Memoria di Shakespeare

A Journal of Shakespearean Studies

11/2024

Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal

edited by
Nadia Fusini, Iolanda Plescia, Massimo Stella

SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ EDITRICE
2024

Sapienza Università Editrice
Piazzale Aldo Moro 5 – 00185 Roma

www.editricesapienza.it
edizioni.sapienza@uniroma1.it

ISSN 2283-8759

Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies
https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa03/memoria_di_shakespeare
memoriadishakespeare@uniroma1.it

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ISSN 2283-8759
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Nadia Fusini, Iolanda Plescia

Memory

Nadia Fusini

I knew that the time would come when we would have to ask ourselves: what does the title of our journal, *Memoria di Shakespeare*, enclose and encompass, and hide and at the same time preserve, like a shell its pearl? The title was searched out and finally chosen by the person who founded this journal, our beloved Maestro, Agostino Lombardo, who, as his death approached, chose to entrust his creature to the care of one of the dearest amongst his pupils and students, Rosy Colombo, who took on the task, preserving the journal in its fundamental lines, as indeed already expressed in its title. I remember heated discussions in which Agostino Lombardo involved all his pupils and students at the time. For a while he even thought of a title inspired by Eliot, *La figlia che piange*, which, however, frightened many of us female pupils, women, daughters, who were by no means in the mood for crying…

Memoria di Shakespeare seemed to all of us then, and still does, more 'correct', more to the point. It contained the necessary, the right ambiguity, which now, in this Introduction, I would like briefly to comment on. Without, however, abolishing the halo of rich indeterminacy that literary language thrives on, as anyone who has learned the lesson of William Empson knows.

But let us proceed in order. In the title *Memoria di Shakespeare* one must note before all else the complexity of the task to which our Maestro was inviting us: clearly, in creating such a journal, we were called upon to keep Shakespeare's memory alive, not to let Shakespeare die, now or ever. "Remember Shakespeare, do not let him disappear from the lecture halls of our universities, here in Italy", Lombardo exhorted us.

You might well ask yourselves: but why? Was there a risk at the very end of the second millennium, when Lombardo called us to our task, that Shakespeare would disappear from the canon of world literature? Was there then, is there today at the beginning of the third millennium, a risk that we might have to stop teaching Shakespeare? A risk that Agostino Lombardo – far-sighted, visionary as he was – had already foreseen?

Difficult to believe, I agree, that Shakespeare might disappear from the heritage of our tradition; but is that really impossible? Aren't there already active teams of politically correct censors who would like to stop us from reading *Othello*? Or *The Merchant of Venice*? And for how many more years will anyone still be able to read Shakespeare in his early modern English? Will Shakespeare be translated into basic English, as we already translate and betray Dante into modern Italian?

But more to the point and more specifically, in naming his journal *Memoria di Shakespeare,* Agostino Lombardo was imposing on us the task of reflecting on the very idea of memory itself, starting with Shakespeare as its object. We know that the genitive case (*Memoria di*…) is always ambiguous in and of itself – are we dealing with an objective genitive? Or a subjective genitive? If subjective, the invitation will exhort us to deal with Shakespeare's own memory: how much he remembers; and therefore our task as scholars shall be to investigate the mnemonic capacity of our author: how much he actually and voluntarily uses the past, understood as the literary heritage he has at his disposal; if and how he is aware of how much literary matter, the language, the imagination, the tradition of antiquity, deposits in him. In this case, we may be asked to count and recount the conscious, voluntary quotations from past literary material that he preserves in his language, even in the form of "scraps, orts, fragments", which we scholars in the guise of antiquarian academics, or superfine investigators, will need to trace and retrace in order to reconstruct the heritage he conveys to us. And to interpret the ways in which he transforms it. A beautiful task, I do not deny it. Like true detectives, which we scholars sometimes aspire to be as interpreters of literary texts, we try to seek out traces of the presence of tradition in our author.

But if objective, that genitive will turn the search towards another sense, towards a tracing of the unconscious memory and persistence of the classical past in Shakespeare, in the direction of recovering that

which surfaces involuntarily, because the language carries it, floats it in the lines or in the words he puts into the mouths of the characters he invents. For what else do we mean by 'memory', if not a legacy of images and figures from the past that metamorphose into new images through a process of recovery and re-use, of 'renewal', in fact; that proceeds by transporting fragments of 'memories', recollections that are often involuntary? Not only the result of a programmatic recovery, but undoubtedly a booty, a patrimony, a heritage of tradition to be drawn upon with freedom and respect, but without inhibitory restraints on the imagination.

Because the creative energy which moves Shakespearean language, as every scholar knows if he or she will observe faithfully, gives birth to new figurations thanks to echoes and cross-references that are not necessarily intentional, learned quotations, the result of an antiquarian attitude, I repeat; but rather images, characters, names in which a legacy of the past is deposited, and which, distorted or transformed, relaunches the creative imagination into the future. Here then is the question: what is there of Medea in Lady Macbeth? (Fusini 2023)? What's left of the Roman Coriolanus in Shakespeare's Coriolanus, what's left of Pyramus and Thisbe in the *Midsummer*?

Further, the question concerns not only the cultural heritage that Shakespeare reinvests and recycles, which indeed he does with unparalleled ease and audacity. Rather, we are interested in how and how much, from the genetic heritage that accumulates in a language more language is generated, and how that heritage grows precisely because it hybridizes…

That is how questioning "la memoria di Shakespeare" becomes a way of projecting Shakespeare into the future, anticipating the many ways in which Shakespeare is alive not only in the time past, and time present, but in the time future. Because, yes, we think it impossible to think of a time in which Shakespeare will not be here. No, we cannot think of a time when we will fully experience the death of Shakespeare. In any case, however, can there ever be a fully experienced experience of death?

There is a difference between *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung*, we learnt from Heidegger. A difference that is already there, in the generous, impetuous, hasty response of Hamlet, when Lord Death comes to him via the ghost of the father. At his father's intimation that he might not

remember, that he might forget what the father commands, instantly Hamlet the son answers: "Remember thee? / Yea, from the table of my memory / I'll wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all pressures past […] And thy commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of my brain, / Unmix'd with baser matter" (*Hamlet*, I.v.97-104, Shakespeare 1998). Admirable response, which suggests the way the living should, shall ever and ever respond to the dead, so that the intimation becomes a commandment, a task, a duty, an alliance.

We who live after Shakespeare, don't want Shakespeare to die. We don't want to face a time in which we might live in such a mood of impoverishment and deprivation. We know of course that it is the Other that is always dead, and that precisely from that inhuman ascertainment that is the Other who is dead, springs guilt, and the entire discourse of mourning is generated. Death is never to us simply the death of the Other: we have the problem of justifying our survival. That is why death is so indecent: it exhibits our erection over the Other's prostration. If we cannot tolerate death, it is precisely because we have come so far from the kind of primitive, direct triumph of life, which says yes to survival. We want to maintain our allegiance with the dead one, not win over him. In quoting Ovid, Shakespeare helps him to live, and in reading Shakespeare quoting Ovid, we ourselves live with them. In so doing, in fact, we do not let the dead die, and if anything we let the dead invade our life and triumph over it. So Life and Death constantly intermingle, and we have nightmares, hallucinations, ghosts… Metamorphoses of all kinds.

In the plural, *Metamorphoses* is the title of Ovid's book, a work famous like few others in the world. And very many, plural are the changes, the transformations it describes. In the singular it is an essential and in many ways salvific concept, because if there is metamorphosis, the still-image of death does not prevail. In both cases, whether in the title of the book or in the concept, the appeal of the word lies in the movement to which it alludes. And it is certainly not a coincidence that in the Renaissance era, an era that above all else adores the sinuosity of movement, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is so plundered in poetry, in painting. In a seminal book in the history of literature, *The Gods Made Flesh. Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (1986), Leonard Barkan rightly began his exploration of the Ovidian text from Velazquez's painting, *The Spinners*, or the fable of

Arachne, which brilliantly exposes the principle that weaves together the Ovidian text, namely a weaving of Chinese boxes. Or if you like, matryoshka-style, in the Ovidian text stories spring up one after the other in an exhilarating proliferation, moving and stirring and pervading and impregnating the mind of the poet, who feeds off ancient fables to his own mind, and the mind of the reader. Something not dissimilar happens to the mind of the poet Shakespeare, who in his writing very often uses the same process of *mise en abyme*.

Indeed, it is so; Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a book that has had an enormous influence on the art of the West, an influence equal to the Bible, the other great text of the literature of the West that nurtured our literary language. In Shakespeare's case, we readers are presented with an astonishing miracle: we discover that a writer can also be a ventriloquist. That is, Shakespeare speaks in Ovid's voice: it is Ovid's voice that resonates in his poetry, and prose. Shakespeare's, though, is not an operation of imitation, but one of recreation. Shakespeare paraphrases, rewrites, interprets, changes, transforms, and in so doing invents a new language, which intoxicates us with pleasure. *Encore et encore*.

Shakespeare is Shakespeare, we know how dismissive he can be *vis-à-vis* his sources, how free he feels in changing, how free he feels in sifting, in ordering afresh the material and especially in reading into the source an internal nexus that is often lacking in the source itself.

In the case of the Roman plays, Shakespeare chooses his authority, Plutarch; but he treats him with astonishing nonchalance. He has no scruples about creating an entirely new personality for a minor character and, in the process, no hesitation in disregarding the hints that he finds and asserting quite the reverse. We know, I repeat, not only that he alters greatly the characters of Plutarch's narrative, but that he also makes completely new additions. And we accept this. Shakespeare is Shakespeare, I repeat: Shakespeare is a writer – he finds his theme in the process of writing, as always is the case with a true writer. Not even for a moment, I believe, in writing *Julius Caesar*, or *Coriolanus*, did Shakespeare think he might want to write a political play, like Brecht would do.

If in *Julius Caesar* it is indisputable that Shakespeare depends on Plutarch, at the same time it is impossible to exaggerate how much

he alters and adds. And it is absolutely fascinating to observe the instinctive skill with which he transforms narrated episodes into the form of dialogues and scenes. He has to choose and decide certain critical points and not others and dramatize those, and rearrange around them what he considers of greater importance, and of course to bridge in some way the gaps in between. He has to select the pregnant moments, he has to decide which are going to be the ganglia in which a number of threads, or filaments gather.

The selection, the assortment and the filiation of the data are all important. What he leaves out, of course, is just as important. Or the way in which he manipulates the flight of time. Or the way he breaks and rearranges certain data that in Plutarch are given in a different sequence, into a narrative sequence, a paratactical, anonymous sequence. The description of the prodigies, the apparition of the ghosts, the strangeness of the portents acquire a more intense awe, a dramatic quality precisely because Shakespeare individualizes them. Just to give an example, in Act I, scene iii we have Casca meeting Cicero, and describing to him with gusto and in full detail the terrible night preceding Caesar's death. Shakespeare clearly takes pleasure persisting in the extraordinarily pregnant description, and if he does so it's because he uses Casca's panic in a dramatic way, in order to induce in us spectators and readers the same fears. It really is as though we feel them ourselves.

Equally interesting is how freely, while writing the *Dream*, he uses his source – which is Lucius Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*. Before writing *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Sister M. Generosa is absolutely sure and convinces us that Shakespeare must have read the story either in the original Latin, or its translation by William Adlington, published in 1566. Surely, she maintains, there is "a paralleling of ideas" (Generosa 1945, 198). For sure he quotes the story of Psyche, as though he had certain archetypal traits in mind; so much so that the Shakespearean dream becomes in part an example of what Northrop Frye designates as displaced myth (Frye 1961). My impression is also that Shakespeare does not organize the play so much in order to match the structure of the myth, but rather that he plays with the mosaic of the myth after having broken it down into its original pieces. The pleasure for Shakespeare being that of re-arranging them in the way that suits him best.

That of *heredity*, *heritage*, is a political and philosophical theme – how smoothly the past passes into the future through the loins of the Father. Again, it is the Oedipal theme: a central theme to the very idea of canon. With his usual independence in drawing material from his sources, Shakespeare mostly avoids borrowing literal phrasing, so to speak, from the story of *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius, but from his use of certain terms it is clear that he knows the Latin text. He certainly knows William Adlington's preface to his 1566 translation, which was reprinted for the third time in 1596. In Shakespeare's rewriting, aspects of Venus and Psyche are fused together in the person of Titania. While Cupid plays a triple role and appears in Oberon, Puck, in the Indian boy. Oberon is manifestly a Cupid figure. His lieutenant Puck has additional properties beyond his folk characteristics. When Venus calls Cupid to take revenge on Psyche, who did not pay her due attention, Apuleius describes his nature in terms that suggest traits that not by chance reappear in Puck.

Shakespeare, as the exemplary modern poet, creates uniformity out of multiplicity. Since he cannot put the entire world on the stage, he must compress it into a single, awesome event. But the unity he arrives at, when he succeeds, is not purely ideal, it is creative, imaginative, in the sense that it is the only necessary means by which he is able to bring forth a self-sustaining aesthetic illusion. It has nothing to do with the dictates of neoclassicism, and ultimately depends on the power of the poet – and that he is in the deepest sense – to transcend any category of perception and insist on his own measure of time and space. Even where Shakespeare seems to take too many liberties, with his telescoping of time and abrupt accelerations of action, it turns out that he is being faithful to ordinary human experience. Time and space, we know, are not absolute. The internal clock ticking as the drama unfolds may not be synchronized with the watches we wear as we sit in the playhouse – but Shakespeare is able thereby to convey a deeper psychological truth.

Contrary to Greek tragedy, born of myth that remains abstract and universal, Shakespeare's theatre, the roots of which lie in the popular carnival plays of the Renaissance, discloses his turbulent world in all its vibrancy and individuality and disparity. But although Sophocles and Shakespeare, Aeschylus and Shakespeare, Euripides and Shake-

speare – just to repeat comparisons already made – may be outwardly dissimilar, we know, we have been taught to meditate on that difference. They share a spiritual kinship that all geniuses share: they are true not only to nature, but also to the culture from which they emerge. It's not by chance that they all have been interpreted as mouthpieces of the collective soul of their different nations, expressing universal thoughts and sentiments, manners and morals. And in each case, for each of them, their art has been considered a development of indigenous species of expression. Though their purpose – the manufacture of theatrical illusion, the creation of creatures of the mind – is the same, their means are necessarily different. Nevertheless, each dramatic form has its own legitimacy, and so might any other literature that is independent and faithful to its national character. The individual quality of each drama, of each separate universe, without a doubt accompanies time and place and composition throughout all the plays. So yes, we might call Shakespeare Sophocles' brother, or Euripides' brother, or Aeschylus' brother, but precisely only where and when we realize how dissimilar he is, only to be inwardly wholly like them.

The creative energy that moves Shakespeare's language – as every scholar knows – gives birth to new figurations thanks to echoes and references that are not necessarily intentional, cultivated quotations, the result of an antiquarian attitude; but rather images, characters, names in which an inheritance of the past is deposited, which, distorted, re-launches the creative imagination in the future. Here then is the question that I ask again: what is there of Medea in Lady Macbeth? What is there of the Roman Coriolanus in Shakespeare's Coriolanus? What is there of Pyramus and Thisbe in the short *entr'acte* in *Midsummer*? The question is not only relative to the cultural heritage that Shakespeare reinvests and recycles, as indeed he does with unparalleled ease and audacity. Rather, we are interested in how and how much it is generated from the genetic heritage that is accumulated in a language. And we wonder about how that heritage grows and hybridizes.

We know: Shakespeare is a poet. Not only because he is the author of the *Sonnets*, the *Venus*, and the *Lucrece*. No, Shakespeare is "the maker, the ποιητης, he is the myriad-minded creator of Imogen and Iago" (Rylands 1952, 99). Quite rightly so. George Rylands describes perfectly well the kind of poetic energy which is proper

to Shakespeare's language, where every word is a picture, "a motion picture". The word 'energy', he adds, is never to be found in Shakespeare, "but in 1599 we find it as a technical term for vigor of expression". "Of course Shakespeare harnessed his poetic energy to lifting the Globe Playhouse, Hercules and his load too", insists Rylands (Rylands 1952, 99). But what is more interesting to us is the way his imagination works, how his nature is "subdued to what it works in, like the dyer's hand" (Sonnet 111).

So much so that every word in Shakespeare can become the atom of poetic energy informing his plays. Every word, every image, goes through a metamorphosis. A word – like the word 'honour' in *Julius Caesar* – can become the atom of poetic energy informing the play, as any attentive reader can notice.

