed emotional and judicative distance, down to a famously *deferred* happy ending. In Dekker's play, however, a vindication of the English urban, bourgeois and mercantile setting, and of the English language, is central to the comic structure in its development towards an unequivocal happy ending. This is achieved, though, through the construction of a partly fake foreignness, linguistically manifested as the stage Dutch spoken by an English character in disguise. This medium is framed as different enough for it to become an enabling foil for the Englishness of the host environment – and similar enough for it to

31 "You have drunk too much".

collude with that Englishness in a sense of reassuring sameness, around shared Germanic roots.

While it is true that, in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, "Dekker […] causally *links* the comic and the commercial by representing the economic opportunities made possible by comic foreign speech"[32], foreignness is not celebrated per se, remaining plural in its dramatic and cultural processing. Indeed, Southern European cultures and the world of the Romance languages retain their value in the play as traditional satirical butts, and as enabling counterparts for the commonality into which the play's equivocal Dutchness is welcomed. Further, it would prove reductive (and critically unhelpful) to set *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday* against each other as examples of the risible processing of difference respectively through courtly and popular cultures: after all, Lacy is an English nobleman, though happy enough to go Dutch and integrate a middle-class mercantile culture. Unequivocally, though, the two plays share a common origin and set of attractions by emerging from that formative moment in European history when cultures sought definition through the mutuality of their perceived identities – and their languages.

[32] Montgomery, p. 139.

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Selected Publications in Shakespeare Studies

Continisio, Tommaso and Del Villano, Bianca, eds, *Queens on Stage: Female Sovereignty, Power and Sexuality in Early Modern English Theatre*, Canterano, Aracne, 2018, 201 pp.

One of the many strengths of this volume can be found in its very title. Rather than using the category of "queenship", or an Elizabeth I-centred "Staging the Queen", the editors opt for the plural "Queens", thus signalling the collection's praiseworthy emphasis on the multiple intricacies and complex variety of its subject matter. The contributors' essays themselves live up to both the title and subtitle, exploring from diverse perspectives the shifting, often ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory dynamics of power and sexuality involving early modern English theatrical queens both real and fictional. While they reach a general consensus that the gender politics of a male-privileging patriarchal society placed extraordinary pressures and limitations on female sovereigns, the authors convincingly demonstrate that the staging of charismatic, eloquent, and self-assertive queens could follow a wide range of paths, disallowing any single, dominant cultural or aesthetic interpretation, and opening up instead multiple possibilities for future research and analysis. In keeping with this same laudable favouring of plurality, the collection does not – as is too often the case – give precedence to Shakespeare, but places studies of his plays amidst ones focusing on Marlowe, Middleton, Jonson, and others.

The title also aptly evokes the well-known statement of Queen Elizabeth I that "we princes, I tell you, are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed" (p. 151), but mainly as an initial reference point, especially to New Historicist and Cultural Materialist criticism of the past thirty years. As Bianca Del Villano notes in her pithy introduction, the oft-employed "containment vs. subversion" dialectic can be insufficient and even misleading, and thus she advocates, à la Foucault, an approach that assesses "a different distribution of Power, which became as pluralised as the

counter-discourses that undermined its centrality" (p. 11). Stressing the diversity of "discursive typologies of macro-micro interaction affecting specific social groups", she characterises Elizabeth Tudor's "crucial position in this process" as neither hegemonic nor anomalous, but rather as one that saw this real-life Queen "staging and interpreting a scenario in which looming confusion, convergence or inversion between these opposites [of privileged male and subordinate female, of social 'tops' and 'bottoms'] certainly meant political threat but inevitably semantic richness" (Introduction, p. 13). Also invoking the "formations of compromise" that distinguished early modern social and gender relations, Del Villano lucidly explains that the queens of the volume's essays are not mere refractions of Elizabeth I, but more complex theatrical "palimpsests", vital to dramatic representations where "*power* and *sexuality* emerge as markers of particular importance for delineating the interpersonal dynamics of the characters" (Introduction, p. 13). This critical stress on fluidity and heterogeneity thus gives *Queens on Stage* the admirable merit of providing highly welcome updating and revision – marked by rigour, nuance, and subtlety – of historicist studies focusing on monarchical questions and phenomena in early modern English theatre.

In this regard, it is pertinent to give special commendation to one of the volume's final chapters, Roger Holdsworth's "Uncertain Creatures: Playing the Quean in Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama". Applying thorough and scrupulous analysis of playwrights' frequent and often ingenious uses of the "quean" (specifically meaning "whore", generally "a sexually aberrant woman") / "queen" homophone, and deftly relating them to contemporary constructs of gender and female sexuality, Holdsworth demonstrates how audiences would have heard not only punning but also ambiguously provocative, satirical, and challenging conflations of "high status female sovereign" with "low status unchaste (Biblically 'strange') woman". Given the simultaneous availability of five choices for understanding what the "KWIN" sound could represent, auditors would have enjoyed "a liberty of interpretation greater than the reader's" (p. 167). He concludes his engagingly written essay with a helpful list – including new and persuasive readings of Antony's "Fie, wrangling queen[quean]" quip with Cleopatra, and Leontes' jealously insidious "Tongue-tied our queen[quean]?" question to Hermione – of significant Shakespearean instances, following upon

his illuminating appraisals of passages and scenes such as Heywood's brilliantly devised, innuendo-laden card game among Frankford, his wife Anne, and her lover Wendoll in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (with double entendres on the "queen" card), Follywit's backfiring impersonation of the prostitute Frank Gullman in Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters,* Gonzalo's tempting courtship of the Princess Erota in Massinger's and Ford's *The Laws of Candy,* and in the latter playwright's *Perkin Warbeck*, Huntly's confused and indeed confusing reflection on his daughter's possibly bigamous marriage to the would-be future king: "I never was ambitious/ Of using Congeys [deferential bows] to my *Daughter Queene:* / A *Queene,* perhaps a *Queene?*" (II.iii.45-77). In this case, as Holdsworth explains, multiple entendres would depend on the actor's tone of voice, once again showing that the "queen/quean" homophone is more than an easy verbal joke; it was also a way to keep audiences guessing, and in the process to interrogate cynical and abusive patriarchal attitudes towards women and their sexuality.

Such attentive and fruitful analysis prompts me to recall Launcelot Gobbo's design to "try confusions" with his listener: the "queen/quean" wordplay confounds any single, stable, decisive meaning, and enables hermeneutic riddles to function as markers of but also challenges to conventional views of female power, with their sexually inflected bias. I thus would venture to link much of early modern English staging of female sovereignty with the trope of the enigma: my response does not in any way presume to confine the essays of *Queens on Stage* within this interpretation, but rather attests to how they spark critical enquiry and insight into their subject matter, with its own historically and theatrically shaped tendencies towards ambiguity and provocation. For example, Tommaso Continisio starts his compelling piece on the "Questioning of Female Royalty" in *The Lady's Tragedy* with the assertion that "Women are ultimately powerless in Middleton", only to demonstrate that the opposite may also pertain to several of his plays and female figures, such as Gloriana with her poisoned skull in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the Lady herself, who in her eponymous tragedy outshines her hesitant fiancé Govianus as well as the other male characters with her courage, eloquence, and rejection of tyranny. Again the "queen/quean" pun plays its crucial part, as Continisio elucidates how Middleton employs it to develop contrasts as well as parallels between the main plot of female refusal of sexually tyrannous

exploitation, and the subplot of the Wife's yielding to adulterous temptation. The essay accentuates the complexity of the playwright's female characters, and in particular of the moral ambiguities of The Lady's heroic, saint-like, yet potentially damnable suicide, an act that exposes how her identity remains vulnerable to pressure and re-shaping by the men who attempt to possess her.

Middleton's stark and ambivalent dramatisation of men's resolute efforts to prey upon, abuse, and scapegoat women – whether the latter be innocent or guilty, resistant or complicit – emerges even more graphically in his mixed-genre *Hengist, King of Kent, or The Mayor of Queenborough* (note the significant pun of this place-name), with the first title designating a tragedy, and the second a comedy (which, through revision, came to dominate the play's reputation and popularity). Daniela Guardamagna incisively clarifies these generic as well as gender-related tensions, focusing on the evil queen Roxena, who colludes with her lover Horsus (spelled Hersus in the manuscripts of the play, and in the version edited by Grace Ioppolo for the Oxford *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*) to manipulate the lust of King Vortiger, arranging for him to cruelly rape his own chaste wife Castiza, publicly shame and repudiate her, and then marry the scheming and ambitious Roxena. Along the way, while the good queen suffers infamy, the evil one poisons a male political rival, and like her counterpart Beatrice-Joanna in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, feigns virginity to achieve her ends; here Guardamagna usefully cites the real-life contemporary scandal of Frances Howard, with the scandalous poisoning of Lord Overbury and Howard's divorce from Count Essex in order to marry Lord Somerset. And yet, as Guardamagna appropriately emphasizes, Roxena's horrible demise, painfully dying in the flames that engulf Vortiger's castle, is worsened by the males – her lover and her husband – who remain deaf to her cries for help and prefer to kill each other, confirming the critique of masculine jealousy and violence made by the queen herself earlier in the play: "I pity all the fortunes of poor gentlewomen / Now in mine own unhappiness; when we have given / All that we have to men, what's their requital? / An ill-faced jealousy" (III.i.44-47). In his dying speech, Vortiger may vilify Roxena as a "mystical harlot", and pronounce the rhyming *damnatio memoriae* epitaph for her "whom lust crowned Queen before, / Flames crown her now for a triumphant whore" (V.ii.155-

56), but his own lustful and criminal deeds contradict him, and thus give more validity to the woman's spoken words.

It is in fact the staging of the power and influence of the regal female voice that serves as a revealing *leitmotif* in the collection's essays devoted to Shakespearean plays. These are Savina Stevanato's "Margaret's Queenship: A Mirror for Kings", Paolo Pepe's "The Lily and the Rose: Queen Isabel and the Prophetic Vision of a New Lineage of Kings", and Simonetta De Filippis's "Queens on Trial: the Staging of Passions in Shakespeare's Theatre". While the last-named contribution brings needed and instructive attention to the shared dignity and remarkable eloquence of the accused self-defendants Katherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII* and the Emperor of Russia's daughter Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, the preceding two, focusing on the early plays *Richard III* and *Richard II*, illuminate the ways in which the theatrically impressive utterances of dispossessed queens carry a force that transcends their own historical limits, resonating into England's (Tudor) future. Stevanato discerningly characterises the ever-evolving, dynamic Margaret of the first tetralogy as a "maieutic queen," who teaches other repudiated, disgraced, and grieving royal women "the power of words and how to appropriate it" (p. 74). Tracing how the efficacy of Margaret's truthful language increases through the final acts of *Richard III* – in contrast to the decreasingly efficacious speech-acts of the title character – Stevanato reaches the conclusion that "through Margaret's queenship, Shakespeare provides a model for kingship that tells of the Tudors' ability to combine tradition and modernity" (p. 85). Likewise, though in a less rhetorically transparent way, Queen Isabel – transformed by Shakespeare from the ten-year old consort of historical fact into a mature, devoted, and much-admired queen – speaks lines that will be revealed to have prophetic power, though in unorthodox ways. As Paolo Pepe persuasively argues, citing the key insight of Silvia Bigliazzi in her monograph *Nel prisma del nulla*, Isabel's "heavy *nothing*" will generate a legacy of *something* genuine and substantial (italics mine): this paradox is made possible by the inner truth of her emotional sensibility, combined with the script's use of the Biblical paradigm of the withered but ultimately redeemed Garden. Thus Isabel's curse of the plants grafted by York's gardener – hailed by the queen as "old Adam's likeness" – is undone by her own tears, which symbolically fertilise the repentant land, fostering the growth of rue/ruth (the herb of grace) and thus the restoration of the English

body politic, "in the remembrance of a weeping queen" (III.iv.107). In this sense, Isabel speaks most proleptically with the miraculous organ of her tear-shedding eyes, rather than with her ultimately silenced female tongue. In these Shakespearean cases, the conventions of female complaint, cursing, and lamentation are thus re-imagined, and through theatrical performance put to other, more strategic and constructive uses.