Quite rightly so. But here again, 'honour' comes from Plutarch, but Shakespeare plays it in another tune. 'Metamorphosis' is essentially Ovid, but in another key. In both cases, be it Plutarch, or Ovid, they are Plutarch and Ovid refracted through Shakespeare, and so made new, made different, redirected or 'turned' (Tanner 2010, 116). This concept of 'turning' introduced by Tanner helps us to understand the creative movement through which language goes in the 'ripresa', be that re-take, or re-collection. In the movement there is an obliquity, and a fertility, that at the same time repeats, and varies. Change is implicit in the return. So much so that Tanner can affirm few pages after that Shakespeare gives us quintessential Ovid, but "in another key". (Tanner 2010, 118). Tanner grasps the mystery, or rather approaches with confidence and instinct – this is the gift of the great reader he is – the beating heart of the metamorphosis taking place in Shakespeare's writing, or rather his re-writing. Rather than quoting, Tanner understands, Shakespeare reactivates the creative mechanism of the poetic word.

It is precisely this movement that interests me, the way in which Shakespeare takes, re-takes, repeats and varies themes and motives – the movement itself of repetition consisting precisely in a kind of psychological experiment, if you like. Or better, in a linguistic experiment. Or even better still, in an act of symbolization, which we constantly repeat from the moment we are born. In this sense, literature is a sort of mirror. As kindly Hamlet teaches us while talking to the actors, the text – which he presents to the actors, his piece of writing, the very words

he has invented for them to recite on scene – is, yes, a sort of mirror, but not in the sense that it reflects an external reality, but in the sense that it is made of "words, words, words" (and the tone here is important. One must remember the tone of contempt he uses with Ophelia…) but… But precisely those words in this case will make something happen – even unmask regicide. Yes, words can be daggers…

Yes, words move, words kill, words make things happen…

Precisely those same words will move us readers, us spectators… We readers and spectators know and feel and recognize that for the time of our reading, for the time of our being there watching, we become Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Ophelia, Hamlet… We readers, we spectators are involved in an act of symbolization. In an act of symbolic repetition. In this sense, the action I the spectator see on stage, or the words I the reader read on the page are mirrors in which I the spectator, I the reader reflect myself. Or more precisely, they give me to myself. Isn't this magic? Isn't it narcissistic in itself, the movement that the words initiate?

But more to the point, is it not the very movement of our coming into the world?

Is it not how we human beings position ourselves in relation to the symbolic dimension?

That is precisely, Lacan would suggest, how we as infants find our way into the human community via the power of the signifier. It is also how through repetition, through narcissistic projection in the mirror, in search of the Same, we may happen to meet the Other, and following the trace of the Same may stumble on *différance*.

Before Tony Tanner, Coleridge insisted on the particular aspect of the relation of Shakespeare to the past. On the way he 'turns' what he takes into something else. That is what Coleridge calls Shakespeare's peculiar excellence; that is, his capacity to repeat and change at the same time. So much so that throughout the whole of "his splendid picture gallery", we find individuality everywhere, mere portrait nowhere. In all his various characters, Coleridge claims, we still feel ourselves communing with the same human nature, which is everywhere present "as the vegetable sap in the branches, sprays, leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruits, their shapes, tastes, and odors". Speaking of the effect, i.e. his works themselves, "we may define the excellence of *their* method as consisting in that just proportion, that union and interpenetration of the universal

and the particular, which must ever pervade all works of decided genius and true science", so Coleridge asserts (Coleridge 1907)[1].

For *Method*, Coleridge explains, implies *a progressive transition*. Not by chance this is the meaning of the word in the original language, the Greek *Μεθοδος* literally being *a way,* or *path of transit.* "Methodical" in this context, Coleridge explains, is a term that is quite interesting in itself, because in a world of continuous change, there cannot be transition without continuity, transition meaning not a dead arrangement, but an arrangement that has in itself a principle of progression. For what truly deserves the name of *Poetry* in its most comprehensive sense is precisely the movement that originates in the mind of the poet, a movement that in itself is an instinct; or if you like in itself is nothing but the form, in which the idea, the mental correlative of what finds expression, first announces its incipient germination in the poet's own mind, and thence proceeds the striving after unity of principle through all the diversity of forms, with a feeling resembling that which accompanies our endeavors to recollect a forgotten name; when we seem at once to have and not to have it; which the memory feels, but cannot find.

We all experience that, don't we? asks Coleridge. And we say yes, it is so. And yes "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet" would reply to Shakespeare's Theseus, as his thoughts present to him the one form, of which they are but varieties. Very much in the same way "water and flame, the diamond, the charcoal, and the mantling champagne with its ebullient sparkles, are convoked and fraternized by the theory of the chemist", as Coleridge explicates. And insists furthermore: isn't this, in truth, "the first charm of chemistry, and the secret of the almost universal interest excited by its discoveries?" (Coleridge 1907).

More to the point, we might continue, is it not the same sense of a principle of connection proper to the mind of the poet? In Shakespeare nature becomes poetry, through the creative power of a fertile mind which has that very special metamorphic, miraculous power. A mind divine in this, that both creates and is created. A mind poetic, in the very Greek sense of the word. The poet is a maker, for he 'makes' in the very actual sense of using materials of the past: recycling.

1 I paraphrase throughout this final section from various passages from Coleridge 1907.

Memory, voluntary and involuntary: the essays

Iolanda Plescia

It is the purpose of this concluding section of the introduction to take up the preceding reflections and provide a brief presentation of the essays which we are very pleased to publish here. My co-editors, Nadia Fusini and Massimo Stella, and I began planning this issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare* a few years ago, during a conversation about translation. All three of us have practiced or taught translation: Fusini, translator into Italian of Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf, and many other authors of English literature, is also the general editor of the Feltrinelli Shakespeare series, which is publishing new editions of the entire Shakespeare canon; Massimo Stella has especially translated from ancient Greek, producing a new Italian version of *Oedipus Rex*; I have translated Shakespeare and taught Shakespearean translation for a number of years. Our journal has paid special attention to Shakespeare's relationship to his sources over the years, culminating in an important issue edited by Silvia Bigliazzi in 2023 on *Senecan Shakespeare* (Bigliazzi ed. 2023). It seemed to us, however, that the special kind of textual transmission that we call translation might be a good way to think about the issue afresh: it is stimulating to think of Shakespeare as being engaged in a broad sense in *translatio*, i.e. the transposition of themes, motifs, plotlines, and characters into a new culture, whilst early modern England as a whole was immersed in the activity of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, developing its own sense of national identity in dealing with the inspiration, but also the burden, of the past, and with classical models of empire and power still emanating from the linguistic prestige of Latin.

The category of translation offered useful parallels in coming back to the age-old question of Shakespeare's relationship to his classical sources, for our own experience in the field had taught us that while critics have often rightly emphasized the idea of choice, selection, deliberation, translation is also a question of involuntary memory. It is also a question of blurred recollections of other translations of the same texts, turns of phrase in our "lessico famigliare", our everyday vocabulary, of the sources behind the 'original', of new sources – personal readings, favourite authors – lurking behind the newly produced target texts. Here, of course, we are really talking about influence, "a secret, invisible, and insensible flowing" (as Bigliazzi

has it commenting on Miola 2003, in Bigliazzi 2023, vii). Or, as Nadia Fusini aptly puts it in the opening words of this introduction, dedicated to the foundational and operational motto of our journal, itself devoted to memory: "that which surfaces involuntarily, because the language carries it, floats it in the lines or in the words [Shakespeare] puts into the mouths of the characters he invents" (viii-ix).

On a practical level, translation also often relies on a sort of 'muscle memory', an experience which allows the translator to 'solve' linguistic units as a whole, relying on similar problems encountered in the past, and introducing the original elements that make the new text distinctive (on this, see in particular Laetitia Sansonetti in this issue). We would like to suggest that this process bears similarities to the ways in which authors work with sources, and that it is useful to conceptualize this kind of metamorphosis following Jakobson's well-known tripartite structure, as instances of interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic transposition (Jakobson 1959): the essays here included explore, in fact, how Shakespeare used sources translated into English, or through languages of mediation such as French and Italian, as well as the ways in which the source material is transformed into the language of drama, a wholly new semiotic system which still relies on words but also goes well beyond them (Elam 1980).

Our two opening essays are a perfect case in point for this final problem, focused as they are on *Troilus and Cressida* and the archetypal war story of Troy, to remind us, as Monica Centanni has it, that "Shakespeare is presenting a version that is new and unprecedented, because the questions and problems that the dramatist has to face are different from those of a writer or a poet. Shakespeare does not have to tell a story: he has to make it happen in the theatre" (Centanni 2024, 12). In "*Troilus and Cressida*: Classical Past and Medieval Heritage", Piero Boitani shows us into Shakespeare's workshop from the privileged vantage point of a lifetime of study devoted to the Troilus and Cressida story, providing a brief and poignant interpretation of two selected junctures. "Suspended between Homer and Chaucer" (2), the play in fact offers two key moments (III.ii, V.ix) that are re-read by Boitani as the product of an unreconcilable relationship between source materials, which creates conflict and, as a result, supremely theatrical moments: one which effectively "destroys" the courtly love code of the Middle Ages (6), another which completely deconstructs,

and again – Boitani insists on this word – "*destroy[s]* classical epic after having *destroyed* medieval courtly love" (8, my emphasis). The utter lack of reverential attitude towards the classical/medieval past is what lends particular "realism" and "modernity" (8) to this play, but change and transformation can also be seen as the necessary by-product of movement between different semiotic systems, in which omissions are as significant as inclusions with regard to plot construction and genre definition (a notable problem in *Troilus and Cressida*). Writing from her point of view as a classicist, Monica Centanni ("The Gauntlet of Mars, the Glove of Venus: A Reading of William Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*") considers not only the direct sources which critics have long debated, but also theoretical sources, such as writing and treatises, which Shakespeare and his contemporaries may have known and used "to derive a set of coordinates that functioned as 'instructions for writing a drama'" (13). Achilles' tent, Troilus' gift to Cressida, places and objects are used by Shakespeare to 'make theatre', Centanni newly shows: but here again, conflicts among sources, or subsequent innovations to tradition, are just as fruitful for the dramatist – for example, the two different versions of Troilus as having been killed while still a child by Achilles, or in a martial context as a warrior, during a duel (after Achilles had been rejected as a lover by Troilus). The latter enables a version of Troilus as a "son of Mars" (40), as well as a further innovation by Shakespeare who gives us a Troilus who effectively does not die at the end of the play: "everything is still open, everything is possible" (42), and it is the theatre that makes it so.

Two successive essays go on to consider the linguistic texture of Shakespeare's comedic writing and his poetic production, to uncover clues to his relationship with his sources which rely on linguistic choices – or, perhaps, at times hazy school-day memories? – rather than, or in addition to, structural elements. In "A *Magnus Amator* in Illyria: Shakespeare and the Memory of Plautus", Michael Saenger investigates links between the *Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night* and Plautus' *Menaechmi*, drawing on his fertile past work on *interlinguicity*, the existential condition of being 'between' languages, or "the cohabitation of multiple languages within a conversation, a sentence, or a creative work" (46). Saenger argues that Shakespeare may have been indebted to Plautus in a linguistic as well as a thematic sense, showing that the word "great" (*magnus*) "carries demonstrable lineage between the two

plays" (45): the life of a word from the past on Shakespeare's stage reveals gaps between the 'original' and its English translations (65), spaces which it is important to explore. It is through this exploration that the questions asked in this essay come to the fore, questions that can be said to run through the issue as a whole: "[W]hat texts were on the table when Shakespeare was writing? What texts were plausibly operating in his recent or distant memory? On what levels was a text recalled: by words, plot, thematic structure, or some other aspect of its verbal life? If one source text affected more than one Shakespearean text, was the first act of poetic recollection part of the memorial experience that was the basis of the creation of the second? That is to say, was the remembering remembered?" (46). In "'Venus and Adonis' (1593): Shakespeare's Translation Memory", Laetitia Sansonetti, drawing on her own extensive expertise in translation and polyglossia in early modern England, turns to Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* to reflect on the extent to which Elizabethan translation practices, themselves a product of schoolroom training, with its insistence on memory techniques and exercises in repetition and translation, informed the narrative poem adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She shows how our own terror and fascination with the 'machine' turn in translation, as well as "current breakthroughs in computer assisted translation" can be thought of "as developments in storage and information retrieval" (71), problems which were of course well known in the Renaissance: translation memory relies on a mental archive which early modern scholars were intent on honing and developing in the classroom. Sansonetti shows how Shakespeare alludes to schoolroom exercises and in particular to the "double translation" method encouraged by Roger Ascham, arguing that "[Shakespeare] composed his poem thanks to memories of grammar-school translations of Ovid, and aimed to trigger similar memories in his readers" (70). It is a perspective that contemplates but also goes beyond Shakespeare's personal memory to consider how the author relied on shared memory and collective cultural practices.

Two further essays delve into the question of time and temporalities, from different perspectives, enriching our understanding of the past as something that does not merely resurface in a new work of art but which is constitutive of its present and future. Carla Suthren ("A Wrinkle in Time: Shakespeare's Anachronic Art") proposes an investigation of the "anachronic" as a vocabulary that "might be usefully brought to

bear on the complex temporality (or temporalities) involved in classical reception, which necessarily 'remembers' the classical past in one form or another" (95-96). Here remembrance is seen as an active process in the dynamics that creates the conditions for a relationship between the present reader and the ancient text (97): Suthren looks at the links between *The Winter's Tale* and Greek romance, perceptively suggesting that a "chain" of reception or substitution effectively "brings the past into the present" (98), and that in Shakespeare's play the oracle from Apollo and the 'statue' in the final scene can be read as moments which "fetch" or "create" textual memories of the classical past, "projecting it into the future" (96). Such a moveable connection between temporalities can constitute an interesting point of departure to read Martina Treu's wide-ranging essay, which is written from a very different perspective, that of a historian of the contemporary reception of classical theatre, but which also benefits from the reminder that the past is always with us. In "From Greece to Straford, and Back. Teatro dell'Elfo: Half a Century with Shakespeare and the Classics", Treu turns to the Italian theatre scene to look at the collective history of the Teatro dell'Elfo in Milan and the ways in which adaptions from classical texts have intertwined, throughout the entire life of the theatre, with Shakespearean plays, creating interesting echoes and remembrances, allusions rather than direct quotations. The essay discusses the unifying aesthetic and theoretical premises of fifty years of scenic practice, aiming not to identify "causal links" between classical and Shakespearean adaptations, but focusing on the "new life" that those adaptions have found on stage at different turning points of the theatre's activity (118).

Finally, the essay which concludes the monographic section of this issue is published in Italian as an homage to the bilingual history of *Memoria di Shakespeare*, which began with Agostino Lombardo as an Italian-language journal, and then evolved thanks to the tireless work of Rosy Colombo into a new online life, where it has attracted an international readership and has therefore published essays mostly in English. Our co-editor Massimo Stella offers an essay on the relationship between Shakespeare and the classical past in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, which addresses many of the questions posed in the preceding essays by showing how it is in language – in this case in the words *immortal* and *falliable* with their respective antonyms, *mortal* and *unfalliable* – that we can find evidence of recep-

tion of the past not only as textual memory of the classical tradition, but also as 'real presence': one that can be glimpsed, rather than openly viewed, through word play, puns, lapses (of the tongue and of memory), and through linguistic error. It is a fitting conclusion to our work on this issue, in which we have been interested in memory, recollection, tradition as ghosts that are not only conjured up voluntarily, but that constantly resurface uninvited, silently co-habiting within texts, and with us, modern readers or spectators of Shakespeare.

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Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 1-9 (2024)

Troilus and Cressida*: Classical Past and Medieval Heritage*

Piero Boitani

Among Shakespeare's 'classical' plays, *Troilus and Cressida* occupies an especially problematic place. The play is, to sum it up in an approximate formula, suspended between Homer and Chaucer, two authors and two styles not easy to reconcile with each other. Two scenes in particular in the play are characterized by a conflict between sources which entirely changes both the classical and the medieval features of *Troilus and Cressida*. This brief essay offers a reading of Act III, scene ii and a handful of lines in Act V, scene ix, drawing on Piero Boitani's lifelong work on the Troilus and Cressida story.

Keywords: *Troilus and Cressida*, classical sources, medieval sources, modernity

Among Shakespeare's 'classical' plays, *Troilus and Cressida* occupies an especially problematic place. Because of its setting at the time, and indeed during, the Trojan war, it should be the most classically oriented, since that war is the subject of the *Iliad*, that is, of the first ever poetic document of the classical tradition in Western literature. On the other hand, due to the sources used by Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida* ought to be markedly medieval, because those sources, coagulating – via John Lydgate's *Troy Book* and Caxton's translation of the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* – in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, one of the greatest poems of the late European fourteenth century, go back to a tradition which includes Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, and Benôit de Sainte Maure's *Roman de Troie*, composed around 1160-1170 on the basis of the previous narratives by Dictys Cretensis and Dares Phrygius. As a matter of fact, the invention of the Troilus-Cressida love story, absent in classical accounts, and its insertion into the plot of the Trojan war, are due to Benôit (who calls Cressida "Briseïde").

Thus, Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* is, to sum it up in an approximate formula, a play as it were suspended between Homer and Chaucer, two authors and two styles not exactly easy to reconcile with each other. Furthermore, it presents two other fundamental features – the part played in the plot by Thersites and his opponent, Ulysses, and endless inconclusive discussions among the Trojan leaders, Hector, Aeneas, Paris, Deiphobus, Helenus. Neither Ulysses nor Thersites have anything to do with the love story of Troilus and Cressida, but a lot with the problem of power, authority, and order which are the essential political and military ingredients in the fighting of a war. As in the *Iliad*, Thersites plays the role of the simple soldier, the protester and the rebel against the strategy and the structure itself of the Greek army, whereas Ulysses is the general who affirms with the greatest possible strength the necessity for the maintenance of a rigid chain of command. On the other hand, the Trojan chiefs, who would indeed have a lot to do with the relationship between Troilus and Cressida and the decision to send her to the Greek camp, generally talk of *honour* and of another, admittedly more important, restitution, that of Helen to Menelaus, which would put an instant end to the war.

There are two scenes in the play where the conflict between sources entirely changes both the classical and the medieval features of *Troilus and Cressida*. The first is scene 2 of Act III, placed at the very centre of the play. It corresponds to the long key scenes of Chaucer's *Troilus* spanning from Book II, 967 to the end of Book III. It starts with Pandarus' announcement to Troilus that Criseyde is not ill disposed against him, upon which Troilus reacts, following Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, with the new vigour indicated by the famous Dantean simile of *Inferno* II, 127-32, *Quali i fioretti*:

> But right as floures, thorugh the colde of nyght
> Iclosed, stoupen on hire stalkes lowe,
> Redressen hem ayein the sonne bright,
> And spreden on hir kynde cours by rowe,
> Right so gan tho his eighen up to throwe
> This Troilus, and seyde, 'O Venus dere,
> Thi might, thi grace, y-heried be it here!' (II, 967-73)[1]

1 The text of *Troilus and Criseyde* I use here is that edited by B. A. Windeatt for Longman (Chaucer 1984).

It goes on with the beautifully delicate moment when Criseyde looks at Troilus coming back from the battle, glorious in his arms, a "knight fulfilled of heigh prowess", and exclaims, as if she were an Isolde who has just drunk the love potion that will tie her to Tristan forever, "Who yaf me drynke?" (II, 651). There follow the endless manoeuvres of Pandarus to persuade Criseyde to meet Troilus and finally managing to do so, literally pushing the young man into the lady's bed, after which Troilus pronounces a first hymn to Love that contains a distinct Dantean echo from no less than *Paradiso* XXXIII's Prayer to the Virgin:

> Benigne loue, thow holy bond of thynges,
> Who-so wol grace and list the nought honouren,
> Lo, his desir wol flee with-outen wynges;
> ffor noldestow of bowntee hem socouren
> That seruen best and most alwey labouren,
> Yet were al lost, that dar I wel seyn certes,
> But if thi grace passed our desertes. (II, 1261-67)

Finally, having spent the night blissfully in Criseyde's welcoming arms, Troiulus sings his greatest hymn to Love at the end of Book III, picking up the author's own Proem to that same Book, both passages being indebted to Boethius' *Consolation* at its highest[2]. Criseyde, meanwhile, is slowly and gently won over, in a process that lasts over a thousand lines and feelingly follows the rules of courtly love. At one point, about three quarters of the way through this process, as she and her lover amiably converse in bed, Chaucer uses a simile which is not in Boccaccio and which implicitly compares her to a skylark being held in the claws of a hawk. Then he reports Criseyde's answer to Troilus' vows. She trembles like an aspen leaf when he embraces her tightly and when he says at III, 1206-08:

> 'O swete, as euere mote I goon,
> Now be ye caught, now is ther but we tweyne,
> Now yeldeth yow, for other bote is noon',

2 *Troilus and Criseyde* III, 1-52 and 1744-71, the former inspired by *Filostrato* III, 74-79 and ultimately by Boethius' *Consolation* II, m. 8, the latter based on *Consolation* II, m. 8.

she replies with a shy but full confession that she had surrendered long before now:

> To that Criseyde answerde thus anoon,
> 'Ne hadde I er now, my swete herte dere,
> Ben yolde, i-wis, I were now not here!' (III, 1209-11)

In Shakespeare's play, by contrast, the love plot is broken up into a series of short scenes which, beginning with Act I, scenes 1 and 2, are continuously interrupted by completely different episodes, such as the dissensions and debates within the Greek army or the Trojan leaders, and we don't hear of love until Pandarus sings his canzonetta *Love, love, nothing but love, still love, still more* to Helen and Paris in Act III, scene 1[3]. Finally, the meeting between Troilus and Cressida takes place, somewhat abruptly, in the following scene, giving the impression that his courtship of her has already taken place behind, so to speak, the curtains. In that second scene of Act III two things happen. First, Troilus pledges eternal faith to Cressida: "Troilus shall be such to Cressid as what envy can / say worst shall be a mock for his truth, and what / truth can speak truest not truer than Troilus" (III.ii.95). Second, Cressida confesses immediately, without any hesitation, to have loved Troilus for a long time: "Prince Troilus", she says, "I have loved you night and day / for many weary months" (113-14). When Troilus at this point asks, "why was my Cressid then so hard to win?" (115), Cressida blurts it all out:

> Cressida
> Hard to seem won; but I was won, my lord,
> With the first glance that ever – Pardon me:
> If I confess much, you will play the tyrant.
> I love you now; but till now not so much
> But I might master it: in faith, I lie –
> My thoughts were like unbridled children, grown
> Too headstrong for their mother – See, we fools!
> Why have I blabb'd? who shall be true to us,
> When we are so unsecret to ourselves? –
> But, though I lov'd you well, I woo'd you not;

3 Quotations from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* are from Kenneth Palmer's edition in the Arden Shakespeare (Shakespeare 1982).

> And yet, good faith, I wish'd myself a man,
> Or that we women had men's privilege
> Of speaking first. Sweet, bid me hold my tongue,
> For in this rapture I shall surely speak
> The thing I shall repent. See, see, your silence,
> Cunning in dumbness, from my weakness draws
> My very soul of counsel. Stop my mouth.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, III.ii.116-32)

The hint Shakespeare has taken from Chaucer has become an eruption. Cressida shows her uncertainty, in a way, but her absolute certainty in another. She has loved Troilus for a very long time, and, as a kind of proto-feminist, she wishes she were a man or had a man's privilege. In medieval courtly culture, ladies never declare their love first. Cressida's eruption, which becomes ever more contorted and embarrassed in the rest of the scene, is a cultural revolution. I quote the relevant passages:

> Cressida
> My lord, I do beseech you pardon me;
> 'Twas not my purpose, thus to beg a kiss.
> I am asham'd. O heavens! what have I done?
> For this time will I take my leave, my lord. (III.ii.135-38)

> Cressida
> Let me go and try.
> I have a kind of self resides with you,
> But an unkind self, that itself will leave
> To be another's fool. I would be gone:
> Where is my wit? I know not what I speak. (III.ii.145-49)

> Cressida
> Perchance, my lord, I show more craft than love,
> And fell so roundly to a large confession
> To angle for your thoughts. But you are wise,
> Or else you love not; for to be wise and love
> Exceeds man's might: that dwells with gods above. (III.ii.151-55)

Shakespeare's Cressida is not at all naïve. She passes from a feeling of shame, to one of self-oblivion, to a recognition of her 'craft'. She knows perfectly well what she is saying because Shakespeare seems to know how a woman's heart works. Chaucer does, too, but the

heart of Chaucer's ladies is over two hundred years old now, and conventions can change dramatically over such a period of time, as Chaucer had indeed acknowledged in *Troilus and Criseyde* itself:

> Ye knowe ek that in fourme of speche is chaunge
> With-inne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
> That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
> Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,
> And spedde as wel in loue as men now do;
> Ek forto wynnen loue in sondry ages,
> In sondry londes, sondry ben vsages. (II, 22-28)

Cressida is also sincere – ironically so, in view of what happens in the second part of the play, when she betrays Troilus with Diomedes fully confirming Boccaccio's misogynist proclamation in the *Filostrato* that "giovane donna, e mobile e vogliosa" (VIII 30, 1) is "volubil sempre come foglia al vento" (8) – an anticipation of "la donna è mobile qual piuma al vento" in Verdi's *Rigoletto* (III, 2) five hundred years later. Shakespeare's Cressida seems to know now what kind of reputation she will have in the future, from Lydgate and Henryson onwards, the very instant she proclaims her faithfulness forever:

> Cressida
> Prophet may you be!
> If I be false, or swerve a hair from truth,
> When time is old and hath forgot itself,
> When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy,
> And blind oblivion swallow'd cities up,
> And mighty states characterless are grated
> To dusty nothing – yet let memory,
> From false to false, among false maids in love,
> Upbraid my falsehood. When they've said 'as false
> As air, as water, wind, or sandy earth,
> As fox to lamb, as wolf to heifer's calf,
> Pard to the hind, or stepdame to her son' –
> Yea, let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood,
> 'As false as Cressid'.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, III.ii.181-94)

And with this second blow the courtly love code of the Middle Ages is destroyed for good.

* * *

The second deconstruction Shakespeare operates on past culture concerns the epic, indeed Homer himself. This happens in a handful of lines in scene 9 of Act V of *Troilus and Cressida*, when Hector and Achilles finally meet in deadly combat, as in Book XXI, and above all XXII, of the *Iliad*, when the *menis* with which the poem had started, the 'wrath' or 'ire' of the Greek hero becomes *menos*, relentless homicidal fury, and an aspect of the cosmic conflict which involves elements, gods, and humans.

Shakespeare shows us Achilles already in scene 7. He is inciting his Myrmidons to pursue Hector:

> Achilles
> Come here about me, you my Myrmidons;
> Mark what I say. Attend me where I wheel,
> Strike not a stroke, but keep yourselves in breath;
> And when I have the bloody Hector found,
> Empale him with your weapons round about;
> In fellest manner execute your arms.
> Follow me, sirs, and my proceedings eye:
> It is decreed Hector the great must die.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, V.vii.1-8)

In the meantime, Hector, after dragging the corpse of a dead Greek, is taking a rest and beginning to get rid of his armour: as the caption has it, he "*disarms*". Thus, at the opening of scene 8, we hear him say:

> Hector
> Most putrefied core, so fair without,
> Thy goodly armour thus hath cost thy life.
> Now is my day's work done: I'll take my breath.
> Rest, sword; thou hast thy fill of blood and death. (V.viii.1-4)

Achilles comes upon him at precisely this moment. He addresses his enemy with the usual brutal haughtiness:

> Achilles
> Look, Hector, how the sun begins to set,
> How ugly night comes breathing at his heels;
> Even with the vail and dark'ning of the sun,
> To close the day up, Hector's life is done. (V.viii.5-8)

Hector protests he is "unarmed" and asks his enemy to "forego this vantage" (9). Shakespeare is already practicing drastic censorship on Homer, where no such scene is present. Then, he has Achilles repeat with more violence what he had already said in scene 7:

> Achilles
> Strike, fellows, strike: this is the man I seek.
> [*Hector falls*]
> So, Ilion, fall thou next! Come, Troy, sink down!
> Here lies thy heart, thy sinews, and thy bone.
> On, Myrmidons, and cry you all amain,
> 'Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain'. (V.viii.10-14)

This is a particularly vicious, unheroic Achilles, who has nothing to do with Homer's. For in the *Iliad* (XXII, 205-7) Achilles had explicitly told his Myrmidons to stay away from Hector and leave the Trojan warrior to him. Shakespeare would have been aware of this had he read George Chapman's translation of Homer's *Iliad*, which began to be published in 1598, several years before *Troilus and Cressida* was composed. Chapman wrote: "Achilles yet well knew / His knees would fetch him, and gave signs to some friends (making show / Of shooting at him) to forbear, lest they detracted so / From his full glory in first wounds, and in the overthrow / Make his hand last" (XXII, 175-79). Thus *Troilus and Cressida*, in one respect the most 'classical' of Shakespeare's plays, destroyed classical epic after having destroyed medieval courtly love. In doing so, Shakespeare showed both a good portion of realism and a good dosage of modernity.

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Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 11-44 (2024)

The Gauntlet of Mars, the Glove of Venus: A Reading of William Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida

Monica Centanni

At the heart of this reading is an analysis of the ways in which Shakespeare structures the plot of *Troilus and Cressida*, and of how he treats the source material at his disposal. The omissions and additions that Shakespeare makes to the generic and confusing myths must be examined carefully: the essay newly considers the choices that the playwright made in order to select from the stories known to his time the material that would be useful for the composition of his plot.

Keywords: *Troilus and Cressida*, myth, drama, classical sources, plot structure

I. From Myth to Drama

The story of Troilus and Cressida, on which Shakespeare based his play, is, as is well known, a medieval myth, consisting of a tale of love, betrayal and death, in which the protagonists have names taken more or less directly from the Trojan saga. The cast of the medieval story is thus made up of characters from the ancient myth, but enlisted in a narrative quite different from the versions attested in Greek and Roman sources for a story set against the backdrop of the Trojan War. The critical literature on the sources available to Shakespeare, and in particular on the texts that mediate between him and the ancient sources[1], is both robust and wide-ranging[2].

1 The sources accessible to Shakespeare on the story of Troilus are Boccaccio's *Filostrato* via Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*; but fundamental for the Trojan events is *The Recuyell of Historyes of Troye*, an English translation of Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des Histoires de Troie*, published in 1473-1474, which is generally regarded as the first complete printed text in English.

2 The bibliographical reference for ancient sources remains Boitani 1989b; more generally, for Shakespeare's debt to Chaucer's mediating texts, and to Boccaccio

At the heart of this reading is an analysis of how Shakespeare structures the plot of his play, and how he treats the material at his disposal. The omissions and additions that Shakespeare makes to the generic and confusing myths must therefore be examined carefully[3]. In other words, it considers the choices that the playwright makes in order to select from the stories known to his time the material that would be useful for the composition of his plot.

While it may be useful to reconstruct the genealogical chain of the myth, as has been meticulously done by others, by going back to the ancient and medieval sources that Shakespeare uses, from a compositional point of view, the key datum is something else. Shakespeare is presenting a version that is new and unprecedented, because the questions and problems that the dramatist has to face are different from those of a writer or a poet. Shakespeare does not have to tell a story: he has to make it happen in the theatre. And this is the same problem that Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides had with the versions of the myths then in circulation: how to make the myth happen on the stage.

A hotly debated question in the critical literature is the genre to which *Troilus and Cressida* should be assigned. In the headings of the various early editions of the play, the title page of the 1609 quarto reads "History", but the "Address to the Reader" added in the second state refers to the play as a "Comedy", and the First Folio describes it as "The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida". Defining the genre of *Troilus and Cressida* (as well as of other Shakespeare plays) seems to be a topic that fascinates modern critics, who feverishly analyse the tone and mood of a play scene by scene, taking the temperature of whether it is comic, tragicomic, or dark comedy; but for Shakespeare, for his audience, and for the culture of his time, the question of genre was much more blurred and nuanced than our modern categories might lead us to believe. To simplify, but without doing too much

via Chaucer, see the contributions in Boitani 1989a; in particular, for the use of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in *Troilus and Cressida*, see Davis-Brown 1988. In general, the selection of key critical entries in the annotated bibliographical survey of Plescia 2015, 283-290 is very useful.

3 For possible similarities between Shakespeare's work and Euripides' texts, at least those tragedies available in English translation from the mid-16th century, see Arnold 1984. For a thorough survey of the circulation of Euripides' texts in 15th- and 16th-century Europe, see Pasqualini 2023.

injustice to the reality of the matter, it can be said that since the rediscovery and Renaissance revival of ancient dramatic genres, the term 'Tragedy' has been claimed to define a drama with a negative ending for the protagonist(s), while 'Comedy' defines a plot with a positive ending; falling between them is a series of intermediate genres more or less reinvented on the basis of an inaccurate understanding or interpretation of ancient texts[4]. Shakespeare, though, is a playwright, and what interests him is the composition of a drama, the making of theatre. From the theoretical sources – writings and treatises – that they may have known directly or indirectly, Shakespeare and his contemporary playwrights were able to derive a set of coordinates that functioned as 'instructions for writing a drama'. Many decades ago, Brian Morris, one of the few scholars to approach *Troilus and Cressida* from an exclusively dramaturgical point of view, raised the question of the availability of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Elizabethan period, and also recalled the importance of a text, *A Warning for Fair Women*, published in 1599 (i.e. very close to the composition of *Troilus*), in which 'Tragedy' appears as a character and describes her function:

> Tragedy
> I must haue passions that must moue the soule,
> Make the heart heauie, and throb within the bosome,
> Extorting teares out of the strictest eyes,
> To racke a thought and straine it to his forme,
> Untill I rap the sences from their course,
> This is my office.[5]

Indeed, as has recently been pointed out, Shakespeare could have known the *Poetics*, at least indirectly, in partial translations or

4 This is the case of Poliziano, who invented the term *fabula satyrica* for his *Orpheus*, a genre modelled on Euripides' satire drama *Cyclops*, and which would have the characteristic of mixing weeping and laughter, joy and sorrow; on the importance of Euripides' satire drama in relation to Shakespeare for the invention of modern tragicomedy, see Dewar-Watson 2018, 118ff.