Another Queen Isabel(la), that of Marlowe's *Edward II*, actively enters the scene in Paola Di Gennaro's trenchant essay on the play's treatment of "Power and Desire", though with less emphasis on her volubility, and more on the character's volatility, especially in her relationships with her husband the king and with her eventual lover, the Machiavellian power-broker Mortimer. At stake once more is the question of how Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights modulate gender roles and conventions, for as Di Gennaro recognises, "Marlowe plays with femininity and masculinity as they relate to sovereignty" (p. 43). In this light, Isabella emerges as a virago queen, more fit to be a warrior than is her effeminate husband/king, with his homosexual, politically irresponsible passion for his favourite Gaveston: consequently, "the fusion of masculinity and femininity subverts the expected common order" (p. 59). Likewise, Carmen Gallo focuses on Marlowe's revisionist approach to historical material and literary traditions, in her essay "Translating Gender, Power and Fate in *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage*" (the first of the collection's case studies, which follow a chronological order from this Elizabethan play through Jonson's Jacobean masques). Informatively citing recent London stage productions of Marlowe's tragedy, Gallo confirms its theatrical viability, connecting it to how the script boldly departs from its Virgilian model, with such moves as Dido's putting Aeneas in feminine positions and even metaphorically inscribing him in her own body. As elsewhere in this dramatist's oeuvre, we see a distortion and even a parody of moralizing Christian versions of classical figures. Thanks also to the nearly farcical suicide of Dido's sister Anna, the play's characters convey a loss of faith in any providential framework, as they fight to maintain some kind of independence from literary clichés – in some ways, Marlowe's Dido consciously rejects her standard portrayal as a victim of lust and desire – as well as from the logic of imperialism mixed with the (possible) operation of supernatural agents.

Supernatural factors, however, do not mark the agenda of two other contributions to the volume, which make apposite reference to the theatrical consciousness and activities of the historical queens Elizabeth I and Anne of Denmark, the consort of King James I. In Marina Lops' well-articulated study of "Queen Anne and the Staging of Female Sovereignty in *The Masque of Blackness*", primary attention is given to the crucial roles played by Anne both on- and off-stage, as the royal patron who insisted that the masque's author Ben Jonson write scenes for her and her ladies-in-waiting costumed as "blackmores", which they then performed – the pregnant queen herself in the lead as the nymph Euphoris, exposing her bare, black-greasepainted arms – at the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall, to scandalised as well as favourable reaction (in 1605). By elucidating how Queen Anne astutely deployed a cultural-aesthetic politics that aimed to give positive valence to her actual (as Danish/Scottish outsider) and represented (as the Daughter of the River Niger) otherness, as well as to legitimise herself through a metaphoric continuity with the recently deceased Queen Elizabeth, Lops worthily extends the valuable insights into Jonsonian masques made by scholars such as Stephen Orgel, Bernadette Andrea, Leeds Barroll, and Clare McManus. She suggestively explains how the masque's tropes of alchemical recombination and transmutation achieve an empowerment of otherness, and finally an idealised *conjunctio oppositorum*, with the Queen's symbolic Moon uniting with the King's symbolic Sun, in concert with the Union of the Realms of England and Scotland. The culminating contribution to *Queens on Stage*, an "Afterword" by Carlo Bajetta, provides an English translation of the unpublished letter recently discovered by the author himself, written (or dictated) in Spanish in 1567 by Elizabeth I to Empress Maria of Austria, regarding the marriage negotiations still proceeding, though soon to be broken off, between the English queen and Archduke Charles of Austria, brother of Emperor Maximilian II. Like Lops and Del Villano, Bajetta cites Elizabeth's "set on stages" comment, applying it to his perceptive reading of the "dramatic effect" of Elizabeth's letter, accomplished in collaboration with her secretaries. This effect involves the precisely calculated deferential language used in the letter, intimating a kind of sisterhood between the queen and the empress, in contrast to the colder, more detached tone of Elizabeth's missives to Maximilian. With his concise affirmation that Elizabeth's constant princely performance was not a monologue-

based one, Bajetta clinches a key argument pervading the volume's essays: namely, that the staging of female sovereignty crucially and dialogically engaged listeners and spectators, in multi-faceted and challenging ways.

For a variety of reasons, then, *Queens on Stage* itself deserves a fully appreciative audience response – in other words, thorough and assiduous reading by all admirers, students, and teachers of early modern English theatre.

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Del Sapio Garbero, Maria, ed., *Rome in Shakespeare's World*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018, XXII 294 pp.

Edited collections are sometimes met with mixed critical reception, insofar as – even when all the contributions originate from a single conference, symposium or workshop and should accordingly be (at least) thematically coherent – they all too often exhibit lack of balance, unevenness and excessive diversity across chapters. This is definitely *not* the case with *Rome in Shakespeare's World*, a particularly well-crafted book that gathers extended and reworked versions of some of the papers delivered during the series of coordinated events held in Rome in April 2016 under the collective title *Shakespeare 2016: Memoria di Roma* on the occasion of the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death. Chapter after chapter, the volume strikes the reader for its consistency and clarity of scope. Credit is especially due to its editor, Maria Del Sapio Garbero, now Professor Emerita of English Literature at the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Roma Tre University, who has been the coordinator of the departmental "Shakespeare's Rome Project" since 2004 and founded the Shakespeare's Rome International Summer School in 2017, besides publishing extensively on the manifold shapes of Shakespeare's encounter with the Roman past.

Del Sapio Garbero's careful editorial work is visible at every turn of the collection. Though tackling different areas of Shakespeare's Roman canon from several critical perspectives, the various chapters that make up *Rome in Shakespeare's World* display remarkable unity. This, as the editor makes clear early on in the introduction, is predicated above all on the book's daring investigation of "the different ways in which Shakespeare took advantage of the contrast between the mythologised values of a Rome long past and the sense

of their decline: a crisis [...] which he appropriates [...] as a discoursive pattern, to make it interact anachronistically with the unsettling context of his own early modern times" (p. XX). Structurally, the book is divided into two parts: "Part I. Shakespeare's Uses of Rome" and "Part II. Using Shakespeare's Rome".

In introducing the volume, Del Sapio Garbero resorts to reflections concerning the matter of ancient Rome by Walter Pater, as well as to the notions of inheritance and fragmentation as put forward by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Derrida, with a view to creating what proves to be a fruitful conceptual framework against which to scrutinize Shakespeare's dramatic uses of ancient Rome. The virtual conversation set up between these four writers leads Del Sapio Garbero convincingly to argue that "Shakespeare forcefully edits and marks his Rome [...] by saturating his Roman plays with an excess of time, or else by inscribing into them, as a deliberate anachronism, the untimely urge of the playwright's historical present – his own time *à venir*, or better his characters' time *à venir*" (p. XV). Hence, Del Sapio Garbero continues, the plays and the poem that Shakespeare set in ancient Rome end up not merely enacting "the fictional replica of real events"; on the contrary, "they posit themselves and the 'now' of the theatre [...] in a ghostly chain of representations" (p. XVI), which makes them particularly worthy of scholarly interest, while at the same time enabling them to outshine Shakespeare's contemporaries' attempts at recreating their own ancient Rome(s).

Stephen Greenblatt opens the first part of the collection by focusing on "Shakespeare's uncanny ability to represent the conflicted inner life of characters onstage" (p. 3). Among the many factors that contributed to its development, Greenblatt singles out Shakespeare's engagement with Seneca's *Oedipus*, which provided Shakespeare with a blueprint for reversing the Aristotelian dictum according to which characterization is included on stage for the sake of the characters' action rather than the other way around. This reversal, Greenblatt suggests, dates from the late 1590s and might be considered Shakespeare's "crucial breakthrough" (p. 6). Whereas in plays such as *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard II* and *Richard III* the protagonists are still "delineated as characters in order to make possible the actions they are depicted as taking" (p. 7), this gradually changes as Shakespeare's career progresses. And while "Shakespeare never entirely gave up on the primacy of action" (p. 7); yet, he

progressively started focusing more closely on "inner conflict, mixed motives, and unconscious fears" (p. 10), a mixture of ingredients he would readily find in the Roman – rather than the Greek – *Oedipus*. Here, Seneca shies away from the action and instead sets out to explore "what it means [...] to live *in ambiguo*" in order to dramatize "extreme psychological states" (p. 11). Shakespeare seems to have become especially fascinated "by the ways in which Seneca defers action and delays resolution, in order to explore inner conflict" (p. 12). This occurs for the first time in *Julius Caesar*, a play that offers no solution to the psychological and political dilemmas it scrutinizes, offering instead "an unprecedented representation of uncertainty, confusion and blindness" (p. 17), with the inward conflict that Brutus likens to an insurrection proving to be more central than Caesar's historic murder itself. *Julius Caesar*, Greenblatt concludes, would open the way to further analogous explorations in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.

John Gillies's discussion of Shakespeare's take on the core Republican myth of the *priscae virtutes* as imagined in Livy's *Ab Urbe condita* occupies the ensuing chapter. Shakespeare, Gillies suggests, appears to be sceptical of this myth, insofar as he appears to have read Livy through Plutarch, which seems to have made him deeply ambivalent towards both the *priscae virtutes* and the Republic as depicted by Livy. Three instances of Shakespeare's encounter with Livy's pristine virtues are offered as a demonstration, namely "the reference to 'rash Virginius' in *Titus Andronicus* [...], the character of Brutus in *Julius Caesar* [...], and the character of Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*" (p. 25). Gillies is especially interested in "fragmenting the category of *Romanitas*; the all-but monolithic nature of which has tended to limit our understanding of character in the Roman plays" (p. 25). In Gillies's view, "Shakespeare's negative characterization of Virginius testifies to his sheer distaste: if this is pristine virtue then Shakespeare doesn't like it", inasmuch as it "is uncompromising, even [...] when transgressing a defining human threshold: the sacrifice on one's own family" (p. 30). As for Brutus, after arguing that his "*ethos* [...] derives from Livy" (p. 33), Gillies remarks that while Brutus' "whole project is dominated by the myth of pristine virtue" (p. 34), Brutus none the less "reasons backwards from the violence to the virtue rather than forwards from the virtue to the violence", so that there emerges "a gap between his character and ethos", in that Brutus is "too complex, gentle and thoughtful" to

be "pristine" (p. 35). Hence, his ultimate adherence to the myth of *priscae virtutes* turns out to be "destructive", as "Brutus becomes single-minded, putting on the ancestor's stiffness like an ill-fitting armor" (p. 38). Finally, as regards *The Merchant of Venice*, Gillies contends that, in spite of its not being set in ancient Rome, the play "stages the fundamental confrontation of Livy's second and third books: that of virtue with the scandal of debt-slavery" (p. 40), which opens up the bitter realization that there is an odd homology between virtue and terror.