5 "There is scant evidence indeed that the popular playwrights of the Elizabethan period had the *Poetics* in mind when they constructed what they called 'tragedies' and perhaps the nearest thing to a discussion of the nature of tragedy in the period when Shakespeare came to write *Troilus and Cressida* is found in *A Warning for Fair Women*" (Morris 1959, 482).

through treatises that provided paraphrases[6]. But the statement of Tragedy/Melpomene about her mission in the 'domestic tragedy' *A Warning for Fair Women* must be taken into account: to stir the soul, to make the heart beat and palpitate in the bosom, to draw tears "out of the strictest eyes", to tear a thought and hold it in its own form, to "rap the senses from their course" (Christensen 2021, 206; 5). This was clearly what the Elizabethan audience of the time, and the playwrights themselves, with their very fluid or amorphous ideas about the distinction between 'dramatic genres', expected tragedy to do[7].

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Aristotle's name appears in the second scene of Act II, in Hector's mouth (and it seems almost a joke), with an indirect quotation from the *Nichomachean Ethics* (Bevington 2015, 390). But, as we have said, Shakespeare would have been able to draw on Aristotle, and on the *Poetics* in particular, through the Latin versions widely circulated at the time, and also through the paraphrase of some parts of the text in Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*[8].

Aristotle prescribes six elements that are needed to make tragedy. Of these, four – *lexis* (style), *dianoia* (reasoning; concept), *melos* (song), *opsis* (spectacle) – are subsidiary, the other two, the most important. The first of these *is mythos* (plot), and the second, *ethos* (character). But the *mythos/plot* "is the origin and as it were the core of tragedy"[9].

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6 As is well known, the first Latin translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* did not appear in England until 1619, and the first edition in English translation was in 1708 (Dewar-Watson 2004). On the availability of the text and contents of the *Poetics* in English culture through versions and paraphrases, starting from the first decades of the 16th century, see the recent work by Dewar-Watson 2018.

7 For *A Warning for Fair Women,* I refer to the recent edition and commentary by Christensen 2021.

8 Lazarus 2015, 507: "There was no language in which the *Poetics* was printed in the sixteenth century in which it was not available in England. Few scholars doubt the facility of English readers in Latin, at least, which was the common tongue of the educated west". Lazarus also offers a valuable survey of Aristotelian editions in the original text or Latin or Italian translation found in English libraries in the 16th century (Lazarus 2015, 530-31).

9 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 50a 10-50b1: "ἀνάγκη οὖν πάσης τῆς τραγῳδίας μέρη εἶναι ἕξ, καθ᾽ ὃ ποιά τις ἐστὶν ἡ τραγῳδία: ταῦτα δ᾽ ἐστὶ μῦθος καὶ ἤθη καὶ λέξις καὶ διάνοια καὶ ὄψις καὶ μελοποιία […] ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν καὶ οἷον ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τραγῳδίας, δεύτερον δὲ τὰ ἤθη" [So Tragedy as a whole necessarily has six parts, according to which tragedy is of a certain sort. These

The first concern, therefore, is to construct the composition of the plot: the characters are in fact secondary and must reveal their character – Aristotle teaches – through the events presented on the stage[10]. So the process becomes: to choose the materials and to put them together in a sequence that has "a beginning and an end, and a certain extension",[11] and in which the characters "reveal themselves through the facts"[12]. What materials did Shakespeare have at his disposal for the creation of plots and characters?

As far as the ancient sources of the myth are concerned, Shakespeare's knowledge of the *Aeneid* and, at least in some form, of the *Iliad* is more or less taken for granted in the current state of research. Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* contains (almost) all the elements of the story, but has a different structure. It is, as we have said, a chivalric poem about betrayed love: although defined by Chaucer as a 'Tragedy', it is a narrative poem that reflects the conventions of medieval poetry, from which it takes its plot and overall structure. For the basic material of the Trojan story, William Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* was certainly also crucial[13].

Shakespeare, then, selects and assembles his mythical material, mainly, but not exclusively, from Caxton and Chaucer. As is often the

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are plot, characters, style of diction, reasoning, spectacle, and song. […] Plot is the origin and as it were the core of tragedy]. I translate οἷον ψυχή with "as it were the core" because *psyché* here is not an abstract or spiritual concept, but is, rather, intended as a metaphor for the metal frame holding up a structure, just as breath holds up the body. My reference edition for the *Poetics* is the one edited by Kassel (1965).

10 Aristotle, *Poetics* 50a 16-20: "μέγιστον δὲ τούτων ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις. ἡ γὰρ τραγῳδία μίμησίς ἐστιν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεων καὶ βίου" [The most important element is the structure of the events, because tragedy is not a representation of persons, but of actions, of life].

11 Aristotle, *Poetics* 49b 25: "ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης".

12 Aristotle, *Poetics* 50a 20: "οὔκουν ὅπως τὰ ἤθη μιμήσωνται πράττουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἤθη συμπεριλαμβάνουσιν διὰ τὰς πράξεις".

13 "For the narrative of Trojan war, Shakespeare relied more on Caxton and Lydgate, than on Homer and Chaucer, and especially (perhaps entirely) on Caxton. William Caxton translated and printed *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* in about 1471-5, from Raoul Lefèvre's *Recueil des Histoires de Troie*, the best known of the French translations of Guido's *Historia Troiana*" (Bevington 2015, 420).

case, reading the undertext on which Shakespeare seems to overwrite his work gives the impression that his access to the ancient sources was more fluid and freer than the data we know today would suggest. Take, for example, the scene in Act I, scene ii, in which Pandarus and Cressida look down from above and describe the Trojan warriors: Aeneas, Antenor, Hector, Paris, Helenus, and Deiphobus. The view is from an elevated position:

> Pandarus
> Here, here, here's an excellent place; here we may see most bravely. I'll tell you them all by their names as they pass by, but mark Troilus above the rest. (*Troilus and Cressida*, I.ii.176-78)

The purpose of Pandarus' watch is very clear – to search for the silhouette of Troilus among the warriors, and draw Cressida's attention to him:

> Pandarus
> 'Tis Troilus! There's a man, niece. Hem! Brave Troilus, the prince of chivalry! […] Mark him. Note him. O brave Troilus! Look well upon him, niece. Look you how his sword is bloodied and his helm more hacked than Hector's, and how he looks, and how he goes. O admirable youth! He ne'er saw three and twenty. – Go thy way, Troilus, go thy way! Had I a sister were a grace, or a daughter a goddess, he should take his choice. O admirable man! (*Troilus and Cressida*, I.ii.219-29)

The scene appears, through the mediation of various suggestions taken from episodes of chivalric novels, as a rehash of the episode of the Iliadic scene of *Teichoskopía*, in which Helen, from the top of the walls of Troy, describes and presents to Priam the warriors lined up in the Achaean camp (*Iliad* III, 121-244). Shakespeare turns his gaze inside the walls of Troy: we must imagine that the "excellent place", ideal for seeing the warriors parade one by one, is high up, opposite the city gate through which the champions pass on their way back to the city from battle.

Another instance of resonance – or, more precisely, consonance – with an ancient source is the image in Cassandra's vision of Paris as "our firebrand" who will set fire to all of Troy[14]. Several ancient

14 "Our firebrand brother Paris burns us all" (*Troilus and Cressida*, II.ii.110).

sources mention that before the birth of Paris, Hecuba dreamed of giving birth to a burning torch[15], but it is in Euripides' *Andromache* that Cassandra intervenes in the story. At the moment of birth, confirming the queen's nightmare, the little prophetess cries out against her newborn brother: "Cassandra shouted her order to kill him, / the city of Priam's great ruin"[16].

The ruinous valence that Shakespeare imposes on Helen's name itself is also very evocative[17]. Thus Cassandra demands, "Cry Trojans, cry! A Helen and a woe" (II.ii.111). The allusion to ruin contained in Helen's very name is the focus of a passage from *Agamemnon*, in which Aeschylus plays with the semantic value of √ἑλ- to recall the ruinous fate contained in Helen's "too fair" name, to the point of reducing it to a triplet of pseudo-etymological linguistic compounds alluding to ruin: *helenaus*, *helandros*, *heleptolis*:

> Who could have been the one who gave
> her such a precise name?
> For she is indeed
> *Helenaus* – Ruin of ships, *Helandros* – Ruin of warriors,
> *Heleptolis* – Ruin of the city[18].

Be that as it may, by direct or indirect means, or more likely by autonomous poetic reinvention, the Aeschylean insight into the ruinous secret hidden in the name of the Fatal Woman is revived by Shakespeare with the name 'Helen', through which, as juxtaposed to 'woe', we hear the sound of ruin.

But rather than pursuing a sophisticated, erudite hunt for further consistencies and points of connection with the ancient and medieval texts that might have been accessible at the time, a much

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15 See for example the allusion to Hecuba 'pregnant with the torch' in Virgil, *Aeneid*, vii.319-20: "Another queen brings forth another brand, / To burn with foreign fires another land".

16 Euripides' *Andromache*, 297-98: "βόασε Κασάνδρα κτανεῖν, / μεγάλαν Πριάμου πόλεως λώβαν".

17 To my knowledge, this possible relationship with the ancient text is not adequately highlighted in the commentaries on *Troilus*.

18 Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, 681-90: "τίς ποτ' ὠνόμαζεν ὧδ' / ἐς τὸ πᾶν ἐτητύμως […]; ἐπεὶ πρεπόντως / ἑλέναυς, ἕλανδρος, ἑλέπτολις". Aeschylus' word-play on the name Helen is echoed in Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, 891-92.

more interesting track is to highlight the points of diffraction, the junctures where Shakespeare clearly and deliberately deviates from the sources. For, as we have said, Shakespeare has a task and a problem: to make drama out of the material of myth. And the question is: what does Shakespeare do with the myth of Troilus, how does he treat it in order to make it theatrical? It is the same task and the same problem that was faced by the ancient tragedians: to treat the myth as building material, to take its pieces apart and put them back together again, so that a plot can be created which has its own dramaturgically articulated and self-supporting development. In *Troilus and Cressida*, as in all his works in which the plot is wholly or partly familiar to the audience, Shakespeare must resort to the same strategy of manipulating material that was at the heart of the dramaturgy of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. How can the story of Troilus and Cressida be told on stage? How can the threads of the love story and the Trojan War be interwoven? And it is here that the divergences, rather than the convergences, must be measured against ancient and medieval versions.

For example, the first divergence from the Homeric version depends on the Caxton version of Lefèvre's Trojan Tales: the action – which incorporates the most important episodes of the *Iliad*, including the deaths of Patroclus and Hector – takes place in the seventh, not the tenth, year of the Trojan War (I.iii.12). It is not just a matter of such minor details, however: in *Troilus and Cressida*, certain scenes from the Trojan myth are completely rewritten to reflect the new conceptual framework that Shakespeare imposes on the myth for the construction of his drama. Some episodes of the *Iliad*, handed down through medieval tradition, are transfigured in a new, entirely dramatic, light. In *Troilus and Cressida*, the Homeric version of the duel between Ajax and Hector is fruitfully crossed with another famous duel, that between Glaucus and Diomedes (*Iliad* VII, 186-312; *Iliad* VI, 119-236). Thus, in the play, the duel between Hector and Ajax (who is a Trojan half-breed due to a contaminated medieval tradition) is not suspended after the clash (as it is in the *Iliad*, with the exchange of the fatal gifts between the two heroes)[19], but before the duel: the recognition of the relation-

19 Hector gives Ajax the sword with which he will commit suicide; Ajax gives Hector the belt with which his corpse will be attached to Achilles' chariot (*Iliad*

ship of kinship, like the relationship of hospitality in the Homeric poem, prevails over any reasons for warlike enmity (*Iliad* VI, 234-36).

The farewell scene between Hector and Andromache also appears in a completely different light compared not only to its Homeric precedent, but also to its treatment in the medieval versions (Caxton II, 620). Nothing remains of the happy family scene presented in the *Iliad*, with Andromache's entreaties and Hector's loving, though firm, response, through to the touching and pathetic embrace of little Astyanax, frightened by his father's helmet (*Iliad* VI, 466-73). The farewell scene in *Troilus and Cressida* becomes a choral scene in which Hector is deaf to every call:

> Andromache
> […] I have dream't
> Of bloody turbulence, and this whole night.
> Hath nothing been but shapes and forms of slaughter.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, V.iii.10-12)

But Hector does not believe Andromache and her prophetic dream, haunted by visions of blood and ghosts of death; nor does he believe Cassandra, who already sees his end celebrated in a macabre dance:

> Cassandra
> O, farewell, dear Hector!
> Look how thou diest! Look how thy eye turns pale!
> Look, how thy wounds do bleed at many vents!
> Hark, how Troy roars! How Hecuba cries out!
> How poor Andromache shrills her dolour forth!
> Behold, distraction, frenzy and amazement,
> Like witless antics, one another meet,
> And all cry, 'Hector! Hector's dead! O Hector'!
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, V.iii.80-87)

He disbelieves and disobeys Priam, who recalls the visions of Andromache, Hecuba and Cassandra, and begs him not to go to battle, not by appealing to his filial love and respect, but because it is clear that if he dies, Troy will fall:

VII, 299-305): the mention of the "ἐχθρῶν ἄδωρα δῶρα" is in the monologue of Ajax's suicide, in Sophocles (*Ajax*, 661-65).

CASSANDRA
Lay hold upon him, Priam, hold him fast;
He is thy crutch. Now if thou lose thy stay,
Thou on him leaning, and all Troy on thee,
Fall all together.

PRIAM
Come, Hector, come. Go back.
Thy wife hath dreamt; thy mother hath had visions,
Cassandra doth foresee, and I myself
Am like a prophet suddenly enrapt
To tell thee that this day is ominous.
Therefore, come back.
(*Troilus and Cressida*, V.iii.59-67)

"Unarm, sweet Hector" (V.iii.24), says Andromache to him. "This day is ominous", Priam repeats to him, and this is not just his father's voice; these are the words of the King of Troy (V.iii.66). But Hector is unmoved: "Mine honour keeps the weather of my fate" (V.iii.26). What matters is honour – *his* honour: the fate of the city, the fall of Troy, which will inevitably follow his death, seems to matter very little to him.

The situation in which Achilles retreats from battle is also completely new. With the merger of the Homeric figures of Chryseis and Briseis in the figure of Cressida, the original motive for Achilles' being offended and angry has disappeared. In Shakespeare's version, the motivation for Achilles' retreat into his tent is both more vague and much more elaborate in terms of the character's *ethos*: Achilles withdraws because he no longer enjoys fighting, and his decision seems irrevocable. When Agamemnon and Nestor pass by his tent, he mumbles through clenched teeth like a whimsical and irritated boy: "I'll fight no more 'gainst Troy" (III.iii.56). But the emphasis is not only on his bored indolence: it is also on his love for Polyxena, a theme already present in versions of the chivalric tradition known to Shakespeare through Caxton's *Recuyell*. In the letter he receives from Hecuba, there is a reminder of a pact more important than any glory, than any honour:

ACHILLES
Fall, Greeks; fail, fame; honour, or go or stay;
My major vow lies here: this I'll obey.
(*Troilus and Cressida*, V.i.42-43)

Love and the pact that seals it are worth more than any lust for honour, any vow for glory and the cause of war. Achilles will hold to this position until the unleashing of his animal rage in the terrible scene of his revenge on Hector after the death of Patroclus.

II. "Beginning in the middle"

But let us return to the overall construction that Shakespeare imposes on the mythical material. That the playwright is well aware that the first critical point to be resolved is how to weave the plot of the play, and in particular where to begin, is clear from what the Prologue in Armour announces:

> Prologue in armour
> Our play
> Leaps o'er the vaunt and firstlings of those broils,
> Beginning in the middle, starting thence away
> To what may be digested in a play.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, Prologue 26-29)

"Beginning in the middle": drama must always begin *in medias res*, unlike the poems of Boccaccio and Chaucer, which can take the time they need to tell a story stretched out in time – the story of Troilus from beginning to end. Faced with the choice of where to begin the story, Shakespeare chooses to present Troilus as a young man in the throes of the desires and sufferings of love, sacrificing an important aspect of Troilus's character and a piece of history that was present in both the *Filostrato* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. In ancient and medieval poetry, the myth of the young hero, wild, rude and unwilling to love, who suddenly falls in love, has a vital tradition that has continued through the centuries. Such a story is presented as a rite of passage and at the same time as the punishment of Venus, who demands honour and devotion from those who despise her power[20]. Shakespeare's play, in contrast, does not include the *metánoia* from wild teenager

20 It is the tragic story of Hippolytus in eponymous tragedy by Euripides, which has a long history through the centuries, up to the story of Iulus' conversion because of Simonetta's vision in Angelo Poliziano's *Stanze per la giostra di Giuliano*.

to young lover: Troilus is presented as madly in love with Cressida from the very first scene of Act I. The martial side of his character, although present in some scenes, is not dominant in Shakespeare's character profile, and will only explode in the final act of the play. The young man is certainly rich in spirit and courage, as is evident in his dialogue with Hector, whom Troilus spurs to the ruinous decision to go to the battlefield despite any warnings, pleas and dire omens (V.iii.29ff). But this Troilus is no longer just *philostratos*: Mars may shine in his sky, but for much of the play, Venus shines brighter.

It is an act of weighing and measuring of elements that Shakespeare engages in, preparing the fabric with which to build the drama – which is, to quote Aristotle, the *ethos* of the characters. So Shakespeare redraws not only the profile of Troilus, but also that of Cressida, as we shall see, not to mention the complex and wonderfully theatrical profiles he presents of Ulysses, of Thersites, and of Pandarus[21].

But the first and most important action of filtering, weighing and adjusting is that which Shakespeare exercises on the *mythos*, above all in his investment in the double scenario, the double front: Troy and the Achaean camp. In the sources available to Shakespeare, the setting of the story is either almost exclusively in the Achaean camp or almost exclusively in the city of Troy. In the case of the various versions of the Trojan Saga collected in the *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, with all their divergences and variations from Homer, the setting remains that of the *Iliad*, in which incursions within the walls of Troy are rare and sporadic. In the case of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, almost the entire poem takes place within the walls of Troy, centred on the love affair between Troilus and Criseyde, with only Book V shifting the setting to the Achaean camp, with Diomedes' forcible removal of Criseyde, the consummation of the betrayal, and ultimately the death of Troilus.

In the script of *Troilus and Cressida*, the dramatic movement consists of a programmatic strategy of deviation from the (not Aristote-

21 To the construction of the *ethos* of these characters, in themselves or in relation to previous versions of the story, critics have devoted many brilliant and illuminating pages. I would like to recall the reading proposed by René Girard who dedicates no less than five chapters of his *Shakespeare* to the characters of *Troilus and Cressida. The Theatre of Envy*: Girard [1990] 1998: 199-220; 221-29; 230-46; 247-58; 259-69. The risk, however, is to push the limits of psychological interpretation into over-interpretation.

lian, but pseudo-Aristotelian) unity of place, and Shakespeare seems very careful to balance the weight of the action between the two settings. It is as if there were a revolving stage or a double screen (and some modern theatrical versions have taken their cue from this dramaturgical writing for their set design) in which acts and scenes take place in parallel or in sequence, alternating according to this scheme:

I.i-ii	Troy
I.iii	Greek camp
II.i	Greek camp
II.ii	Troy
II.iii	Greek camp
III.i-ii	Troy
III.iii	Greek camp
IV.i-ii-iii-iv	Troy
IV.v	Greek camp
V.i-ii	Greek camp
V.iii	Troy
V.iv-v-vi-vii-viii-ix-x	Greek camp
V.xi	Troy

The colours of the conceptual landscape of the Trojan set are very different from those of the Achaean set: the effect Shakespeare achieves is a combination in which the greatest attention is paid to the balance between the two scenarios, but with a focus on the scenes in which the forays from one camp to the other take place.

We are now in the seventh year of the Trojan War, the last year of the war in the tradition of the stories collected by Caxton upon which Shakespeare draws. Compared to the ancient myth, there is no longer any Chryseis, the daughter of Chryses returned to the Trojan priest; there is no longer any Briseis, the slave girl taken by Achilles to compensate Agamemnon for the theft of Chryseis. There is, instead, Cressida (or as she still is Lefèvre-Caxton, 'Breseyda'), who in the medieval versions of the story is no longer the daughter of the Trojan priest Chryses, but the daughter of Calchas. The latter, though in the Achaean camp, is a Trojan priest who has fled to the enemy after abandoning his homeland, having foreseen the fall of Troy

through his prophetic powers. Cressida is full of grace, and she is beautiful, even more beautiful than Helen (Pandarus' words) – only a little less blonde[22]. Cressida has remained in Troy – "I have forgotten my father" (IV.ii.97), she proudly declares – and has no intention of following her traitorous father into the enemy camp (IV.ii.110). But the capture of the Trojan Antenor by the Achaeans leads Calchas to ask for an exchange, the Trojan prince for his beautiful daughter. It is an exchange between prisoners that sets in motion the second part of the drama, but it is not, as in the *Iliad*, the exchange between Chryseis and Briseis responsible for provoking Achilles' wrath. It is the exchange instead of a Trojan man for a Trojan woman – Antenor, captured by the Achaeans, for the beautiful Cressida, so that she may be reunited to her defector father, and herself be called upon to become a defector. There is always a passage from one camp to another, but it is not the same exchange. Shakespeare subjects the myth to a filtering treatment, the aim of which is to take episodes from previous versions and transform them into a new form. This is also the case, for example, with the story of Achilles' retreat to his tent. With the original, Homeric cause of his anger removed from the script, Achilles does indeed spend much of the play within his tent, but out of a vicious, unmotivated laziness. This Achilles is not "proud", but "covetous of praise"; he is "surly borne", he is "strange"; or rather, he is sick with "self-affection" (II.iii.231-33)[23].

But what are Achilles and Patroclus doing in the tent? Could it be, as in the splendid image from an ancient symposium bowl[24], that, tired of war, they are looking after each other, applying bandages and ointments to their wounds? Or could it be, as we read in the *Iliad,* that

22 *Troilus and Cressida*, I.i.39-41: "An her hair were not somewhat darker than Helen's – well, go to – there were no more comparison between the women." Bevington, in the comment *ad loc*, cites Sonnets 127 and 130 as evidence of Shakespeare's adherence to the Petrarchan canon, claiming that here "Pandarus concedes a point in Helen's favour" (Bevington 2015). It seems to me that here Shakespeare is joking with the Petrarchan and chivalric canon about the obligatory 'blondness' of the Ladies.

23 The series of adjectives "covetous of praise", "surly borne", "strange", "self-affected", is in an exchange between Nestor, Ulysses and Diomedes that is artfully played out in order to bait Ajax against the rival champion.

24 The reference is to *kylix* F 2278 signed by Sosias, dated c. 500 BCE, from Vulci, preserved in the Altes Museum in Berlin.

when Achilles retreats from battle, Patroclus watches him in silence, as Achilles plays the zither and sings the deeds of the heroes that will bring them death but also immortal glory? (*Iliad*, ix.186-91). No, Shakespeare is not Homer, and does not want to be Homer: we are now in a theatre, and inside the tent Achilles and Patroclus are acting, making theatre. This is how Ulysses describes them: they are lying idly "upon a lazy bed", mocking the leaders of the Achaeans. But this is not simply general mockery: it is theatre. Patroclus "breaks scurril jests; / And with ridiculous and awkward action / Which, slanderer, he imitation calls" (I.iii.146ff), mocks all the heroes one by one. He is like "a strutting player", who makes his moves and, using pitiful caricatures, parodies Agamemnon's greatness with exaggerated words, while Achilles, thrown on the bed, laughs and cries, "Excellent. 'Tis Agamemnon just". And then he does Nestor, imitating his manner by stroking his beard before speaking, and then parodying his frailty, and the failings of his age, the fact that he coughs and spits, and because of the trembling of his hands cannot hook his gorget – and Achilles still exclaims, "Excellent. 'Tis Nestor just." (I.iii.164; 170) Ulysses continues:

> Ulysses
> And in this fashion,
> All our abilities, gifts, natures, shapes,
> Severals and generals of grace exact,
> Achievements, plots, orders, preventions,
> Excitements to the field, or speech for truce,
> Success or loss, what is or is not, serves
> As stuff for these two to make paradoxes.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, I.iii.178-84)

According to Aristotle, the natural tendency to mimesis is the characteristic that distinguishes the human species from other living beings: even in children, it is the way of learning about life, of gaining access to the world through imitation, and at the same time of experiencing pleasure[25]. It is on this idea of mimesis – a presentation rather than a

25 Aristotle, *Poetics* 48b 5-9: "τό τε γὰρ μιμεῖσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παίδων ἐστὶ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρουσι τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων ὅτι μιμητικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ τὰς μαθήσεις ποιεῖται διὰ μιμήσεως τὰς πρώτας, καὶ τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήμασι πάντας". [Since childhood human beings have an instinct for representation, and in this respect, they differ from the other animals in that they are

representation of the world – that Aristotle bases the emergence of poetry, and especially of theatrical poetry, which, by deviating from reality, gains access to a dimension that makes facts and characters presentable in a more "serious, more philosophical" way than history can[26]. In this sense, poetry – and theatrical poetry par excellence – is the creative activity of the world. It is a matrix of life, a doubled, staged and en-acted life, a life that takes place in an amplified form through the device of the theatre. The paradoxical theatre that Patroclus stages in the tent to amuse his Achilles is the childish game of imitating the great by ridiculing them; but only in a grotesque sense, which is a degradation of the fundamental value of poetic mimesis. Imitation is used as a parodic weapon, subverting for the sake of ridiculous amusement what is taken to be the real. This, too, is theatre within the theatre.

There is no need here to recall the sublime instances in which Shakespeare uses the theatre within the theatre as an amplifying but faithful mirror, increasing the legibility of reality, giving representation (that is, visibility and utterance) to what would otherwise remain secret and silent. In *Troilus*, in contrast, the scene in the tent evokes the drift of theatre towards an anamorphic mirror, overturning values that are taken for granted. The cabaret that Patroclus and Achilles put on inside their tent to pass the time is the degeneration of that principle of representation/presentation on which Aristotle had hinged the philosophical relationship of poetry to reality – and on which Shakespeare himself constructs the scene of the comedians in *Hamlet*. The making of theatre in *Troilus* is therefore also meant to undermine the very philosophical value of theatre itself as the producer of truth and reality, reducing it, as in the episode in the tent, to a paradoxical inversion of normally perceived reality, which includes not only the parody of Agamemnon's arrogance but also the exposure of the details of Nestor's senile frailty. Theatre is also a children's game, cruel and stupid like all children's games. The bad theatre in Achilles' tent is the

much more imitative and learn their first lessons by representing things. And then everyone enjoys representations.]

26 Aristotle, *Poetics* 51b 6: "διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἡ δ᾽ ἱστορία τὰ καθ᾽ ἕκαστον λέγει". [For this reason, poetry is more philosophical and serious than history, because poetry tends to speak of universals, while history speaks of particular facts.]

counterpoint that positively underlines the fact that, on a dramatic level, the only way to make things happen is to stage them.

This is what Shakespeare does in the play of *Troilus and Cressida* as a whole, choosing to take what was the subject of an epic poem and put it into the form of a drama; and specifically, act by act, scene by scene, constructing a syntax of events that all happen, one by one, on stage. One for all, as in the case of Troilus' gift to Cressida, which she in turn gives to Diomede. In the medieval poems, Troilus discovers Criseyde's betrayal by chance: Chaucer, for example, tells us that Troilus sees the 'broche' he gave Criseyde[27] on the collar of a "manere cote-armure" torn from Diomedes in battle by his brother Deiphebus (*Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1650-66); at this point he realises that all is lost and decides to go and die in battle. Even in Shakespeare's *Troilus*, the episode of the gift is central to Cressida's betrayal; however, the scene is not narrated, but performed live. Troilus enters the Achaean camp as a member of the Trojan delegation and is then escorted by Ulysses to the tent of Calchas, followed by Thersites. On the unexpected arrival of Diomedes, Ulysses and Troilus hide, as also does Thersites, and spy on the seduction scene, in which Cressida succumbs to Diomedes' wooing, her response sealed by the gift of the 'sleeve', which she had received from Troilus and which, after some skirmishing, she now hands over to her new lover. In the medieval version of the story, the betrayal is symbolically underlined by the surrender of the precious object, which, from a pledge of love, becomes the token that the lover displays in the joust or in battle to remind him that his valiant deeds are dedicated to his Lady. Shakespeare, on the other hand, renounces the mediation of the symbol, shortens the distance between the narrative and the action, and transforms this cue into a scene of great theatre within the theatre.

It is a double scene of seduction and betrayal: the first scene takes place live but in the background inside the tent; the second scene in the foreground but set 'apart', with the counterpoint of Troilus' sad comments, the call to courage of his 'friend' Ulysses, and the vulgar overwriting of Thersites' words. The division of the scene – Cressida and Diomedes *vs*. Cressida and Troilus – is sealed by the wonderful

27 Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1040-1041: "And ek a broche – and that was litel nede – / That Troilus was, she yaf this Diomede." (Chaucer, ed. Benson 2008).

image with which Troilus rescues the truth of his inner scenario and the scenario of Troy itself, in the most beautiful monologue of the play:

> Troilus
> This she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida.
> If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
> If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,
> If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
> If there be rule in unity itself,
> This is not she. O, madness of discourse,
> That cause sets up with and against itself!
> […]
> Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, V.ii.144-61)

As Aristotle teaches, in tragedy one does not enact a pre-established *ethos*; rather, but the character assumes their *ethos* through action. This is never more clear than with Cressida: "This she?" No: there is a Cressida with Troilus, there is a Cressida with Diomedes. It depends on the setting, it depends on the scenario. Perhaps, as Troilus himself suggests, this insight is just a "madness of discourse". Or perhaps, no doubt, it is an effect of the theatre.

III. "Love, nothing but love"

"Fry, lechery, fry" – so Thersites comments on Cressida's live scene of betrayal. But Thersites knows only the language – corrupt, pornographic and fundamentally hyper-puritanical – of "devil Luxury"; what he can imagine are only the most sordid details of sexual intercourse "with his fat rump and potato finger, tickles these together" (V.ii.57-59). Thersites knows no code, no vocabulary, no alphabet of love. But it is Love, "love, nothing but love", that is the protagonist of *Troilus and Cressida*[28], and the compositional problem that Shakespeare has to solve is how to combine the story of Troilus' love and betrayal with the action of the Trojan War. As we have seen, the balance between the Trojan camp and the Greek camp is a problem that Boccaccio does not have to solve in his *Filostrato* and Chaucer does not have to solve in his poem. Even less is it an issue in Caxton's collection of tales

28 So Paris in III.i.107, and Pandarus in III.i.109.

of the Trojan War, which is the principal source of much of the material for Shakespeare's play. In Chaucer's poem (and before it, Boccaccio's), the geometric figure around which the narrative structure is built is the circle, in which the centre is one: Troilus and his love – desired, consummated and then betrayed – for Cressida. In neither poem is war the factor that drives the story to the catastrophic end of Troilus's death/suicide. The love of the two lovers could continue – and this was their promise – across the border between the two fronts: the walls of Troy, the edge of the Greek camp. In the two medieval poems, it is Cressida's betrayal that breaks the harmony of the circle.