That *Coriolanus* sceptically treats as an opinion rather than a fact the notion that "valour is the chiefest virtue" (p. 50) and that this inevitably has negative consequences for the title hero is a consideration at the core of Gilberto Sacerdoti's chapter: "How can we be sure that Coriolanus deserves to be dignified more than all other men, if we cannot be sure that valour is the chiefest virtue?" (p. 51). That this is treated as a mere hypothesis is at the heart of the social conflicts portrayed in the play, which seems to constitute, when viewed in a Machiavellian light, "not a liability, but the very source of Rome's freedom, stability, and power, because they led to the dynamic equilibrium of a mixed and balanced state" (p. 55). Accordingly, it seems appropriate to look at the play as "belong[ing] to [an] English *ur*-Machiavellian moment" (p. 63) significantly predating the eighteenth-century one famously identified by John Pocock in the 1970s.

Pondering that Shakespeare must have been familiar with the iconographic convention of depicting Roman emperors as disembodied heads and that he must have been aware that women, by contrast, were often shown full- or half-length, Lisa Hopkins compellingly argues that the representational strategies Shakespeare adopts in the depiction of male and female characters in his Roman plays follow a similar logic. While the emphasis for male characters is invariably on the head, and references to other body parts tend to belittle them and their social status, the attention in the case of women frequently moves to the womb and the thighs. This, however, does not appear to demean them, inasmuch as "women bleed, leak and give milk, but they can also be associated with goddesses, with the symbolic, and with abstract concepts such as fertility. Men, by contrast, insist on headedness, which they seek to connect with the immobility and constancy of busts, but which they cannot always maintain" (p. 84).

Acknowledging dismemberment as a crucial element in *Titus Andronicus* – a play depicting *romanitas* as a figure of decadence in the name of the crisis of *pietas* that marks the decline of political and state powers, which are substituted by a sense of belongingness based on family bonds and feud logic that rekindles age-old outbursts of unrestrained violence – Silvia Bigliazzi contends that in the play "mutilation and self-mutilation combine into an overall system of signs dramatizing the crisis of civil ceremonies, political and funerary, in Rome as well as their regress to a tribal rituality of *sparagmos*, or sacrifice of a victim by tearing it apart and feeding upon it for communal bonding" (p. 91). Ultimately, the actual sacrificial victim turns out to be neither Titus nor his sons, but "an idea of Romanity embodied in the virtue of *pietas* that through the *translatio imperii* narrative tradition gestures to contemporary Britain" (p. 92).

A very sharp focus "on the linguistic expression of power in some momentous instances in Shakespeare's Roman plays" characterizes Iolanda Plescia's chapter, which scrutinizes two lexical items that appear in *Cymbeline*, 3.1, "specifically the verb *pronounce* [...] and the noun *utterance*, [...] which put the spotlight in different ways on the act of speaking, and of speaking performatively" (p. 108). Plescia is right in maintaining that a close examination of the uses of these two terms is "particularly revelatory of Shakespeare's linguistic treatment of the Roman theme, which seems to rely on a masterful blend of ancient and newer meanings of words that effectively depict the act of speaking in order to *do*: thus dramatizing the pragmatic and performative dimension of language" (p. 111). Plescia's riveting exploration of the web of meanings generated by these two words in other key Shakespearean Roman scenes reveals that both the emerging and the residual meanings of these words are at work together, thereby testifying to Shakespeare's "uncanny awareness [...] of the several layers of meaning, both old and newly developing, in words that had been around for quite some time before him" (p. 113).

The last chapter of the first part of the book by Andrew Hadfield refreshingly broadens the critical perspective of the volume beyond Shakespeare's *oeuvre*. Renaissance Rome, Hadfield points out, "loomed large in the English literary and cultural imagination, but not many people actually saw it first-hand. Rather, it existed as an imagined urban space, a cityscape that everyone and no-one knew that provided a powerful image of what an ancient and modern city

might look like" (p. 128). Hadfield surveys depictions of Rome offered by writers such as Thomas Nashe, Edmund Spenser and John Donne, then comparing and contrasting them with the eye-witness accounts of such travellers as William Thomas, Anthony Munday and Fynes Moryson. While these writers all provide different depictions of Rome, more or less directly relating it to London, what clearly emerges is that "For travellers and readers alike Rome was a city of startling contrasts, extraordinary beauty juxtaposed with fierce cruelty" (p. 140). Admittedly, Rome "was a large city, but was under-populated, notorious as a place of squalor and violence. It was not yet famous as a city of wonderful art" (p. 135). In this sense, Netherlandish writer Jan Van Der Noot's work seems to Hadfield especially telling as an encapsulation of "Europe's general perception of Rome in the sixteenth century, a city that was simultaneously ruined and powerful, [...] a disaster area that was eager to spread destruction throughout the civilised world" (p. 137).

The second part of the volume, which explores reworkings of Shakespeare's plays, starts with Manfred Pfister's discussion of two German-language adaptations of *Titus Andronicus*, a play that Pfister considers "an extremely well made play, transparent in its sequence of *peripeteias*, yet at the same time disturbingly subversive in the subtle interplay of stark contrasts and startling correspondences linking Goth barbarism and Roman civilization" (p. 149). Pfister examines in particular Swiss dramatist Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Umarbeitung* of *Titus Andronicus* (1970) and East German dramatist Heiner Müller's *Anatomie Titus Fall of Rome Ein Shakespearekommentar* (1985) as prime examples of adaptations of Shakespeare's *Titus* that "identify, reveal, and exhibit the modernist potential of Shakespeare's earliest tragedy as well as its potential timeliness for the present" (p. 152). While Dürrenmatt's *Umarbeitung* is particularly interesting for its "fatalistic and disempowering visions of history", Müller's *Anatomie* is a more complex work that is "much more alert to the divisions of racial and cultural otherness in Shakespeare's play" by dint of its having been written "three years before the Wall and the Iron Curtain came down" (p. 154). Müller's work explores the "uneasy and dialectical relationship between tragedy and comedy" (p. 156) and markedly displays a visceral interest in "the nexus between sexuality and violence" (p. 157). As a coda, Pfister also briefly discusses a Polish-German production by Jan Klata, first launched in Dresden and Wrocław in 2012, which shines through as

particularly remarkable for its treatment of xenophobic stereotypes and violence, thus demonstrating once again *Titus*'s enduring timeliness.

Claudia Corti's chapter examines "how the theatrical progression of the play *Coriolanus* developed and changed in modern and post-modern times" (p. 167). In Corti's view, the title character "shows psychologically intimate wounds and cracks which cast doubts on his apparently impenetrable, rigid identity" (p. 168). More specifically, Corti continues, "Coriolanus is mostly the case of a hidden, repressed, prohibited sexual sensibility [...] that concerns primarily his homoerotic attraction to his co-agonist and antagonist Tullus Aufidius" (p. 169). It is precisely this sexual dimension of Shakespeare's character that has been frequently explored in modern and contemporary productions of the play, while criticism and performances of *Coriolanus* from the Restoration until the end of the eighteenth century tend to display "a subordination of the political level of this drama to a moral/aesthetic one" (p. 172). This is effectively exemplified by the young German exponent of *Sturm und Drang* Jakob Lenz's adaptation *Coriolan* (1776), a closet drama focusing quite narrowly on "the hero's existential struggle" (p. 174) rather than on civic and political issues. In England, John Philip Kemble's landmark performance as a statuesque Coriolanus at the turn of the nineteenth century remained influential for a long time, at least until Lawrence Olivier's portrayal of the play's protagonist as a man of "solid class pride, crystal patrician anger, and granite imperial sensibility, all of them on an epic scale" (p. 177). The first half of the nineteenth century, however, also witnessed a very different Coriolanus, staged by Edmund Kean in 1820 as a "violent, passionate, volcanic [...] hero" (p. 178). After briefly surveying a number of twentieth-century productions of the play, which are especially interesting by virtue of their Modernist overtones, Corti closes her chapter by examining the focus of contemporary productions on the play's homoeroticism, which started being foregrounded in Tyrone Guthrie's 1960s production with John Neville as Coriolanus and Ian McKellen as Aufidius. Other ensuing notable productions in a similar vein were Peter Hall's in the 1980s (with McKellen as Coriolanus), Steven Berkoff's in 1988, Gregory Doran's in 2007-8, the 2011 cinematic rendition with Ralph Fiennes (Coriolanus) and Gerald Butler (Aufidius), as well as the 2014

Donmar Warehouse production with Tom Hiddleston in the title role.

The theatrical reception of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century Italy is the subject of Lisanna Calvi's chapter. Italian translations and adaptations of Shakespeare in this period need to be examined in the context of the so-called *teatro del personaggio*, "in which the relationship between the actor and his/her character is the core element of the whole performance" (p. 191), as illustrated by the work of Tommaso Salvini, Ernesto Rossi and Adelaide Ristori. As Calvi remarks, these actors tailored their Shakespearean roles "to their taste and skills mainly by way of cuts and variations fashioning the playtexts to a pre-set agenda which they arranged by identifying the protagonists of the single dramas with a dominant passion" (p. 191); accordingly, they "very often got rid of secondary characters or passages of the plot that could distract the audience's attention [...] from the centrality of the 'protagonist-star'" (p. 192). With a view to displaying this approach at work, Calvi focuses on two different versions of *Giulio Cesare* by Rossi. A careful comparison of these two scripts reveals that Rossi moved from a conception of the play in which Caesar was the dominant force to another in which it was Brutus who governed the action. In order to achieve this result, Rossi had to proceed by means of severe cuts and sizable creative additions. This way, not only did the logic of the *grande attore* ended up flattening the play's multi-protagonist arrangement; it also "ironed out and domesticated [the complexity of Brutus] into a rudimentary emblem of heroism and rigour" (p. 203).

Laura Tosi discusses adaptations of Shakespeare's plays for young audiences, the story of which "has been very much a tale of drama turned into narrative" (p. 205), starting with Charles and Mary Lamb's collection of short stories *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807). As Tosi observes, "the Roman plays do not feature in the Lambs' selection of Shakespeare plays [...], and the Lambs' choice was followed by several later adaptors" (p. 206), at least until the second half of the nineteenth century, when renewed interest in Shakespeare's Roman plays was sparked both by a nationalistic agenda connected with the British imperialistic efforts and by the broader Victorian fascination with the classical past. Prose adaptations of Shakespeare's plays for young readers generally feature an intrusive omniscient narrator, a stable view of characters and actions, and "a clear-cut division between good and bad

characters"; as a result, they "tend to generate simplified meanings" (p. 208). The effects of such an approach are especially evident in the case of a play like *Julius Caesar*, which "tends to withdraw motivation to an even higher degree than is usual in Shakespeare" (p. 208). Tosi examines eight Victorian/Edwardian adaptations of the play and three more dating from the second half of the twentieth century. Her focus is especially directed to the tales' beginnings, "because this is where Caesar, Cassius and Brutus are introduced and contrasted, so it is often immediately apparent how power and responsibility are distributed among the main characters" (p. 210). A careful investigation of these adaptations leads Tosi to conclude that "every narrative adaptation of Shakespeare for children [...] takes a major interpretative effort to produce meaning – this is achieved through clarification, explanation and [...] judgment. Narrators tend to be telling rather than showing, appropriating comments and conclusions that are expressed by the characters in the play or describing not only what the characters do but also their thoughts and motivations" (p. 217).

A discussion of two very recent contemporizing rewrites by David Lane, initially commissioned for Shakespeare Unplugged, are at the heart of Márta Minier's chapter, which seeks to contribute "to a much neglected area of Shakespeare reception when looking at projects that involve some degree of community engagement and borrow from less orthodox vocabularies such as youth theatre, site-specific performance and immersive performance" (p. 223). *I Am England* is "a wholesale reworking" of *Coriolanus* set in a dystopic England; *Resurrection*, "the fragmentary, character-based reworking of *Titus Andronicus*" (p. 222), is "a promenade performance text consisting of five monologues to be voiced by five resurrected Shakespearean characters [i.e. Lavinia, Ophelia, Richard of Shrewsbury, Cordelia and Arthur], all of whom die young in Shakespeare but are revived here and forced to tell us something meaningful, wise or moving in and for our contemporary world" (p. 224). Here, Lavinia is given a poetic soliloquy offering alternative historiography. As Minier contends, both adaptations should be considered analogies, in which "the adaptation uses a 'skeleton' derived from the source (p. 237). Though in different ways, both plays seem to meditate "on heroism, nationhood and community", as well as "the paradox of the contemporary past" (p. 238), thus

productively impinging not only on the *extra*mural afterlife of Shakespeare, but also on *intra*mural public discourse.

Maddalena Pennacchia closes the collection with a thought-provoking survey of the silent films based on Shakespeare's Roman plays. Pennacchia conceptualizes Shakespeare's dramatic writing as "a form ontologically in motion between different semiotic systems and with an intense kinema-tic quality" (pp. 245–46) and decides to focus on three different cinematic takes on the assassination scene in *Julius Caesar*, since this is perhaps the most compelling instance of a Shakespearean scene that is "'deferred' to be realised in a different medium" (p. 246) by virtue of its highly elliptical quality. Specifically, Pennacchia examines *Julius Caesar* by William V. Ranous (1908), *Giulio Cesare* by Giovanni Pastrone (1909) and *Cajus Julius Caesar* by Enrico Guazzoni (1914), ultimately demonstrating that filmmakers of this era deliberately let "intermedial references to art forms [...] such as painting or sculpting affect the adaptations" (p. 253). The Caesar of Ranous's movie "dies in less than ten seconds", the action clearly "arranged in order to faithfully follow Shakespeare's play-text" (p. 254); interestingly, "the actor impersonating Caesar wears heavy makeup that has him resemble the 'Chiaramonti Caesar', a famous marble head which represents the statesman as a dignified if not idealised great man" (p. 255), thus producing a deviation from the insistence on Caesar's weakness in Shakespeare's text. As for Guazzoni's film, it did not originate as a Shakespearean adaptation, and it was only during the US distribution that it became associated with him. The sequence of Caesar's murder here "is much longer and violent" because it follows Plutarch (p. 255). Finally, Pastrone's film appears broadly to follow the Shakespearean storyline. Yet, its murder scene "seems to have been inspired more by the visual arts than [by] written sources", insofar as it "seems to revive Vincenzo Camuccini's monumental canvas entitled *Death of Julius Caesar* (1806), now at the Museum of Capodimonte in Naples" (p. 256).

As a timely addition to the recent wave of scholarly publications dealing with the reception of classical antiquity in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, Maria Del Sapio's Garbero's *Rome in Shakespeare's World* marks a significant contribution to our understanding of Shakespeare's engagement with the classical past as well as of modern and contemporary adaptations of his plays. By exhibiting a breath-taking array of stimulating critical insights and in being devoid of any discernible flaws, this collection provides yet

another effective illustration that, as Del Sapio claims in her introduction, "no-one better than Shakespeare with his own Rome was able to grasp, with the emulative and revisionist perspective of the latecomer, all of the promise and potential of modernity stored in Rome's history of pride and catastrophe, making it resound – again and dramatically – from the arena of his 'Wooden O'" (p. XVIII).

Domenico Lovascio, University of Genoa

Dente, Carla and Drakakis, John, eds, *Shakespeare and Money*, Pisa, Pisa University Press, 2018, 213 pp.

In a way, it all began in 1988 when Graham Holderness registered, in his preface to *The Shakespeare Myth*, the cultural relevance of Shakespeare's presence on the reverse of English £20 notes. Here, "the device of the banknote" served to transact a give-and-take of values: "the currency of Shakespeare as a cultural token enhances the material worth of the promissory notes; while the high value of the note itself confers a corresponding richness on the symbol of high art and national culture" (Holderness, 1988, p. xi). It was, in its essence, a cultural landmark both for the evolution of cultural studies, or cultural materialism, and for "bardolatry", for the seminal connection of Shakespeare with areas apparently removed from his poetry. The Bard's imbrications with economy were followed up to Stratford, where trade regarding his birthplace was thriving. Indeed, it is now impossible to tackle Shakespeare's instable, ever-growing canon without considering the financial fallout after a "new" play with the Bard's name is brought to the fore, as well as the financial capital(s) that Shakespeare's plays have accrued over the years.

In *Shakespeare and Money*, the relation between the Bard and the coin is evaluated in Shakespeare's time (essays by Régis Augustus Bars Closel, Sukanya Dasgupta, Niranjan Goswami, Paolo Bugliatti) as well as in our so-called globalized culture, which indefatigably continues to nurture Shakespeare's offspring (Roberta Ferrari, Susan L. Fischer, Sara Soncini). The point made, as John Drakakis explains in his introductory essay, is that it is necessary to go beyond the metaphor and to consider economy and literature as mutually related and influenced. This is not a mere matter of language, nor is the relation one that involves a similitude, however sophisticated: it is

rather a functional dependence, a "structural similarity" (p. 14), a system that is "both reflective *and* constitutive" (p. 23, emphasis in the text). The Revenge tragedy, a hit of Elizabethan drama, can hardly be imagined without the operative aid of a novelty of Shakespeare's time, "Venetian book-keeping" (p. 17) which sounded, to many Elizabethan theatre-goers, as Italianate as revenge itself. Both were based on mathematical reckonings and both were founded on a "binary system" (p. 17) that could come to an end only when the triumph of profits over losses was achieved. Not to mention "the proximity of the venereal and the venal" (p. 19) that the discourse of Love increasingly enacts in much poetry, and drama, of the sixteenth century and onwards. Today, not only does economy affect areas of experience in unprecedented ways, but it is also embedded in various discourses that tend to blur disciplinary boundaries and make the "compartmentalisation of particular disciplines" (p. 14) appear old and obsolete. (This is, indeed, a *vexata quaestio* that seems to resist only in academic labels, with all the power of endurance that this "compartmentalisation" entails).

In Shakespeare's times, the dematerialization of money also had its first inception. Money could be there even if it was not *physically* there, and an abstract quality of thought was quintessential in understanding a system of credit which implied a principle of transience even for the ludicrous and the venal. It was then, as Carla Dente notes, that "the use of a non-tangible [...] true standardized unit of currency [...] made a system of unitary prices possible" (p. 9), and it was then that the immateriality of wealth began to be the hallmark of a generation of *nouveaux riches* which prospered on speculation and commerce instead of customary money-grounded business.

All this, as Dente notes again, speaks of "issues that resonates with our own concerns" (p. 26), thus introducing the idea of a conjunctive interest in the study of the past, of an advantage in studying the ancients for what they can still teach us. Insofar as the past is seen in proleptic terms, as a source of knowledge that anticipates the present, this is undeniable. One question, however, is left open, namely whether economy and its old and new strategies promote the dissolution of (geographical) borders or rather their strengthening. Apparently, economic transactions operate against

walls and barriers, connecting people worldwide and, given the cross-cultural aspect of the transactions themselves, incidentally also against the "compartmentalisation of disciplines" mentioned above. However, such an increasingly globalized approach is also responsible for the burgeoning of neoliberal social *milieus* reshaped by a new, unbalanced market rationale, with all the partitions and filtering that this may entail and that we know only too well. Once again Shakespeare, and Shakespeare studies, may serve as a parameter to verify the permanence of distinctions between inclusion and exclusion.

Paolo Caponi, University of Milan

Greenblatt, Stephen, *Tyrant. Shakespeare on Politics*, New York, Norton, 2018, 212 pp.

Tyrant. Shakespeare on Politics is Stephen Greenblatt's thirteenth monograph, and continues its author's exploration of early modern England and of the development of its ideology and culture. This time, Greenblatt focuses on a range of Shakespearean plays and their main characters, drawing from their analysis his considerations on Shakespeare's attitude towards contemporary politics, and by implication inviting us to reflect on the politics of our own times. Lightly annotated (after the first chapter the endnotes dwindle almost to nothing) and with no bibliography at the end (although there is an accurate index), this volume is meant for a non-specialized audience, and invites its readers to revisit a number of Shakespearean plays in pursuit of a very individual topic: the portrait of the tyrant, his relations to friends and enemies, the modalities of his ascent to power and disastrous fall, the strategies of resistance organized by dissenters. Shakespearean tyrants appear to be exclusively male, but this is one of the very few things they have in common: they come from tragedies as well as comedies and history plays, are extraordinarily successful or quickly fall into disaster. Through their analysis, Greenblatt offers us a reading of plays ranging from the earliest histories to the late romances.