Instead, in the entirely dramaturgical construction of his *Troilus*, Shakespeare works with a double scene and a double focus: the geometric figure of *Troilus and Cressida* is the ellipse: Troy on one side, the Greek camp on the other, but also, on a conceptual level, War on one side, Love on the other. The "cruel war" (*Prologue* 5) immediately evoked by the Prologue is echoed in the first scene of the tragedy with the reference to "such a cruel battle", the other war, the battle of love, that dwells in Troilus' heart (I.i.3). And if it is true that the struggle of love can consume the lover in the elasticity between desire and disappointment, war is evil in every sense: it is fierce, it is macabre. In *Troilus*, the condemnation of war is more radical and decisive than perhaps anywhere else in Shakespeare's plays. These are the words of the protagonist at the beginning of the play, in some of the most powerful and icily impressive lines in the tragedy:

> Troilus
> Peace, you ungracious clamors! Peace, rude sounds!
> Fools on both sides! Helen must needs be fair
> When with your blood you daily paint her thus.
> I cannot fight upon this argument;
> It is too starved a subject for my sword.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, I.i.85-89)

The name 'Helen', as we have seen, echoes the sound and meaning of 'woe' (II.ii.111). Around her, two ranks of madmen fight to replenish her daily supply of blood, her reserve of make-up. Troilus immediately declares that he will not play this game: he has a more important game to play, the game of love with Cressida. "Let Helen go," suggests Nestor, and this is what Diomedes says of Helen:

Diomedes
For every false drop in her bawdy veins
A Grecian's life hath sunk; for every scruple
Of her contaminated carrion weight
A Trojan hath been slain. Since she could speak,
She hath not given so many good words breath
As for her Greeks and Trojans suffered death.
(*Troilus and Cressida*, IV.i.71-76)

But it is not just the war-weary Achaeans who feel like this. The same view is echoed from the Trojan front by Priam, who wants to give up Helen in order to end the war for which so many Trojans have died. It is the same voice that rises in unison from the two fronts: the Trojans will give Helen back and the war will end. At one point, even Hector seems to agree that this is the way to end the war:

Hector
Let Helen go.
Since the first sword was drawn about this question,
Every tithe soul 'mongst many thousand dismes
Hath been as dear as Helen – I mean, of ours.
(*Troilus and Cressida*, II.ii.17-20)

Here, though, the soul of the son of Mars explodes in Troilus:

Troilus
I would not wish a drop of Trojan blood
Spent more in her defence. But, worthy Hector,
She is a theme of honour and renown,
A spur to valiant and magnanimous deeds.
(*Troilus and Cressida*, II.ii.197-200)

If there were no Helen, there would be no occasion – no scenario – for fame. In the sky of *Troilus and Cressida*, however, and especially in Troilus's birth chart, it is not just the light of Mars that shines.

Troilus
In characters as red as Mars his heart
Inflamed with Venus. Never did young man fancy
With so eternal and so fixed a soul.
(*Troilus and Cressida,* V.ii.171-72)

Mars is also red because he is inflamed by Venus: these are the red imprints, the red marks on the heart of Mars. Troilus himself is inflamed by the conjunction of the two planetary lovers, but for much of the play Venus shines brighter. It is her light that is stronger, truer. Shakespeare succeeds in interweaving the story of love with the story of war because he creates a gap between the two divine names, a difference in potential, as these gods, as always, play out their skirmishes to the detriment of mortals: and, just as happened in the ancient depictions of the myth, and later again in the artistic imagination of the Italian Renaissance, in *Troilus*, Venus wins out over Mars.

The game of Mars is always terrible, senseless, ignoble: so it was in the *Iliad*, where Ares rages without reason or purpose; and so it is again in *Troilus*, especially in the field of the Greeks. Here, we have to listen to the epithets and insults of the villain Thersites, and of Ulysses himself. Agamemnon is a pompous braggart, who "has not so much brain as ear-wax" (V.i.52); Ulysses is a cunning henchman, a "dog-fox", who knows only how to sow discord and combine idle plots that seem cunning but bear no fruit ("is proved worth a blackberry", V.iv.11); the wise Nestor is a "mouldy" old man, a "stale old mouse-eaten dry cheese" (II.i.101-2; V.iv.9-11). Ajax is a "blockish" (I.iii.389), "brainless" idiot (376); Achilles is hysterical, "self-affected" (II.iii.233), "sick of proud hearth" (84), prey to his moods and the instability of his pettish lunes (128), a disease – to such an extent, Ajax adds, that it would be a gift to call him Melancholy[29]. The only episode in which Achilles seems to become civilised is when, faced with Hecuba's letter reminding him of the promise of the marriage pact with Polyxena, he decides again, for a brief moment, to leave the field and remain faithful to the pact of love (V.1.36ff)[30]. For the rest, unlike in the *Iliad*, not even the death of Patroclus manages to humanise the mixture of vain sloth and ferocity with which Achilles' soul is impregnated. But the Trojans are just as rhetorical and vain, all blinded by abstract and absolute values – as abstract as the rage that drives Achilles to kill. War is the bestial outburst of Achilles and his

29 So Ajax: "You may call it melancholy, if you will favour the man" (*Troilus and Cressida*, II.iii.84-85).

30 Achilles' falling in love with Polyxena had already been stigmatised by Ulysses in III.iii.194ff.

Myrmidons, who rage over Hector's body like ferocious, cowardly dogs. The spirit of Mars is rampant where love is lacking. But in Troilus, it is not war that stirs the strongest feelings, the truest passions. Between the gauntlet of Mars and the glove of Venus (IV.v.179-80), the soft glove of Venus is far more powerful.

Of course, all the male protagonists of the drama are warriors, but they are also – or could be – a community of loving spirits: all Lovers, Greeks and Trojans. It is to this community that Aeneas invites the Greeks; and the call is promptly answered by Agamemnon, who swears to recall all "our lovers":

> Aeneas
> If there be one among the fair'st of Greece
> That holds his honour higher than his ease,
> That seeks his praise more than he fears his peril,
> That knows his valour and knows not his fear,
> That loves his mistress more than in confession
> With truant vows to her own lips he loves,
> And dare avow her beauty and her worth
> In other arms than hers – to him this challenge:
> Hector, in view of Trojans and of Greeks,
> Shall make it good, or do his best to do it,
> He hath a lady, wiser, fairer, truer
> Than ever Greek did couple in his arms;
> And will tomorrow with his trumpet call,
> Midway between your tents and walls of Troy,
> To rouse a Grecian that is true in love.
> If any come, Hector shall honour him;
> If none, he'll say in Troy when he retires
> The Grecian dames are sunburnt and not worth
> The splinter of a lance. Even so much.
>
> Agamemnon
> This shall be told our lovers, Lord Aeneas.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, I.iii.265-85)

And so, in the lofty and noble imagery that Aeneas evokes in his ambassadorship to Troy, the long and bloody conflict could be resolved: under the power of love, the war could be transformed into a grandiose chivalric joust in which each lover fights to prove his Lady's honour and worth in the contest. The stakes, the war itself, would thus be transformed into a gentle and civilised ordeal in which, by

elevating the specific conflict over the possession of Helen, it could be established whether the women to whom the Greek knights dedicate the duel are more or less beautiful, more or less worthy, than the women for whom the Trojans take the field. Loving spirits, no longer warriors; sons of Venus, no longer sons of Mars. Or rather, warlike spirits, but in the sense that the marks that Mars has engraved on their heart are red because they are inflamed by Venus. A "maiden battle", therefore, which may also end in an embrace: "The issue in the embracement" (IV.v.149): the duel chivalrously interrupted between the 'cousins' Hector and Ajax, their fraternal embrace ending the quarrel, seems to promise that this is possible. The final act of the war, in which the enraged Mars triumphs through the barbaric cruelty of Achilles, shows that it is not to be.

But *Troilus and Cressida* does not only stage the chivalrous alternative to the horrors of war; it also stages, above all, the triumph of the power of Love. There is no need for Cressida, like Boccaccio and Chaucer's Criseyde, to be a widow (i.e., by implication, a woman expert in love). Cressida is a young girl here, but above all, she is a loving spirit, she is *filia Veneris*, and is not afraid to declare herself as such: she even wishes she were a man in order to declare herself first to Troilus (III.ii.124-27). Indeed, Love needs courage and the actions of present bodies, loving bodies. Without this, it is a vain abstraction – and Shakespeare's *Troilus*, which measures an enormous distance from the lamentations of the *Filostrato* and the skirmishes of Troilus' emotions in Chaucer's poem, is an ideological manifesto against abstractions. The plaintive letters that Troilus sends to Cressida to remind her of their pact are useless; the last letter that Cressida writes to Troilus after their betrayal has been consummated is nonsensical, literally meaningless, and almost offensive, because it is rhetorically full of empty words:

> Troilus
> Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart.
> Th' effect doth operate another way.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, V.iii.107-08)

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare gives no space to the dimension of long-distance love, which, since the great classics of medieval literature, had been entrusted to the exchange of words written in letters. In this play, there is no love at a distance, no love in the abstract: love

is captured in the details: "Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice" (I.i.51) – it is the grace that Troilus sees in the particulars of Cressida's person. And, conversely, love is the light of beauty that Cressida sees in Troilus: and she sees it for herself. It is the passion – barely delayed by a preliminary skirmish that serves to heighten the erotic charge – that makes the intercourse between Troilus and Cressida inevitable and immediate. Cressida does not need the rhetorical pirouettes, the tricks of the ruffian Pandarus, to fall in love: in the end, the broker-between serves no purpose in the development of the drama. Love consists of charm and enchantment, of embraces and kisses, of lovers' tears that mingle, of sighs that become one breath.

Troilus and Cressida is an ideological manifesto against abstraction: "Words pay no debts; give her deeds" (III.ii.54). For Troilus, it will be facts: these are the proof that love must pass in order to prove its existence:

> Troilus
> Praise us as we are tasted, allow us as we prove.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, III.ii.87-88)

Facts, not words. Love is made up of pleasure that is instantly acted upon, instantly enjoyed – the very concreteness of enjoyment in unison. Love is a meeting of bodies, and therefore, it is mutual; otherwise, it does not exist. "She was beloved, she loved; she is, and doth" (IV.v.292), says Troilus of Cressida.

Love is conjugated only in the present tense: to put it in Greek words and images, it is not the image of *Pothos*, languidly abandoned to the nostalgia of the past, nor that of *Himeros*, the still unfulfilled desire, reaching into the future. Love is Eros, nothing else. Love, nothing but love. The distance of the present from the past and the future is expressed in the powerful image that appears surprisingly, in Act V, in the mouth of Agamemnon:

> Agamemnon
> What's past and what's to come is strewed with husks
> And formless ruin of oblivion.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, IV.v.167-68)

It is an extraordinarily philosophical Agamemnon who speaks of Time here, and sees past and future as the layer of the sawdust of husks,

shavings and slag, from which the streets were kept clean. Past and future are only slag, the shapeless ruins of oblivion[31]. It is only, Agamemnon concludes, "this present moment", the aorist moment when, after the polite embraces between the warriors of the opposing sides, the war can finally end, with the decisive duel between Hector and Achilles.

Love, too, must come to terms with time, which is here and now, and is always scarce for lovers. This is why love in *Troilus* is also expressed with the accents of the 'aubade', the song of defiance against the light of dawn, against the "guastafeste" – "busy old fool, unruly Sun" (IV.ii.1ff)[32] – that forces the lovers' embraces to a standstill.

Love is courtesy, it is the sound of a song, it is dancing grace. And it is of this, of the "fair virtues" of the Greeks – the idea that the Greeks are more civilised, more polite, more courteous than the Trojans – that Troilus is pre-emptively jealous, even before the betrayal of Cressida and Diomedes looms:

> Troilus
> I cannot sing,
> Nor heel the high lavolt, nor sweeten talk,
> Nor play at subtle games – fair virtues all,
> To which the Grecians are most prompt and
> pregnant.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, IV.iv.84-88)

Within this framework, Cressida is complete, noble, nonchalant. In the "kissing scene", when she arrives at the Achaean camp and is

31 So Fusini: "Quel che è stato e quel che si appresta a venire, [Agamennone] lo paragona al pavimento cosparso di paglia – così si tenevano pulite le strade allora, con una specie di segatura fatta di trucioli, di scorie – *busks*, gusci vuoti. L'avvenire appare così ad Agamennone: come una strada vuota cosparsa di resti informi, rovine dell'oblio. È un'immagine potente, una visione agghiacciante: l'avvenire, e cioè il tempo sospeso, in attesa, è una scoria" ["What has been and what is about to come, is compared [by Agamemnon] to the pavement strewn with straw – that is how the streets were kept clean then, with a kind of sawdust made of shavings – busks, empty shells. This is how the future appears to Agamemnon: like an empty road strewn with formless remains, ruins of oblivion. It is a powerful image, a chilling vision: the future, meaning time suspended, waiting, is mere refuse". Fusini 2015, 19, my translation].

32 I derive the expression "sole guastafeste" from the title of the article on John Donne's splendid *Aubade* by Bizzotto 2023.

greeted very warmly and very physically by the Achaean warriors, she does not flinch[33]. Cressida knows how to get on in this world and immediately understands that if the code is, as it seems, to greet the beautiful guest with kisses and hugs, then one must play along. In this, too, Shakespeare's *Troilus* is an ideological manifesto against convention: inscribed in the sign of the nobility of love, and the ideological and aesthetic revolution with which *Troilus* is littered, is also Troilus's own noble concern, when he discovers the betrayal, to preserve the good name of women from indiscriminate condemnation by those who, in Cressida's case, might "square the general sex":

> Troilus
> Let it not be believed for womanhood!
> Think, we had mothers. Do not give advantage
> To stubborn critics, apt, without a theme
> For depravation, to square the general sex
> By Cressid's rule. Rather think this not Cressid.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, V.ii.135-39)

"Rather think this is not Cressid". Love is a pas de deux, and this is how it is presented. Love wavers, doubles, 'depends' – on possibility, proximity, time, circumstances. It is not supportive of the cause of truth against falsehood, as lovers claim and promise each other in pacts that seem made to be broken[34]. Love is never loyal, never faithful, it is never transparent: it is another form of 'truth'. Cressida in the Achaean camp has difficulty remembering Troilus, because she is now elsewhere. Cressida's splitting is not just a punch line, evoking the mirroring that is the hallmark of *Troilus*' dramaturgy. It is also an act of love, a way of telling the truth about love: that love is either 'here and now', or it is not at all. Troilus wisely recognises that if she is elsewhere now, she is a different Cressida; she is another because she is elsewhere. Cressida has not betrayed herself (or Troilus), she has doubled herself, because her body, transferred from Troy to the Achaean camp, is now elsewhere, and therefore another.

33 The kisses-scene is in *Troilus and Cressida*, IV.v.

34 See the promises Troilus and Cressida exchange, all based on the principles of "True *vs* False" in III.ii.164-91.

No, Thersites is not right. Certainly, the Thersites of the play is a sublime figure from the point of view of the construction of his *ethos*, and his words have the effect of reshaping and shifting the silhouettes of all the characters, illuminating other, possible, features of their figure that only the livid light of his dazzling gaze can bring into focus. Everyone is a "fool" to Thersites (II.iii.56-57), and he, who plays the role of the Fool in the play, says so. But Thersites is neither the voice of truth, nor the voice of reality, nor the voice of anti-militarist conscience, as has been argued and repeated in so much critical literature, to the point of reading the character in an entirely positive light. Shakespeare's Thersites is a cynic, imbued with bad moods, impaired in the organs of sense and feeling that allow true 'knights', Troilus first and foremost, to understand love. No, Thersites is not, is never, right.

"Lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery" (V.ii.201-02); Thersites morbidly sees only lust in Cressida, in Troilus, in Diomedes. And before that, in Helen and in Paris, and in Helen and Menelaus: "a whore and a cuckold" (II.iii.69) are the icon and the emblem, but reversed, standing tall on the field of the Trojan War. Patroclus is "Achilles' brach" (II.i.111), his "masculine whore" (V.i.17), against whom he wishes everything, from (predictably) syphilis to kidney stones. He turns his pathogenic evil eye on the organs of the homoerotic sexual relationship, which is depraved and repulsive to his Puritan imagination. War is "nothing but lechery" (V.i.96), but when Thersites invokes "peace and quietness", it is only because he is not interested in either the exploits of war or the exploits of love, and with his misanthropic soul, he seeks only his own tranquillity (II.i.81-82). His is an empty sky, populated by sad passions, deprived of the light of Mars and deprived of the light of Venus, which set fire to everything, even the heart of Mars.

He does not know, Thersites, he cannot understand what Shakespeare teaches and proclaims in *Troilus*: a psychomachy is always at work between Mars and Venus. When the conjunction works, war can be sublimated into a knightly tournament and become an occasion to honour the Lady. But when love fails, when it withdraws, war reclaims its space. War is nothing but a degraded and substitutive form of the enterprise of love.

"Nothing but lechery": this is what Thersites thinks and says, because he babbles, foaming with rage, about things he does not know.

"Love, nothing but love" is the response of Troilus and his tragedy. Troilus himself becomes a warrior again at the end of the play: but he only becomes *philóstratos* again when all is lost for his love. Only when all love is lost.

IV. What if Troilus doesn't die?

We know that the Troilus who comes to Shakespeare is certainly not the Troilus of the ancient myth. But it is not unprofitable to go back to the Greek and Latin sources of the myth in order to trace the focal points of its literary and iconographic history. If, indeed, we can justifiably rule out the possibility that many of the details of the myth were known to Shakespeare, some of the ancient junctures of the story may still be useful for understanding how the character, the figure, and the story of the protagonist are reconfigured in the course of the medieval tradition, through scraps, omissions and reinventions.