The title, however, poses the first of this book's problems: taken in conjunction with the dust-jacket and the opening chapter it misleads its reader. The dust-jacket introduces "an aging, tenacious

Elizabeth I" clinging to power, and the opening pages help matters by establishing a firm historical basis for Shakespeare's early plays: but as we continue our reading, such historical basis proves to be unnecessary, since Greenblatt explores various plays without references to contemporary England; nor does Elizabeth play any special role in his reading of the plays, or appear as a blue-print for any of the Shakespearean tyrants. The book puts its author's gift for elegant prose at the service of a literary-political search that in its initial phase has no clear direction. In the opening chapter, the scene is set, offering a gripping narrative that encompasses religious wars, Walsingham's espionage network, the Essex rebellion and the various factions in the Queen's council, all under the impending doom of Elizabeth's inevitable ageing. The famous 1601 staging of *Richard II* is discussed as making the case for the appropriateness of reading Shakespeare's plays against the background of sixteenth-century politics. But this first chapter sits uneasily with the rest of the book: not only is it the only one offering a historical reconstruction against which to understand Shakespeare's rise to theatrical fame; it is also proposed, thanks to the use of endnotes and the insertion of quotations from early modern chroniclers, as a scholarly endeavour, thus offering an odd contrast with the following chapters. Besides, although the first quotation of the book is from George Buchanan, the Scottish humanist who was also the highly influential teacher of the future King James, the latter is mentioned only once, in passing. Yet James I was the reigning monarch during Shakespeare's maturity, when the playwright wrote some of his most famous tragedies, his dark comedies, the late romances; by taking Shakespeare's company under his direct patronage, James was certainly more closely involved than the previous monarch in the theatrical life of his time. The conventional tendency of pairing England's greatest playwright with its most famous queen has been a staple of Renaissance studies and of popular imagination for centuries; the tenacity with which critical tradition assigned a special value to the relationship between Shakespeare and Elizabeth in the face of all existing evidence, has been successfully debunked in recent times by scholars such as Helen Hackett, who in her *Shakespeare and Elizabeth: The Meeting of Two Myths* (2009) explores the fascinating history of this supposed relationship, sharply defining the boundary between scholarship and fiction. Re-proposed in a book by an eminent Shakespearean scholar, the cliché is surprising and makes the book appear unsettled. The

other interesting omission is that of Henry VIII, a king who certainly has a greater claim to the title of tyrant than the ever-negotiating Elizabeth: although the actual monarch is mentioned, there is no discussion of the puzzling and somewhat upsetting play dedicated to him and attributed to Shakespeare. The omission appears deliberate, as on p. 5 we read that the playwright "carefully kept at least a full century between himself and the events he depicted" – a surprising statement, forcing facts to serve a theory.

However, these reservations concern only the early section of the book, which unfolds revealing a different agenda. As the author makes clear in the acknowledgements (a point to which I shall return below), the volume is meant to point at the present while discussing the past: this has been done before in the analysis of Renaissance drama, one of the most interesting examples probably being Jan Kott's *Shakespeare our Contemporary*. First published in 1961 and translated into English in 1964, the book proposed itself as a statement of anti-Stalinist engagement in Poland, the country where Kott lived and taught. The Soviet regime and the demands of censorship made any parallel with contemporary times at best muted, but the anguished plea for freedom of speech was unmistakeable, and the book offered some startling insights, and sometimes shockingly new ways of looking at ancient plays; it exerted great influence on the theatre and cinema of its day, informing the Shakespearean (and non-Shakespearean) productions of directors such as Peter Brook and Grigori Kozintsev. Even more importantly, it bridged the fissure between scholarly studies and performances of Shakespeare. A comparison between the two volumes would not be fair to either, since they were born of very different circumstances, but there is some similarity in the method. Both books aim at discussing the nature of tyranny and its role in the political game, implicitly inviting a comparison with the times in which they were written; Kott's study, however, adheres firmly to a close reading of the chosen Shakespearean plays, while Greenblatt's also considers early modern English politics – a terrain on which comparison with the contemporary political situation may prove misleading. While Kott lets each play speak for itself, freely exploring it against the background of twentieth-century culture (particularly interesting, in this context, is the chapter dedicated to *King Lear*), Greenblatt tries to link different plays with an overarching motif, using his analysis to offer a definition in more general terms of the

abstract concepts, such as *tyranny* and *populism*, on which his book rests.

Sometimes such definitions may prove simplistic: see, for instance, statements such as "Populism may look like an embrace of the have-nots, but in reality it is a form of cynical exploitation" (p. 35). This attempt to write at the same time a historicist study and a reflection on contemporary reality creates an imbalance in the book, and the scholar is aware of the problem. Thus in the brief account of religious dissension and of the network of espionage and counter-espionage that was formed in England and abroad in the second half of the sixteenth century, Greenblatt deliberately uses terms more easily applicable to today's international situation, such as *terrorist*, *radicalized*, *extremists*, *trolling*, *unstable youths*, *fanatics*, *brainwashed*. The attempt at presentism (not a novelty in Shakespearean scholarship) obscures the fact that these early modern English subjects were, after all, simply adhering to the "old faith", fighting a reactionary fight, rather than trying to impose a religiously-based fundamentalism from the outside. Catholicism was by no means a distant memory. Even more puzzlingly, none of the terms mentioned above is used for Anglicanism. Inevitably, the comparisons are somewhat forced: drawing an analogy between the executions of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587 and of Osama bin Laden in 2011 does not help understand either event, nor is the reader enlightened by slightly surreal statements such as "The play [*1 Henry VI*] could have depicted [the Dukes of York and Somerset] in a way that would remind us of the warlords of contemporary Afghanistan" (p. 26). I should add that, once again, this attempt to apply contemporary terminology to early modern politics is soon abandoned: it seems to belong to the historicist tendency that informs the first part of the book.

After the two introductory chapters, Greenblatt moves to a closer scrutiny of individual plays, focusing in turn upon the *Henry VI* trilogy, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Coriolanus*. That the sequence may seem slightly random, both in the choice and in the order in which the plays are presented, is felt by Greenblatt himself when he writes that "*The Winter's Tale* is a rare release from the realistic thinking that occupied him for much of his career, thinking that returned to the ways in which the nightmare could be brought to an end" (pp. 137-38). I would posit that political thinking in Shakespeare's literary output is much more complex than

this, and not solely obsessed by "the nightmare" of tyranny. Thus some of the general assessments Greenblatt provides for tyrants do not fit all his examples: when he writes that "possessing no vision for the country they ruled, they were incapable of fashioning enduring support" (p. 142), I feel that such a statement does not adequately describe Lear (who, before his decay into senility, seems to have been, with reservations, accepted and calmly obeyed by all his subjects), or Julius Caesar, and to be frankly inapplicable to characters such as Macbeth or the various would-be tyrants in *Henry VI*, since they never had a chance to show their ability as rulers. Works that are essentially political such as *Julius Caesar* or *Coriolanus*, or works that are only in part political such as *Othello*, discuss the problem of tyranny against a much more articulated background; Shakespeare's political meditation goes beyond tyranny, or even absolute monarchy, and includes the role of oligarchical powers; the possibility of a republican form of government; the struggle of a king who has received no divine recognition through a clear dynastic line, and must make himself acceptable through his personal virtues and political ability. The problem of applying the concept of tyranny to a political system that did not envisage absolute rule such as republican Rome remains unsolved, and Greenblatt is conscious of the problem when he writes of Shakespeare's "interest in the world of classical antiquity, where Christian faith and monarchical rhetoric do not apply" (p. 5). It may be argued that the playwright's interest for classical antiquity, and his reading of Plutarch, created also the opportunity for him to explore different political systems, especially the republican form. On the other hand, early seventeenth century England, dominated by the debate on the divine right of kings and reason of state, provided a widely different scenario. Andrew Hadfield, among others, has examined this issue in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (2014), offering a survey of the various plays that also shows the diversity of Shakespeare's responses to individual political situations. Greenblatt's choice to find the tyrant in a number of plays forces him to give a much too definite, occasionally even narrow, direction to his reading.

There are nice touches, marginal observations that are extremely rewarding, such as his reading of the role Shakespeare assigns to dreams to make the spectators aware of the unravelling of the mechanisms of tyranny, or the analysis of the scene in *King Lear* in which one of Cornwall's servants unavailingly tries to stop his

master's hand while the latter is torturing Gloucester. The analysis of the individual plays shows not only Greenblatt's expertise and power of detailed observation, but also his ability to communicate and to give life to the play on the page. Occasionally the analysis is less than rewarding, especially as deliberately vicious or tyrannical characters, such as Richard III, are described, but the journey along the character's development is lovingly made, and will entice readers. Interestingly, I found the reading reductive in the case of major characters, and richly rewarding for minor characters: it is as if the self-imposed task of exploring the concept of tyranny had forced the protagonists into one mould: but the cap of the tyrant is too large for characters such as Coriolanus, or York in the *Henry VI* plays, and too small for Lear.

In the acknowledgments page, appearing at the end of the book, Greenblatt makes it clear that he is thinking of present-day America and of the 2016 presidential election; re-reading the book with this in mind, one may find a number of covert allusions. Much as one may sympathise with this, I cannot help wishing he had been a little bolder in his claim: the careful avoidance of any reference to contemporary politics does not help the double reading that is intended in the book.

Alessandra Petrina, University of Padua

Guardamagna, Daniela, ed., *Roman Shakespeare. Intersecting Times, Spaces, Languages*, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2018, 233 pp.

The Elizabethans' attitude towards Rome, and the Roman myth, was rich and strange. It was varied, and characterized by inner, often jarring tensions. But it was also inescapable, and essential in defining the identity of the British nation. Rome was, *in primis*, the living and obvious symbol of the fall – the quintessence of the Elizabethan and Shakespearian conception of tragedy. Rome embodied decline, physical and spiritual decadence still showing signs of the previous splendor and intimations of its immortality. But Rome was, at the same time, the cradle of ancient, virile qualities, *virtus* and *pietas*, barely discernible, in the Elizabethans' view, after centuries of rotten popery. Rome as the den of all vices, as the place of venoms, literally and figuratively, from which the British people wanted to keep their

distance. But not always. There were times when the British prided themselves on being the sole heirs of the classical heritage, to the point that John Stuart Mill could still say, at such a very late date as 1846, that the battle of Marathon had been even more decisive for British history than the battle of Hastings.

A difficult relation, then, connects the wooden O and the Roman soul. This collection of essays, edited by Daniela Guardamagna, addresses this uneasiness acutely, both with a thorough knowledge of the contemporary critical debate and with an eye open on our predicament and on the various meanings and nuances that the Roman ideal still possesses to Western eyes. At first, the perimeter of the so-called "Roman canon" is traced, or re-traced, sanitizing it from the critical incrustations accrued over decades of wrestling with Shakespeare. If it is true that the proper "Roman", or "Plutarchan", plays are the ones joined by their mutual source, i.e. Plutarch's *Lives* as filtered by Thomas North, it is also true that a critical view focused only on *Julius Caesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* would fatally leave behind two other plays of Roman setting, the early *Titus Andronicus* and the late *Cymbeline*, which do not come under Plutarch's aegis but, precisely for this reason, may reveal something more of Shakespeare's conception of Rome. In *Cymbeline*, indeed, the issue of *translatio imperii* is felt more acutely than anywhere else, as Maria Del Sapio Garbero has noted: here, the Empire is in London, not in Rome, in accordance with James's project of a great and united Britain with Wales and Scotland, and with James himself as the new Augustus. The wide net of connections arising from Roman imagery is explored in this volume intensely and repeatedly, alternating the focus between past and present and with a culturalist approach which stretches the analyses to the figurative and the aural and the musical: from a survey of the present nationalist revival detectable behind contemporary performances of *Julius Caesar* (Michael Dobson), to the reconstruction of the geographical and cultural perspective that Shakespeare could have of Rome (Peter Holland); from a comparative study of Tim Crouch's *I, Cinna (the Poet)* and Rosy Colombo's *Viaggio di Giulio Cesare nei Fori Imperiali* (Marisa Sestito), to the individuation of an influence by D'Annunzio on *The Waste Land* that comes from a new interpretation of Eliot's cryptic reference to *Coriolanus* (Richard Wilson); from the analysis of the fleeting concepts of *barbarous* and *Roman* in *Titus Andronicus* (Tommaso Continisio), to the evaluation of the pastiche of literary

genres that is *Cymbeline* (Piero Boitani); from a thorough examination of the figurative tradition(s) embodied both by the Lucrece of the Shakespearean *Rape* and by the Lucrece of the much less known *Ghost of Lucrece* by Middleton (Daniela Guardamagna), to an evaluation of the dramatic, dynamic role played by music in the Roman plays (Giuliano Pascucci).

As Guardamagna writes in her sweeping introduction, the renewal of interest in the Roman plays, undoubtedly a trait of our modernity, has a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it performs an historical and literary function, one that openly deals with the past and that is engaged in the restoration of the national heritage through the reassuring mediation of the "classics"; on the other, the Roman plays as instruments, in the hands of contemporary artists and directors, used to shed light on the ubiquitous attacks on democracy carried out by political frond forces, in a dimension that is only slightly less than "dystopian" (Guardamagna, p. 2). It is precisely this lingering presence, this prolongation of the Roman myth in our present that raises the most disquieting questions. Was the Roman myth not at the root of the blackest European nationalisms? Mussolini *was* Caesar, to the point that the author and director Gian Francesco Malipiero was made to remove from view, and to play off-scene, Caesar's stabbing in his 1936 *Giulio Cesare*, so as to nip any emulative intent on the part of the audience in the bud. The Roman plays are thus a two-faced Janus, an instrument useful to expose contemporary fascisms and also to turn the screws of right-wing governance. As this book teaches us, we must keep our eyes open so as to prevent the Roman canon from falling once more into the wrong hands.

Paolo Caponi, University of Milan

Kerrigan, John, *Shakespeare's Binding Language*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, 622 pp.

With the hindsight afforded by the past three years, John Kerrigan's *Shakespeare's Binding Language* stands out as one of the most significant contributions in the plethora of studies issued to mark the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. The book, extensively reviewed, has been deservedly hailed as a major accomplishment in Kerrigan's distinguished career as a Shakespearean scholar and

editor. The reasons for eulogy are sound, for Kerrigan knows how to deploy both thoroughness and erudition at their best. His virtuoso close reading, interspersed with calibrated Derridean touches, effortlessly dovetails with a painstaking probing of historical records to yield a double focus, in-depth exploration of binding language and of its multiple enactments in early modern England and in Shakespeare's works.

Despite its titular emphasis on Shakespeare, Kerrigan's ponderous study (a 622 page long *tour-de-force* that engages with over twenty plays by Shakespeare, touches upon relevant sonnets and samples many plays by other early modern dramatists) seems informed less by Shakespeare per se than by the baffling variety of language patterns to do with "binding" in early modern private and public life, "the whole array of utterances and acts by which people in early modern England committed themselves to the truth of things past, present and to come". "Oaths, vows, promises, asseverations, legal bonds, gages, contracts" (p. xi): the range of linguistic cases Kerrigan exemplifies at the outset anticipates the vast purviews and far-reaching undertones of his study. What is at stake is obviously not a repertoire of formulas but an array of speech acts caught in a perplexing casuistry of contexts and circumstances: who commits himself/herself to whom, in whose sacred or profane name, to what end and in which guise. The intention and the act of committing oneself through binding are seen to innervate all kinds of mundane and religious practices (binding, we are reminded, lies at the very root of *re-ligio*): they are to be found ubiquitously and are perhaps most active where least evident. Whether secular or sacred, formulaic or ridden with ambiguities, whether kept or broken, oaths, vows and promises weave the fabric of early modern communal life, a social life Kerrigan pores over meticulously via extensive forays into the overlapping fields of religion, politics, philosophy and economics. In his thorough introduction Kerrigan lucidly sets out the book's methodical assessment of all and every issue entangled in the language of binding: from the works and words involved, to the import of classical tradition, and the pesky variables of cultural status and gender. At the same time, Kerrigan designates early modern theatre – notably Shakespeare, but also, albeit more marginally, Dekker, Fletcher, Heywood, Marston and Middleton – as his ideal compass of study. For this is the place where the all-powerful histrionics wielded by the language of binding reaches its unfettered

fulfilment, where the tortuous motives and intentions of those who swear, promise or asseverate come into full view, and where the leeway allowed by varying allegiances is negotiated. On Shakespeare's stage, binding speech acts that are drawn from the discourses of everyday life instigate action and motivate characters. They are in fact "joint actions" where "speech act and doubt go together" (p. 37) and where "oaths and vows can reinforce the very doubt they are meant to allay" (p. 40). Whether perlocutory or illocutory, fatic or persuasive, they eventually lose all pretensions to neutrality to expose the textile shifts and wavering fragmentation of their fabric. On one hand then Kerrigan sheds light on how binding language upholds the cultural scaffolding of Early Modern England. On the other, his ingenious insights into the language of Shakespeare's theatre and Shakespeare's poetry lay bare the unsteady workings of it all: the underlying pushing, clutching and loosening of the bolts that hold such cultural construction precariously together.

The result is a volume which, in seventeen essay-like chapters, arranged in a loosely chronological sequence, followed by an "Epilogue", and complete with an impressively comprehensive bibliography, retraces unexpected Shakespearian variations of one *leitmotiv*. What matters are not the plays themselves, but their ability to reverberate the modulations of binding language. We come across them repeatedly as they are made to resonate with each other in plays unconventionally paired or as they resurface under different guises in several chapters that address the same play. We are shown how equivocation "ripples through *All's Well That Ends Well*" only to reach into darker places in *Macbeth* where it "is caught up in the unravelling of oaths" (p. 324); we are taught to discern the threat of bonds loaded with the double urge of time and money both in *The Merchant of Venice* and in *The Comedy of Errors*; more predictably but no less interestingly, we are made privy to the parallel oaths of fealty which bind counsellors to sovereigns and spouses to each other in *The Winter's Tale* and in *Cymbeline*.

A climactic point in the book's trajectory is the early Jacobean crisis in authority mirrored on and off stage by the unchecked proliferation of blasphemous oaths and perjuries, an escalation of dubious commitments that allude to the volatile religious controversies of a divisive post-reformation England. Imposed upon Catholic subjects in 1606 by James I, the Oath of Allegiance signals a

pivotal "defining" (p. 368) counter-measure which, in his two chapters devoted to the topic of Reformation, Kerrigan carefully places in context, in light of previous Oaths of Allegiance and through a penetrating analysis of religious contention in matters of natural and positive law, of obedience and of sacraments. What he also chases with unrelenting precision, however, is the problematic enactment of the tortuous relationship between oaths and obedience in plays which turn to the Henrician period, such as John Bale's *King Johan*, and Shakespeare's *King John*, or which hark back to the Henrician Reformation such as the collaborative dramas *Sir Thomas More* and *Henry VIII.*

In a book which so pointedly puts on record the many historical incarnations of binding language through the lens of the theatre the emphasis placed on the drawbacks of the 1606 Act to Restrain Abuses of Players against anyone who should "in any Stage/play, Interlude, Shew, Maygame, or Pageant, iestingly, and profanely [to] speak, or use the holy name of God, or of Christ Iesus, or of the holy Ghost, or of the Trinitie" (p. 8) comes as no surprise. Kerrigan convincingly shows that Jacobean coercions feed back into the theatre where expurgations and redirections became tangible. Yet, he also expands on how, even in his "oath-constrained plays" (p. 453) Shakespeare, like most other dramatists, found his own ways to dramatize restrictions, proving that " in the ongoing argument about profanity [...] the playhouse had things to say, not merely cuts to make" (p. 472).

These cursory remarks necessarily fail to do justice to the extent of Kerrigan's work, whose sophistication, complexity and meticulousness defy synopsis and challenge reviewers. All the more so because the author aims not to demonstrate, but to illustrate, "to highlight and bring into focus particular kinds of verbal and performative behaviour in Shakespeare" (p. 476), as he humbly puts it in his conclusion. What must be at the very least underscored is that, as Kerrigan highlights plays rarely addressed or details often unnoticed even in works amply plundered by critics, his innovative slant opens fresh vistas on Shakespeare's corpus. One would not expect, for instance, to consider *Hamlet* in the frame of its duels, let alone to find out how revealingly these still embed traces of judicial combats, "the bets upon the soul" (p. 325) which, preceded by sacred oaths , would have tested the truth of the word of honour in medieval times. And it is no less enlightening to be made witnesses of how

closely "the oaths, vows and curses that Shylock piles on top of his bond" (p. 190) in *The Merchant of Venice* tie in with early modern Jewish treatises on the sacred value of oaths and with the anti-Jewish protestant controversy on this issue. Here, as elsewhere, Kerrigan's insight into early modern culture readily engages us thanks to sharp close readings (a feature reviewers have aptly qualified as Empsonian) that are alert to the finest resonances of binding language and that occasionally place references to prominent twentieth century thinkers or critics: Marcel Mauss, Jacques Derrida or Judith Butler amongst others. No matter how opportune, such sparkles from our critical theorists, however, strike an odd note in a book which, despite this alluring smokescreen, remains unconditionally focussed on the pastness of the past, with no concession made to the difference of the present . Actually, emphasis on a synchronic version of history and of performance is, for better or worse, a distinctive feature of Kerrigan's massively erudite volume; and while we are given solid insights into how early modern audiences might have responded to the *mise-en-scène* of their own binding acts, we are also unfortunately left clueless as to the variables of such interaction across time. Still Kerrigan's painstaking delving into the folds "of anything that is conceptually difficult and socially complex" in search of "the variousness of utterance and circumstance in which Shakespeare's plays took shape" (p. 476) leaves us with invaluable tools and a powerful incentive to explore this issue further in a diachronic perspective, beyond Shakespeare's age.

Despite its refreshingly accessible style, this is a book meant primarily for a learned elite of Shakespearean scholars: alert minds that have been trained to follow the densely allusive patterns, the conceptual ramifications and the subtleties of Shakespeare's language across his whole corpus. It is to be hoped that average readers may also find their own ways. Even partial glimpses into this ground-breaking study, which boldly swims against the recent tide of compact books, handbooks and hard-headed writing dictated by the contingencies of academia, will surely spark curiosity and inspire research on the tying and untying of social bonds, a subject which, across the world, remains as topical as ever.

Alessandra Marzola, University of Bergamo

Lopez, Jeremy, *The Arden Introduction to Reading Shakespeare: Close Reading and Analysis*, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury, 2019, 164 pp.