The only mention of Troilus in the *Iliad* is at the end of the poem (*Iliad* XXIV, 257), when Priam, among the deaths of his sons, laments the death of Troilus *hippiochármes*, "who loved horses". It is therefore certain that Troilus was already dead before the events of the tenth year of the war reported in the *Iliad*. The question that arises when analysing the Greek and later Roman traditions of the myth is whether Troilus died as a child, killed by Achilles, or whether he died as a young man, fighting with Achilles in battle, and thus at an age appropriate to the role of a knight and a warrior. The second version – death in a duel with Achilles on horseback in the field – is certainly later, and is less common in the literary and iconographic tradition. Its most authoritative witness is Virgil, who, in the *Aeneid,* tells us that among the scenes that Aeneas sees depicted on the Temple of Juno in Carthage is the death of Troilus, in a battlefield encounter that represents an "impar congressus" between the "infelix puer" and Achilles, who finally kills him (*Aeneid*, 1.474-78).

According to the first, and much more common, version of the myth, Troilus was instead killed as a child, in an ambush set up by Achilles, who catches Troilus as he accompanies his sister Polyxena to fetch water from a spring. In archaic times, Troilus' fatal encounter with Achilles is one of the best-attested myths in pictorial art. Pictorial representations of Troilus' death tell a clear story that can be briefly

summarised. When Achilles emerges from his hiding place, Polyxena drops her water jug and runs away. Troilus rides away on horseback, while Achilles pursues on foot. Achilles finally catches up with him at the sanctuary of Apollo Timbraeus, where he cuts off his head[35].

Within this main version of the death of young Troilus, two sub-variants stand out. Achilles is said to have killed Troilus immediately after his landing in Troy by ambushing him while he was doing gymnastics in the temple of Apollo Timbraeus; or according to another variant, Achilles fell in love with Troilus, was rejected by him, and then killed him in Apollo's temple[36], triggering a battle with Hector and the other Trojan heroes to recover Troilus' body. In return, Apollo (according to some sources, Troilus' father) decreed that Achilles should die before the fall of Troy.

Returning to Virgil's version, the details seem to reflect a martial context, and already the first commentator on the *Aeneid*, Servius, recognises Virgil's treatment of the myth as an innovation that changes the traditional story[37]. However, although the Virgilian version is in the minority, the image that Aeneas sees carved on the temple of Juno in Carthage had an important influence on the tradition of the Troilus myth. It is probably this image of an exemplary duel (and not the far more brutal archaic and classical story) that leads to the invention of the character of Troilus as one of the bravest warriors among the Trojans. And it is this story of Troilus that gradually takes shape over the centuries, reaching Shakespeare through Chaucer and Caxton's *Recuyell*.

In the ancient sources, the character of Troilus was not only linked to Troy by the onomastic kinship in Troilus / Troy; he was also charged

35 It is interesting to note the shift in mythographic focus from Troilus to Polyxena, who at first appears as an entirely secondary character; only from the 5th century BCE does Polyxena take a leading role in literary and iconographic sources due to her relationship with Achilles.

36 Licophrones, *Alexandra*, vv. 307-10.

37 Servius, *Comm. ad Aeneid*, 1. 474: "[…] Troili amore Achillem ductum palumbes ei quibus ille delectabatur obiecisse: quas cum vellet tenere, captus ab Achille in eius amplexibus periit. Sed hoc quasi indignum heroo carmine mutavit poeta". [Achilles, who had fallen in love with Troilus, sent some pigeons before him; Troilus, trying to catch them, was caught by Achilles and died in his embrace. But as this episode was unworthy of the hero, the poet changed the story in his poem.]

with a magical-prophetic value. According to the Mythographus Vaticanus, an oracle had predicted that Troy could not be conquered if Troilus reached the age of twenty[38]. It is not known whether this marginal, but symbolically important, detail of the Troilus myth reached Shakespeare by any means. But two elements of Shakespeare's *Troilus* that could be read together are worth mentioning.

In the finale of the play, there is a kind of announcement of Troilus' death in the duel with Diomedes, into which he has thrown himself furiously, moved also by the sight of Cressida's sleeve, which he had seen hanging as an ornament from the helmet of his enemy and rival. At the end of the duel, Diomedes proclaims:

> Diomedes
> Go, go, my servant, take thou Troilus' horse;
> Present the fair steed to my Lady Cressid.
> Fellow, commend my service to her beauty;
> Tell her I have chastised the amorous Trojan
> And am her knight by proof.
> (*Troilus and* Cressida, V.v.1-4).

Instead, in the scene immediately following, we learn from the words of Ulysses that Troilus is alive and well, performing heroic deeds and seemingly invincible:

> Ulysses
> Troilus, who hath done today
> Mad and fantastic execution.
> Engaging and redeeming of himself
> With such a careless force and forceless care
> As if that luck, in very spite of cunning,
> Bade him win all.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, V.v.37-42)

Troilus is once again a very 'son of Mars'. Hector is now dead, slaughtered by Achilles' Myrmidons, and Agamemnon, declaring the death of the Trojan champion, proclaims: "Great Troy is ours, and our sharp wars are ended" (V.x.10). But will this prove true?

38 Myth Vat. I.210: "Troilo dictum erat si ad annos XX pervenisset Troia everti non potuisset."

In his earlier introduction of Troilus, Ulysses has already indicated that he is seen as the second hope for Troy after Hector: "They call him Troilus, and on him erect / a second hope, as fairly built as Hector" (IV.v.109-10). During the battle, Nestor offers a warning: "There is a thousand Hectors in the field" (V.v.19). On the other side, when Troilus announces Hector's death to the Trojans, he says that he does not speak "of flight, of fear, of death": his concern is who will make the announcement to Priam and Hecuba (V.xi.12ff). "Hector is dead. There is no more to say" (V.xi.22) – and the drama could end there. But it does not.

What is important, we have said, is to identify the points of inflection in the construction of the *myth/plot* of this drama in relation to the preceding tradition. It is worth recalling another passage from the *Poetics*, in which Aristotle stresses the need for the playwright to make a surgical cut in the mythical material: unlike the historical narrative, which must recount the sequential development of all the events that occurred in a given period, the poet must choose a narrative nucleus and build around it "a beginning, a middle and an end". From this point of view, the Iliad – says Aristotle – is the example par excellence, because the poem does not begin with the beginning of the war and does not end with the end and the conquest of Troy, but Homer, "in a divine way", takes only a part of the story and does not try to dramatise it as a whole[39]. Shakespeare does the same in his *Troilus*, taking a

39 Aristotle, *Poetics* 59 a 19-37: "περὶ δὲ τῆς διηγηματικῆς καὶ ἐν μέτρῳ μιμητικῆς, ὅτι δεῖ τοὺς μύθους καθάπερ ἐν ταῖς τραγῳδίαις συνιστάναι δραματικοὺς καὶ περὶ μίαν πρᾶξιν ὅλην καὶ τελείαν ἔχουσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσα καὶ τέλος, ἵν᾽ ὥσπερ ζῷον ἓν ὅλον ποιῇ τὴν οἰκείαν ἡδονήν, δῆλον, καὶ μὴ ὁμοίας ἱστορίαις τὰς συνθέσεις εἶναι, ἐν αἷς ἀνάγκη οὐχὶ μιᾶς πράξεως ποιεῖσθαι δήλωσιν ἀλλ᾽ ἑνὸς χρόνου, ὅσα ἐν τούτῳ συνέβη περὶ ἕνα ἢ πλείους, ὧν ἕκαστον ὡς ἔτυχεν ἔχει πρὸς ἄλληλα. […] διὸ ὥσπερ εἴπομεν ἤδη καὶ ταύτῃ θεσπέσιος ἂν φανείη Ὅμηρος παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους, τῷ μηδὲ τὸν πόλεμον καίπερ ἔχοντα ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος ἐπιχειρῆσαι ποιεῖν ὅλον· λίαν γὰρ ἂν μέγας καὶ οὐκ εὐσύνοπτος ἔμελλεν ἔσεσθαι ὁ μῦθος, ἢ τῷ μεγέθει μετριάζοντα καταπεπλεγμένον τῇ ποικιλίᾳ. νῦν δ᾽ ἓν μέρος ἀπολαβὼν ἐπεισοδίοις κέχρηται αὐτῶν πολλοῖς […]". [As for the art of exposition in verse, it is clear that, just as in tragedy, the story must be constructed dramatically, round a single piece of action, whole and complete in itself, with a beginning, middle and end, so that like a single living organism it may produce its own peculiar form of pleasure. It must not be such as we normally find in history, where what is required is an exposition not of a single piece of action but of a single period of time, with all that happened during it to

part of the story that has a different beginning, development and end from the whole story of Troilus that was available in the tradition, and that his audience could know. And the most dramaturgically significant point of diffraction is precisely the ending. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Troilus does not die; according to the strange non-ending of Shakespeare's play[40], everything is still open, everything is possible.

At the end of the drama, Troilus is not dead, but – and we are warned of this from the very first lines of the play – he has already reached, and passed, the fateful age of twenty (I.ii.227). Perhaps the fall of Troy never happened.

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one or more people, events that have a merely casual relation to each other. [...] So in this respect, too, compared with all other poets Homer appears, as we have already said, divinely inspired, in that even with the Trojan war, which has a beginning and an end, he did not endeavor to dramatise it as a whole, since it would have been either too long to be taken in all at once or, if he had moderated the length, he would have complicated it by the variety of incident. As it is, selecting a single part of the story the poet uses many incidents from other parts.]

40 As is known, the tragedy (un)ends with Pandarus' epilogue in V.xi.35-56.

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Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 45-67 (2024)

A Magnus Amator *in Illyria: Shakespeare and the Memory of Plautus*

Michael Saenger

It is well known that Shakespeare based his comedies about twins, *Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*, on Plautus's *Menaechmi*. The link between the two is often understood as structural, and there is little doubt that the comic possibilities of (re)production that so animate the Roman play form the backbone of both of Shakespeare's comedies based on the idea of twins. In this essay, however, I take a different perspective, arguing that Shakespeare was indebted to the Plautine play at a linguistic level as well as a thematic one. In particular, I suggest that the word "great" or "magnus" carries demonstrable lineage between the two plays, and that this points to an important dimension of the comedy of disorder.

Keywords: *Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, Plautus's *Menaechmi*, comedy of disorder, Shakespeare's language

One of Shakespeare's first plays was *Comedy of Errors*, which is an exercise in *imitatio*, based on a play that he probably knew from grammar school (Shakespeare 2002, 17). Roughly a decade later, Shakespeare returned to the premise of a comedy centered on twins who bear identical faces for his more comprehensively nuanced and ambitious second such play, *Twelfth Night*. The present essay considers some of the layers of memory that operate in Shakespeare's creative path through these three works. I offer an expansion of our understanding of how texts are remembered, and this more expansive perspective offers suggestive insight for a renewed examination of what qualifies as an echo, and how such reverberations can productively cross linguistic lines.

Source study is typically framed in linear ways, asking such questions as which texts were primary, secondary and analogous sources for any Shakespearean composition, and looking for what changes

Shakespeare made to them. Such demarcations are understandable, as the potential field of material that informed Shakespeare's authorship is vast and variegated, including everything from people he knew to sermons he attended. However, these categories necessarily enforce some limitations on our understanding of creativity. According to this model, an author receives a text, reimagines it, and creates a new work through intentional modification, but that idea of linear inheritance is not the only way to see how creativity happens[1]. Another set of questions is, what texts were on the table when Shakespeare was writing? What texts were plausibly operating in his recent or distant memory? On what levels was a text recalled: by words, plot, thematic structure, or some other aspect of its verbal life? If one source text affected more than one Shakespearean text, was the first act of poetic recollection part of the memorial experience that was the basis of the creation of the second? That is to say, was the remembering remembered? What if texts by Shakespeare and by others were so proximate to each other that recollection could not clearly separate them? In what ways might memory be an experience of immediacy, a 'flashback', so to speak, rather than a record of the past? We tend to discuss such emergent recollections in relation to trauma, but the recollection of many structures, textual, linguistic, auditory or conceptual, can be just as immediate in the experience of recollection as they were in initial experience. In particular, I suggest that one of the most pivotal lines in *Twelfth Night* hearkens to a gap between a Latin play he experienced as a child and its English translatability.

This exploration of the productive interplay between languages is an extension of the concept that I have called *interlinguicity*, a term I have offered as a way to understand the cohabitation of multiple languages within a conversation, a sentence, or a creative work. The concept has two stages: the first is to acknowledge that the notion of

1 As Sergio Costola has suggested, "Models of linear descent, such as from Plautus to commedia dell'arte, might be valid, but should not claim legitimacy solely on the basis that they validate the texts that we already have. In contrast, studies of the dramatic construction of the plays of Elizabethan dramatists, as Michele Marrapodi points out, have more recently profited from a comparative approach which has examined the theatrical ancestry of the plays outside positivistic source studies that are primarily focused on the form of influence of source material" (2023, 244).

linguistic integrity is drastically overstated by structures such as dictionaries, nations, university departments, and similar demarcations. Cities, people, and texts have always been hybridized and subdivided in ways that elude or confound traditional linguistic categorization, particularly in their more subtle and meaningful registers. The second stage in the concept is that such overlapping and motive contact between linguistic systems is not just a large element of the social life of communication but also a generative force for poetic creation. Languages have never been separate, and poetic creation has often drawn energy from the gaps and confusions that interlinguistic contact generates (Saenger 2015a, 2015b). We are taught to see languages as separate things that occasionally mix; interlinguicity asks us to focus on, and to put higher value upon, their interpermeation and promiscuity.

In the traditional account of a source, the author is viewed as a unitary agent who shapes previous texts into new creations, and the most conscious decision any author makes is the plot. According to this logic, Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* is based on *Menaechmi*, and *Twelfth Night* is based on *Gl'Ingannati*, a kinship that was initially recorded by a contemporary attendee at a performance of the later play, John Manningham (Shakespeare 2021, 1337)[2]. But the truth is that any textual relationship must have been complicated, mediated and hybridized, as the plot in question was so common in the fabric of ancient comedy. The version of misidentified twins portrayed in *Twelfth Night* includes a factor of gender, thus joining the issue of physical confusion of identity to the social performance of gender. Viola notoriously offers no explanation for her desire to play the part of a eunuch, and in that lacuna, they unwittingly construct a resemblance to their brother Sebastian, through a combination of facial resemblance and the performed embodiment of class and gender expectations[3]. Catherine Scott Burriss has argued for a

2 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Shakespeare are taken from this Arden edition.

3 Brian Cummings has suggested that Viola's capacity for self-erasure and radical instability is counterpoised by the "Captain [who] attempts to impose his fragmentary memories of a place he has sailed to and from in the past onto Viola's bewildering sense of disturbance and displacement" (Cummings 2023, 51). It is reasonable to infer that Viola seeks to cross-dress in order to get a job and to avoid unwanted advances as a woman travelling nearly alone. In *As You Like*

reading of *Gl'Ingannati* that embraces its queer and ludic framing, and indeed there is no real separation possible between that Italian play and the Plautine tradition[4].

At this stage, a more traditional account of the relationship of these three plays must be laid out[5]. Plautus's Latin comedy *Menaechmi* offers two identical twins separated by fate at the age of seven, who have unwittingly ended up in the same city later in life. This ironic coexistence is the pretext for a series of scenes wherein comedy is built on misrecognition and the complications it generates. In the *Menaechmi*, the basic outline of the plot is as follows: a merchant from Syracuse has twins, and takes one with him on a voyage to Tarentum, who for his entire life bears the name Menaechmus (I will call this brother simply Menaechmus here). That son is stolen by a family from Epidamnum who want a child, which prompts the father to die of grief. The grandfather takes care of the remaining boy, who had originally been named Sosicles, and out of grief renames him Menaechmus, after his brother, who is presumed dead. I will call this brother Menaechmus (S), as a reference to his original name.

In *Comedy of Errors*, the symmetries involved with identical twins are multiplied. They are identically named, but without a clear expla-

It, Rosalind offers safety as the reason for her decision to adopt a male persona (I.iii.106-08), as does Julia when she plots to become Sebastian in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (II.vii.40-41), and Innogen when she agrees to dress as Fidele in *Cymbeline* (III.iv.150-53). It is therefore notable that Viola's motivation, by contrast, is not clearly articulated in the play.

4 Scott Burriss suggests, "*Gl'Ingannati* leaves its audience with no firm ground to stand on regarding the performance of gender; in the end, one young man's performance of a girl who plays a boy and of a boy who does not play a girl but is mistaken for a girl playing a boy, insistently asks: what belongs to masculinity, what to femininity, what to both, what to neither?" (Scott Burriss 2013, 77). For example Scott Burris notes that the Prologue flaunts the expectation of a cohesive plot, and along with it, stable gender norms: "'Oh! Or ch'io mi ricordo: non v'aspettate altro argomento perché quello che ve lo aveva a fare non è in punto.' ('Oh yeah! I just remembered: don't expect to hear the argument of the play, because the guy who was assigned to do it isn't ready')" (Scott Burriss 2013, 69).