A welcome addition to the many introductory texts which already aim to help the novice to read Shakespeare's work (Frederick Samuel Boas, *An Introduction to the Reading of Shakespeare*, Oxford University Press, 1927; Maurice Charney, *How to Read Shakespeare*, Peter Lang, 1992, a reprint of 1971; David Bevington, *How to Read a Shakespeare Play*, Wiley, 2006; Eugene Giddens, *How to Read a Shakespearean Play Text*, Cambridge University Press, 2011; Michael Alexander, *Reading Shakespeare*, Macmillan International Higher Education, 2012; Nicholas Royle, *How To Read Shakespeare*, Granta Books, 2014, to name only a few), Jeremy Lopez's book makes another "useful" (p. 162) tool to introduce ways of unravelling the complexities of dramatic language to "readers who are new to studying Shakespeare" (p. viii). That said, as a work that addresses dramatic structures, categories for analysis, technical matters, and close reading methods and techniques, Lopez's study offers far more to the reader than its title—*The Arden Introduction to Reading Shakespeare*—promises. The volume provides a starting point for further exploration ("this book", reminds the author, "should not be mistaken, or used as, a course in Shakespeare studies [...] it will probably be most useful in conjunction with a course or other reading you are already doing on Shakespeare", p. viii); even more importantly, it constantly encourages the reader to develop "habits of attention" (p. viii) which will enable them to test their own interpretive strategies. Indeed, one of the strengths of this *Introduction* lies in its continuous alertness to the "openness" of a Shakespeare text and to its possibilities for exploring and unfolding its "multiplicity of meanings" (p. 6).

The volume benefits from its structured methodology and thematic cohesiveness. The reader is led through four main sections: Part One on starting-points ("title", "stage directions", "scenes", and "the whole play"); Part Two on "first words", "the first act", "the third act", "the second and fourth acts", "the last act", and "last words"); Part Three on "patterned language" and "characters"; and Part Four on "metre" and "textual variation". The methodological rigour applied to the structure of the whole book is complemented in

the organisation of its chapters: each one contains a separate overview and a conclusion. These summaries are particularly commendable for the cogency of their exposition. The argument of each chapter is also proposed clearly and developed systematically in three different sections (A, B, and C), although – and despite Lopez's warning to his reader not to expect any evenly distribution of examples (p. 6) – the arbitrariness of the plays chosen for the close analyses somehow compromises what is otherwise an impeccably organised work.

Each individual section – even Lopez's excursion into Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and metrical language (pp. 141-49) – is sewn beautifully to the others by the book's "overarching concern [...] with the complex relation between individual parts of a play and the dramatic whole to which they belong" (p. vii). As one follows Lopez through his arguments, though, one may feel inclined to question the choice of the book's title: after all, it invites the reader to an "Introduction to Reading Shakespeare" and not, as it seems to be, to an introduction to reading Shakespeare's plays only. Indeed, when he reiterates that "the subject of this book [is] the complex experience of reading or watching a Shakespeare play" (p. viii), he further complicates our appreciation of his choice of the title.

Semantics aside, this lucidly written overview of Shakespeare's dramatic language will be of interest primarily to college and university students who will no doubt find this introduction valuable, particularly in those classrooms where Shakespeare's linguistic complexities are met for the first time. Academics and people with interest or special training in early modern drama will also find Lopez's demand that we see Shakespeare's plays as "contain[ing], or gestur[ing] towards, alternative versions of themselves" (p. 90 and p. 129) as both compelling and persuasive. Equally convincing are the author's analyses of the "inadequacy of last words" (p. 109), of characters who "must be partly defined by what we imagine others might think [them] to be" (p. 127), and of textual variations as a way of informing our close readings (p. 154).

At a time when Shakespeare's work is measured less in terms of its value as a (distant) cultural iconography and more as a space where every person who engages imaginatively with these texts can find relevant clues to inform their own individual knowledge of the world (even beyond academia), Lopez's book represents a strong example of how providing readers with the right critical tools will

enable them to appreciate Shakespeare's work and to position their own voice within today's critical discourse.

Lucia Nigri, University of Salford-Manchester (UK)

Sokol, B. J., *Shakespeare's Artists*, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, 325 pp.

In the large catalogue of current intertextual studies on the fascinating crossover between modes of expression in the early-modern period, B. J. Sokol's book contributes to our sense of the overall map of cultural practices of the time. Shakespeare's poems and plays are at the core of a crucial engagement in portraying artist figures: painters and sculptors, and musicians of diverse kinds.

The volume is presented as an attempt at "a literary critical experiment", starting from an enquiry into Shakespeare's notion of an 'artist': "a practical matter or an intellectual category?" (pp. 4-8). The question also involves the complex issue of Shakespeare's consciousness of aesthetics as a field of knowledge, an issue that leads to a critical analysis of his fictional characters. Sokol's method integrates a historical approach with a subjective, imaginative interpretation: on the one hand it proves that "Shakespeare's artists are distinctive features, even bellwethers, of the social fabric"; on the other, it provides broadly thematic interpretations. The chapter on *Painters and Sculptors in Shakespeare's Poem*s focusses on the shift from Horace's authoritative dictum *ut pictura poesis* to the competitive *Paragoni* of the senses, bringing to the fore Leonardo da Vinci's and Ben Jonson's opposing attitudes to the relative priority of words and images – and related 'sister arts'. Particular attention is bestowed on *The Rape of Lucrece* with regard to Shakespeare's use of *ekphrasis*, but also on the active role played by the viewers imagination according to Ernst Gombrich's classical thesis in *Art and Illusion*: Sokol highlights Lucrece's perception *from a distance* of the Troy painting in the climactic scene leading to her suicide.

In the next chapter, on *Painters and Sculptors in Shakespeare's Plays*, an equal emphasis on the role played by *indefiniteness* is carried through, now with regard to the closet scene in *Hamlet*. Here portraits appear to share with the hallucinatory nature of the ghost, visible only to Hamlet, stirring "the psychological violence [of the scene], so intense that it pales the actual murder that takes place in it" (p. 48).

Consistent with the theme of the chapter, critical focus on *Timon of Athens* is inevitable as is a comment on the pretended Giulio Romano painted statue in *The Winter's Tale.* Not only do Sokol (and Shakespeare) show the mediating function between art and life, but also the "psychic danger" that art's transforming agency encodes: for instance, the "short-circuiting the process of recognizing the symbolization in art" (p. 92) on the statue scene.

Chapters 5 and 6 extend to *Shakespeare's Musicians*; with the proviso that the focus is on "*musicians* represented by Shakespeare rather than, more generally [and predictably], on *Shakespeare and music*" (p. 139). Indeed, in this section the appropriate question is "the *kinds* of music indicated by Shakespearian texts" (p. 139), with a view to inferring from them the kinds of musicians Shakespeare represented in a time which was "a highpoint in musical history" (p. 140). Thematically, *The Tempest* is of course closest to this question, however Sokol seems to be more interested in *Twelfth Night*, seeing Feste as a direct projection of Shakespeare, a sort of 'co-performer', since his music was addressed to people of different stations in the social scale, high and low. An interesting side aspect of Feste is the character's anxiety about the decay of his profession, due to competition from the English playhouses (p.144); an anxiety which might have something valuable to tell us when we approach the experimental playwriting of Shakespeare's last phase.

In spite of the numerous references – historical *and* textual – Sokol's book is not a totalizing study nor was it meant to be. Some of its conclusions, like the claim that Shakespeare does not approve of music (and, by extension, art) used for deception rather than constituting an honest language of expression, do not seem to match the rich material and ideas circulating in the chapters. However, one of the suggestive features of *Shakespeare's Artists* is the perception of "Viola, Laertes, Marina, Imogen/Fidele, Perdita, and possibly even Hamlet" as "unheard musicians" (p. 162). This is real food for thought.

Rosy Colombo, Sapienza University of Rome

A Tribute to Roy Eriksen

Two men are sitting at a table in a candlelit room. Paper, pen, and ink on the table. The slightly better dressed of the two is reading from the sheet in front of him, stops, goes over it once more, before nodding approvingly, "Mmm [...] good, very good". He then swiftly seizes the quill, dips it, and underscores some words at the top of the written text, changes a word in mid-text, and others at the end, before pushing the sheet back over to his companion, with a smile: "What do you think? Better?" The other man peruses the sheet carefully: "Mmm [...] Quite. I see what you mean".

That theatrical scene comes at the opening of one of Roy Eriksen's most recent but finest essays – on Shakespeare's response to the plays of Christopher Marlowe – and it brings Roy's two greatest literary subjects together for a grand finale, which is also a beautifully lit, wryly humorous, typically generous group portrait of what we must now learn to call 'the Eriksen generation'. As with everything he wrote, Roy was hearing secret harmonies here, which he neither wanted nor needed to spell out. He would leave it to those who knew how sensitive his eye and ear were to coded, hidden messages, to get the deeper, secret meaning.

Of course, it is obvious that Roy is the better dressed of the men in the picture. His jackets were tailored in Rome. But anyone who had been invited, welcomed, introduced, chaired, moderated, wined, dined, put to bed, breakfasted, and then driven in a daze to the airport by him, at the end of one of the Maestro's famous conferences in Kristiansand or Italy, and had then been seductively cajoled, edited, corrected, revised, and, more often than not, abbreviated by him, before being published in one of those *de luxe* volumes he conjured, as if by magic, from some clandestine printer in Ferrara; or who had ever shared a seminar panel; or simply listened spell-bound, as he wove all the preceding presentations of the day into the Platonic harmony of his cosmic conclusion, would know how much that piece of chamber music said about his own belief in art and the academy as collaborative creative exchanges. And looking back at the scene of co-operation between the two Elizabethan dramatists, it seems to sum up Roy's irreplaceable role for us. Now I see what he meant. He made all our work better.

Professor Ken Pickering of Kent University, the President of the British Marlowe Society, has asked me to read this tribute from him to the way in which Roy was not only so scholarly in himself, but the cause of scholarship in others:

Roy was an outstanding scholar of early modern drama and he published extensively on Marlowe. He gave a number of fascinating talks to the British Marlowe Society at the dramatist's King's School in Canterbury, and he was a major participant in conferences wherever Marlowe and Shakespeare were considered. We all heard how his translation of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus *into his native Norwegian had its premiere in Oslo shortly before his key contribution to the Shakespeare and Scandinavia conference and the Marlowe and Shakespeare conference at the Rose Theatre, Kingston. He was a tremendous friend of the Marlowe Society, and a personal adviser and encouragement to me as Chairman. In recent years it was entirely appropriate that he was partly based at the University of Padua (like Galileo and another King's School boy, William Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood) where his extraordinary gift for languages and his penetrating scholarship made him a true Renaissance Man.*

Roy's magnificent lecture at another 2016 conference in Kingston's Rose Theatre was entitled "Mission Impossible: Giordano Bruno in London", and that could have been a self-description. He was fascinated by Bruno as a border-crossing go-between, a courier between Catholics and Protestants, magic and science, who wrote the ultimate secret book, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, about a midnight love feast, hosted to bring enemies together during the original Brexit, the English Reformation. Roy's own midnight feasts were celebrated extravaganzas, where seafood, champagne, and a knockout 15% red from Umbria, would have stunned the Borgias. But for his thank-you, Bruno was burned at the stake by the Pope in Rome's *Campo di Fiori*; and on the last-but-one evening we Shakespeare scholars would ever spend with him, at almost the end of his farewell conference, Roy led us by what seemed like a very Puckish roundabout route to the restaurant, all the time lecturing us on the Eternal City, towards the site of the fire, and the statue of the great free thinker. At the time, we were all too hungry to appreciate it. But now I see what he meant. 'To Bruno', reads the inscription

around the base of the statue, 'From the age he predicted'. This was Roy's homage to humanism. Francois Laroque has sent this message in tribute to the humanist spirit he brought to his activities in France, where he had many friends from his time in Montpellier in the 1980s:

Roy invited me to Tromso, Oslo and Kristiansand. Sophie Chiari and I also went to a conference he co-organised in Vincenza. Naturally, we were both very glad he also accepted to give papers at French conferences like "Transmission and Transgression" in Aix-en-Provence, "Censorship" in Clermont-Ferrand, as well as others in Lyons on "Love's Labour's Lost" and "As You Like It". Finally, he accepted to write a piece on Dr Faustus for a volume called "Performances at Court in the Age of Shakespeare", which will be published at the end of the year. Needless to say, the volume will be dedicated to his memory.

This only gives a faint idea of how hard Roy worked, while being yet able to travel and keep so many close links with friends and colleagues all over Europe, as France represents only a small part of his contributions to Renaissance and Italian scholarship. He really impressed us by his vast knowledge as well as by his kindness and availability whatever his other commitments may have been. I never heard him complain about his own health problems or pain. He took long walks, and told you about the magic powder he had been able to get through mysterious channels and which, so he said, did him much good.

Roy was an open-minded and most tolerant man, a true humanist and citizen of the world. He was our friend. We mourn him and we both very much miss him.

The Eriksen methodology is that nothing in the piazza or the picture or the play is accidental; and this belief in intention led Roy into an amused skepticism towards French theorists of 'the death of the author', as well as his lasting love affair with numerology: the concept of intelligent design in literature. He never could accept authorial death, being so confident Shakespeare was right when he swore that "Not marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme". Roy's commitment to "monuments of

unageing intellect" produced what will surely survive as his own best work, his 2001 book, *The Building in the Text: Alberti to Shakespeare and Milton*. This is dedicated, simply, 'To Berit', and when Roy writes there how the ladder Petrarch and his lady climb numerologically in the sonnets is made of what the poet calls "The love that lives and reigns in all my thoughts", we are made to think not only of all those days with Berit, counting the steps in the actual towers of Italy, but of the "marriage of true minds" that made this climbing possible.

Roy had been a high-altitude researcher, of course, in Bernard Berenson's illustrious *I Tatti*, Harvard University's Renaissance Research Centre in Florence, where interdisciplinarity is the sworn religion, and the *paragone* of poetry and painting is everyday conversation, and David Skilton, Professor of Illustration Studies at Cardiff University, has asked to pay this tribute to his role as a genial but astute intermediary between word and image:

As a polymath Roy Eriksen could bring his immense knowledge and judgment in history, languages, fine art and archaeology to bear on the visual content of Renaissance books and manuscripts. In this, as in so much else, he very willingly shared his wisdom with colleagues and students, offering to all who heard him or read his work, hugely exciting yet always reliable insights into the works he dealt with. He was generally patient with those who knew less than he did (that is to say, almost everyone), and, as a rule, was very charitable if asked to explain himself further. The exception to this rule was his impatience with people whose ignorance was a result of laziness or indifference. He had little patience for those who should have known better. To those of us working in literary illustration there was something comforting as well as a trifle shaming to find one's own specialism so well located, appreciated and expounded in such a broad context of renaissance culture. But Roy was, in every sense, simpatico.

Roy by name and royal by nature, the Maestro was known to British scholars as the Godfather, Il Magnifico, Maecenas, or sometimes, simply Rex. For a quarter of a century I have been an awed guest at his lavish multi-lingual table. I count his Kristiansand conferences on "Toleration and the City" as among the most creative events of my career, and the decade-long project as a model for relations between

the university and the community. The series was given unique impact by its location in the city planned by King Christian. For Roy truly believed in the ideal city. He was most eloquent writing about utopias, and the sharing of ideas, and most impatient when speaking of closed minds and policed walls. So, it was apt that he should host the last supper of his farewell conference, on crossing genres, in a Jewish *trattoria* beside the ruins of the gate to the Ghetto, the Portico Ottavia in Rome. As autumn moved into winter, Roy spoke quietly then as he does on the final page of *The Building in the Text*, about "The concepts of *fratellanza*, of brotherhood and the extended family", of the critic or teacher "creating new family ties between people who are not related in real life, and magnifying such ties as do in fact exist". Here was a man who understood the meaning of *The Symposium*. Let us give thanks to Roy, then, that, as the clown says at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost*, "the men of peace" have been at "a great feast of languages", and some of them have been lucky enough to have "stolen the scraps".

Richard Wilson

On Vanitas
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Abstracts

In Defiance of Death: Shakespeare and Tomb Sculpture

Catherine Belsey

Two distinct versions of the *vanitas* appear on late medieval and early modern double-decker tombs. On the one hand, medieval asceticism shows death triumphant and sculpted cadaver humiliated by its own mortality. On the other, Reformation humanism celebrates death as the gateway to eternity, allowing the skeletal dead to defy their own finitude. Shakespeare draws imagery and dramatic action from both traditions.

Keywords: Effigy, Skeleton, *Transi* tombs, *Hamlet*, Cleopatra

'False Latin', Double Dutch: Foreign and Domestic in Love's Labour's Lost *and* The Shoemaker's Holiday

Rui Carvalho Homem

This paper offers a discussion of linguistic diversity as a source of laughter in two early modern English comedies, respectively by William Shakespeare and Thomas Dekker. It focuses especially on the close relationship between the risible potential of some verbal practices and the playwrights' dramatisation of tensions between a sense of the foreign and an assertive vernacular Englishness – at a moment in European cultural and political history that proved crucial for the emergence of commonplace perceptions of national identities. My reading of such tensions will benefit from insights provided by imagology, translation and comparative studies.

Keywords: *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Laughter, Vernacular Englishness, National identities

Shakespeare contra Erasmus

Claudia Corti

This essay reads Erasmus, with the mediation of nineteenth-century theorists,

as one of Shakespeare's dominant influences: this is equally true for his dramatic, theatrical, and lyric production. Drawing upon *The Praise of Folly*, *Enchiridion*, and *Adagia*, as well as "vanitas" portraiture and emblematic literature, this essay aims to provide a textual analysis of cross-references between Erasmus' and Shakespeare's shared conceptions of the Renaissance idea of vanity, in their treatment of such themes as illusion, fancy and imagination, phantasm, as well as politics.

Keywords: Erasmus, Shakespeare, Vanity, Folly, Phantasm

Samuel Johnson, William Shakespeare, and the Vanity of Human Wishes

Robert DeMaria, Jr.

He may be best known for his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), but Samuel Johnson also performed in almost every other literary genre common in the eighteenth century. In all his many varied works of poetry, biography, fiction, and journalism, certain common themes persist. The most conspicuous of these is the vanity of human wishes, or, as the sermonizer in Ecclesiastes 1.14 says, "all is vanity". It is not surprising, therefore, that this theme appears prominently in Johnson's edition of the plays of Shakespeare (1765). He worked on this edition on and off throughout the middle part of his career when he was elaborating Ecclesiastes 1.14 in every other genre, and he does so again as an editor. He felt that Shakespeare's greatest fault was a failure to be explicit about his moral lessons. His role as commentator, he evidently felt, was to articulate the morals he believed should be drawn from Shakespeare, and the moral he finds more often than any other is the vanity of human wishes. That is, above all, what Johnson's Shakespeare teaches us.

Keywords: Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, Shakespeare, Ecclesiastes, Vanity

"There is nothing sure in mortality – but mortality": Notes on Middleton's Way with Death

Daniela Guardamagna

The title quotation is attributed by Thomas Middleton to one of the shallower characters in his *Revenger's Tragedy* (1606). This paper deals with the unconventional strategy of attributing such a fundamental sentence to an antagonist and analyses its fruitful outcome. It also tackles the theme of mortality in revenge tragedies, particularly in *Hamlet* and in Middleton's

play.

Keywords: Middleton, Shakespeare, Revenge tragedy, Mortality, the Vanity of human wishes

"This is nothing, fool": Shakespeare's Vanities

MICHAEL NEILL

Remembering the Latin root of *vanity* in *vanus* meaning 'empty' or 'void', this essay explores the use of *vanitas* and *memento mori* motifs in early modern drama, and to the ways in which they are used to play upon primal fears of nullification. Paying particular attention to the relationship between vanity and folly, the essay concludes with an account of *King Lear*'s Fool as a *vanitas* figure – a prophet of the terrifying nullity into which the tragedy descends.

Keywords: Vanity, Emptiness, Nullification, Folly, *King Lear*

Vanitas Iconography as a Dramatic Device in Hamlet *and* Macbeth

ALESSIA PALMIERI

By tracing an iconographical itinerary throughout some of the typical symbols that animate the *memento mori* artistic *topos*, this essay seeks to demonstrate how Shakespeare's use of verbal images of death in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* is not only indebted to a centuries-long literary as well as pictorial tradition, but also functions as a primary dramatic device in the framework of both plays. From Laertes' parting words to Ophelia, to Macduff's portrayal of Banquo in the guise of a walking spirit, Shakespeare weaves a web of cross-references running through each of the two tragedies, foreshadowing the characters' fate. Investigating the plot in retrospect, small hints at the protagonists' demise resurface. Thus, Shakespearean *dramatis personæ* can be said to perish of a slow and gradual death, one that is gradually prepared until it is made actual.

Keywords: Vanitas, Death iconography, Dramatic technique, Preparation

All Petrarch's Fault: The Idea of a Renaissance

Alessandra Petrina

This article discusses the meaning of the term *Renaissance* and its application to the cultural and literary sphere, discussing its early definitions on the part of scholars such as Jules Michelet, Jacob Burckhardt, and Johan Huizinga, as well as its etymology, in the context of the investigation of other keywords such as *Humanism* and *Middle Ages*. It then focuses on the latter term, *Middle Ages*, by considering its first creation, and its use on the part of a proto-humanist such as Petrarch. In the discussion of the reception of these terms on the part of scholarship, it also proposes a new meaning for these terms.

Keywords: Renaissance, Early Modern, Middle Ages, Humanism, Petrarch

An Image of Vanitas: Geometrical Optics and Shakespearean Points of View

B. J. Sokol

A woodcut illustration to *Der Ritter vom Turn*, Marquard vom Stein's 1493 German translation of Chevalier Geoffroy de La Tour Landry's *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles* (c. 1372), shows a girl vainly viewing herself in a mirror unaware of an obscene demon standing behind her. The implied viewer of this scene sees the girl and demon and the demon reflected in her mirror. Thus the spectator is made aware of the unawareness of the girl. The geometrical optics and perceptual mechanisms lying behind this scene are explored and placed in historical contexts. It is also noted how mirror imaging served varied purposes when noted or depicted by Renaissance authors. It is demonstrated finally that Shakespeare created dramatic configurations that show how perceptions may be entirely altered as a result of changes of vantage point or points of view.

Keywords: Mirrors, Vanity, Mistaken perception, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*

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