5 For a more comprehensive account of the influence of Plautus on *Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*, in terms of plot, incident, and characterization, see Robert Miola 1994, 19-61. The present essay differs from Miola's work in its focus on metalinguistic poetry in Shakespeare, and a fuller exploration of thematic networks, including service, erotic networks and confusion and reconstitution of the self.

nation of how that happened, thus making them more similar even in terms of Shakespeare's plot. Each has a slave, and those two slaves are also identical to each other in face and name, creating a nearly geometric parallelogram of identity duplication. Neither the *Menaechmi* nor *Twelfth Night* are as symmetrical in their structure as *Comedy of Errors*. In Plautus's play, Menaechmus (the one who always had that name) has a parasite, named Peniculus. His brother, Menaechmus (S), misses Menaechmus, and goes to search for him across the Mediterranean. He finds himself quite accidentally in Epidamnum, where his brother happens to live, and he is confused to find that people there seem to know his name. In this way he meets the social identity of his brother for most of the play, only encountering his actual brother in person at the end.

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare revisits the basic plot structure of two dislocated twins who cohabit the same social world, but alters a number of the elements in the model. There are two obvious differences. First, both of the twins are foreign to the city in which the play takes place, making almost all the social bonds we see them experience a product of improvisation for both of them, and secondly, one of the twins, Viola, is female, though this difference is diminished when she dresses as a man and assumes the name of Cesario. Further, a number of other characters wander into the framework, most notably Malvolio. But certain aspects are remarkably similar. The characters in all three plays are focused on outcomes: successfully obtaining a meal, avoiding a strange woman who claims rights to them, and avoiding a debt that they do not understand. The audience is detached from these outcomes, and the primary pleasure that the plays offer is laughter. The audience are laughing because their position as external observers enables them to have information about the disjunction at the root of the misrecognitions: they know that the two siblings are different people, and so each situation that is frustrating, confusing or painful to the characters onstage is humorous for the audience because their superior knowledge tips strife into silliness, and gaps of recognition into levity and play.

Thematically, they diverge. Plautus holds urban identity up for satire, both in terms of psychology, social customs and characterization. Psychologically, the Latin play implicitly asks, if you had a sibling with the same name and face wandering around in your social world, as both

Menaechmus characters do, what choices would they make? Would that be your experience, or theirs? On a societal level, how would your perception of status and community be destabilized if people either gave or took things in a way that you could not reconcile with your memory of interactions, or if those people referred to conversations that you did not have? Lastly, who would you be, and who would you perceive others to be? Characterization, especially in Roman comedy, is heavily connected to set roles, the kind of position that we now call a stereotype. Would you recognize who people were if they did not come with a pre-existing history? Could a wife exist without a husband, and vice versa? And what kind of desire would you have?

In all the plays examined here, *Menaechmi* (e.g., 880), *The Comedy of Errors* (e.g., IV.iv), and *Twelfth Night* (e.g., IV.ii), the idea of madness is invoked, quite understandably, in order to characterize a person whom we in the audience know to be sane, a person who is caught in a web of irreconcilable social cues by the twin plot. That invocation draws attention to how deeply contingent our social existence is, and it also tests the bounds of comedy. In more granular terms of mores and customary norms, the plays ask us to consider questions that structure and disrupt literary narrative: How is debt assigned, and how are favors granted? Are husbands and lovers interchangeable? What kind of normalized patterns create a bad marriage or a good one? How much of our daily reality could be rewritten with the silent arrival of a doppelganger? We tend to think of catfishing, deep fakes and identity theft as perils of the modern social network, but Plautus's play implies that such impersonations and duplicated selves are as old as society itself. Indeed the modern versions of this kind of impersonation are frequently associated with criminality and malintent, whereas the Roman playwright, more troublingly, shows us that such doublings can happen without any active agency; they can happen *on their own*. The social self and its detachability were born together, like the twins from Syracuse.

The Comedy of Errors elaborates the comic plotting, but if anything quells some of the more existential questions raised by Plautus. *Twelfth Night*, on the other hand, contains two key differences. In making one sibling, to speak in contemporary terms, gender fluid, Shakespeare puts less emphasis on sexual desire and more focus on the social implications of longing. Every instance of confusion in Plautus is thus

directed to the more fundamental confusions raised by human existence and the abstract agency of physical and social desire. The second major difference is that the social tensions of rank that are inherent in *Menaechmi* are given a personification in Malvolio[6]. In *Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare tamps down the restive energies of the slave and parasite of the *Menaechmi*. By contrast, in *Twelfth Night*, those energies are played out in scenes that are simultaneously ridiculously comic and poignantly pathetic. The gulled Malvolio is both a comic scapegoat for class ambition and a plaintive victim of extravagant cruelty.

The link between the three plays is often understood as structural, and there is little doubt that the comic possibilities of (re)production that so animate the Roman play form the backbone of both of Shakespeare's two comedies that were based on the idea of interchangeable siblings. In what follows, however, I take a different perspective, arguing that Shakespeare was indebted to the Plautine play at a linguistic level as well as levels of plot and theme. In particular, I suggest that the words 'big' and 'great' or 'magnus' bear a fascinating path in Shakespeare, and that this points to the productive space of interlinguicity, or the gap between languages.

The *poesis* through which Shakespeare created *Twelfth Night* was thus less like the kind of linear, and lineal, relationship between source and creation that traditional scholarship imagines, and more like a broadly based revision of earlier textual moods and thematic networks. Those earlier texts were not exactly assembled on his desk, so to speak, but rather in his memory, which means that an array of texts functioned in this role, beginning with Plautus, and also including his own previous play, *Comedy of Errors*, as well as intermediary versions of the story, such as *Gl'Ingannati* and the tale of Apolonius and Silla from *Rich his Farewell to Military Profession* (1581) by Barnabe Rich (Shakespeare 2021, 1337)[7]. One could pressure that array of texts into linear causality, but it is worth noting that all of the prominent

6 Malvolio is also clearly linked with religious controversy, and various critics have read him as either more comical or more serious as a consequence of this link. Ian McAdam assesses recent scholarship on this topic usefully, and he reads the letter, and his subsequent humiliation, as allusions to "the illicit behaviour of subversive factions" (McAdam 2013, 81).

7 For a full account of the relationship of *Twelfth Night* to its sources, see Lothian and Craik 1975, xxxv-l.

characters in these stories endure misrecognition. As such, they construct and remake themselves by improvisational identity formation, which is to say that they adapt to, and navigate, an ever-shifting set of people and words, many of which do not make sense, internalizing phrases as they go. That literary experience of these characters, in which the present is characterized by detached and unrecognizable traces from a past that is both unfamiliar and uncannily known, might also be a useful way to conceive of Shakespeare's act of writing.

In all three plays, one of the siblings encounters a woman who has a connection to their brother, and that woman is not the brother's wife. In *Menaechmi*, Menaechmus (S) meets Menaechmus's favorite prostitute, Erotium. In *The Comedy of Errors* Antipholus of Syracuse meets Luciana, the sister of Antipholus of Ephesus's wife, and in *Twelfth Night*, Viola/Cesario encounters Olivia, the focus of Cesario's master's love, and later in the play, the wife of Viola's brother, Sebastian. When Olivia first meets Cesario, the dialog seems at first glance to be far from source text of Plautus, to speak in linear terms. The Menaechmus who wanders as a foreigner corresponds more to Viola than to Sebastian, in the sense that Viola is more fundamentally at odds with herself, experiencing a kind of angst that Sebastian never feels, and it is Viola who dresses up as a eunuch. Just as Menaechmus (S) is searching for his sibling (231), so Viola is searching for hers (I.ii.3-6), and Viola (as Cesario) interacts with Olivia in a way that is similar to how Menaechmus (S) interacts with his brother's lover, Erotium (350-430).

There are other interesting differences. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola has created a new character, who is at least liminally male, to act as a representative of Orsino. Viola, playing Cesario, has no apparent erotic interest in Olivia, and Olivia has an extravagant lack of interest in Orsino, in contrast with the businesslike engagement of her counterpart, Erotium. The comparable dynamic in *Comedy of Errors* occurs when Luciana asks Antipholus of Syracuse to go in to observe better decorum and at least feign fidelity to her sister (III.ii.1-28). Antipholus responds with rhapsodic poetry of love, but Luciana is very far from initiating that desire, and at least overtly, very far from reciprocating it. Thus, the situational parallel is there, but the erotic symmetries and parallels are really not aligned.

However, on a more thematic level, Shakespeare uses a remark by Olivia to allude to the Latin play. When Cesario asks Olivia to

remove her veil, she responds to them, "Have you any commission to negotiate with my face?" (I.v.227). She means this as a chess move, so to speak, challenging Cesario's wit in romantic repartée. However, the idea of negotiating with a face precisely matches the mechanics that are so central to the Plautine play. Each character in the ancient play is negotiating – with respect to money, marriage, theft or prostitution – not with a person, but rather with a face that functions as a detachable representation of identity. That detachability is what the twins reveal through their interchangeable social presence.

Shakespeare's Antipholus of Syracuse gives richly poetic voice to a kind of confusion that closely tracks that of his Roman counterpart. Early in the play, Antipholus compares his concept of his own boundaries to the integrity of a water drop:

> I to the world am like a water drop
> That in the ocean seeks another drop;
> Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
> Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself.
> (*The Comedy of Errors*, I.ii.37-40)

The image of separation and reunion in water is apposite to the maritime plot, and the image also resonates with a broader concern for the limits of the self in a social world, which are both fundamental to human agency and always at risk of erasure. Similarly, one of the most transcendent moments in *Comedy of Errors* is when Luciana and Antipholus of Syracuse engage in a *pas de deux*, a scene which emerges from a much more quotidian moment in Plautus. When Menaechmus's lover, Erotium, approaches the wrong Menaechmus to invite Menaechmus (S) in to enjoy her attentions, her tone is practical and his response is confused:

> Erotium
> Our luncheon here has been seen to, as you ordered; you may go in and take your place when you like.
>
> Menaechmus (S)
> To whom is this woman talking? (364-69)[8]

8 All English translations of Plautus are taken from Nixon 1959.

Shakespeare does not so much give Antipholus more depth, but rather simply more verbal diapason. Fittingly, when Shakespeare restages, or rememberingly recreates, the scene between Menaechmus (S) and Erotium, it becomes a scene between Antipholus of Syracuse and Adriana's sister Luciana. Plautus's courtezan has become, for Shakespeare, an innocent young woman, and both characters' words are sublime:

> Luciana
> Comfort my sister, cheer her, call her 'wife'.
> 'Tis holy sport to be a little vain
> When the sweet breath of flattery conquers strife.
>
> Antipholus of Syracuse
> Sweet mistress – what your name is else, I know not,
> Nor by what wonder you do hit of mine –
> Less in your knowledge and your grace you show not
> Than our earth's wonder, more than earth divine.
> (*The Comedy of Errors*, III.ii.26-32)

Luciana's *gradatio* is continued by Antipholus; "sweet breath […] conquers strife" just as earthly grace is transcended by its godly equivalent. Love conquers all – even marriage – but for Shakespeare the poetic stakes are higher and the moral risk is diminished. When Luciana asks what she believes to be her brother-in-law to call her sister wife, she means it as the formal fulfilment of his marital duty, but her phrasing draws attention to the radical instability of names in general, whether they are proper names or terms of relationship. If one personal name can refer to multiple people, then naming itself is revealed as contingent and seemingly random, and calling someone wife is both as arbitrary and legally valid as calling someone Antipholus. The accident of duplicate names in Plautus is just another aspect of the indifferent mechanics of civic life. In a telling sign of Shakespeare's transformative intent, that duplication becomes a site for numinous serendipity.

Another comparable moment occurs at a moment which follows this in the timeline of Plautus, and precedes it in that of Shakespeare. Menaechmus (S) has expressed puzzlement for some time about why a strange woman (Erotium) would invite him into her house. Finally, he decides that rational thought cannot explain the situation but he will shrug and go in anyway (415-20). He addresses Messenio:

> Menaechmus (S)
> See here now, you shut up. Things are going well. I'll assent to whatever the wench says, if I can come in for entertainment here. (*confidentially to Erotium, motioning Messenio back)* I kept contradicting you a while ago purposely, my girl; I was afraid of this fellow (*indicating Messenio*) – that he might inform my wife of the mantle and the luncheon. Now when you wish let's go inside. (416-22)

Antipholus of Syracuse finds himself in a similar position in *Comedy of Errors*, and makes a similar speech before going in:

> To me she speaks; she moves me for her theme.
> What, was I married to her in my dream?
> Or sleep I now and think I hear all this?
> What error drives our eyes and ears amiss?
> Until I know this sure uncertainty,
> I'll entertain the offer'd fallacy. (II.ii.189-94)

Part of the humor lies in the fact that there is no substantial aggrandizement in Shakespeare's version, only a more nuanced confusion. In *Twelfth Night*, this moment belongs to Sebastian[9], who similarly faces a choice of whether to enter a house into which Olivia is inviting him:

> Sebastian
> What relish is in this? How runs the stream?
> Or I am mad or else this is a dream.
> Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep:
> If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep.
>
> Olivia
> Nay, come, I prithee, would thou'dst be ruled by me.
>
> Sebastian
> Madam, I will.
> (*Twelfth Night*, IV.i.59-64)

9 In her account of how the play distends erotic possibilities within the confines of comic form, Nancy Lindheim observes that "Sebastian is shaped to be both necessary transition (Cesario's double) and potential fulfilment (Sebastian himself)" (Lindheim 2007, 685).

Similar thematic threads of intertextuality cluster around Malvolio. Olivia's steward has no equivalent in *Comedy of Errors*, but he has suggestive resonances with a slave in Plautus, Messenio. A product of Shakespeare's mid-career fascination with tonal contrasts, he is a deeply serious character in a wildly fanciful play, a contrast writ large in the play that is figured in small form in the scene wherein he arrives to find Sir Toby and his inebriated companions singing catches, and tries to get them to be quiet (II.iii.85-123). After this, Maria leads an effort to deceive him, detailing her plans to take vengeance in the form of a kind of bivalent double-impersonation[10]. She will mimic the handwriting of her lady Olivia, in letters that command ridiculous behavior from Malvolio, and these letters will change the personality of her target; Malvolio will find himself "most feelingly personated" (II.iii.157). Though neither Maria nor Malvolio have any kin in Plautus, that idea does – the notion that a character onstage can feel socially articulated definitions of another person's identity, personal definitions that do not properly belong to him, and change his character, his facial affect, and his costume to suit a mismatched set of expectations. This idea of epistolary self-fashioning, if one may still use that term, is based on the idea of negotiating with a face. Two identical faces can cause a disruption in the system of legal recognition upon which the *polis* is based, and a consequent disruption in social order. That disorder reveals the fragile and contingent nature of other social cues, such as names, legal agreements, reputation, ambition, punishment and property.

But here too, there are differences; the letter causes a misrecognition that precisely inverts the misrecognition at the core of Plau-

10 Thomas Embry has recently argued that the famous riddle that the faux Olivia offers to Malvolio, "M.O.A.I. doth sway my life" (II.v.109), would have been understood by its original audience as "a double riddle…furnished with clues that point simultaneously to two different solutions, only one of which is correct" (Embry 2020, 367). Embry suggests that in this case, the two interpretations of the letters are that Olivia loves him, and that he will be hung (metaphorically, that is, humiliated), and Embry links this double interpretation to the visual pun of a chain and a rope, which appears in *The Comedy of Errors*. An important consequence of his argument is the notion that doubling is not just a feature of the plots of these plays, but also an intrinsic motif in the processes by which the characters in the plays determine meaning.

tus's play. Menaechmus (S) encounters a world that seems to know someone who looks like him, and he defers judgment and embraces the benefits of what appears to be the capricious gifts of an irrational world. His face is his ticket to another life. By contrast, Malvolio's face is the copy of no one, but he receives Maria's engineered social cues (the text of the letter, its placement, its handwriting) and concludes that his 'value' has been underestimated. He transforms to embrace not the life of a duplicate, but rather a new way of seeing his current position, which is the notion that he has earned the erotic desire of Olivia, a person who is never misrecognized in the play, in the literal sense of the word. Either the core of identity, the face, or its externalities, tied to language and status, can be hijacked, and the effect on the inner qualities of desire or contentment can be very similar.

In *Comedy of Errors*, many of these broader Plautine references to social position survive; Antipholus of Ephesus struts his pride to the merchant in front of his own house, before finding himself locked out (III.i), for example. In addition, his wife Adriana, like her Plautine equivalent, bemoans her lack of power in her *domus*. In *Comedy of Errors*, dignity is much less emphasized as an emotionally important issue; it is merely an impediment to meeting one's needs. By contrast, the perception and sensation of status appears as a more powerful issue in *Twelfth Night*.

In writing *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare remembers Plautus, his own prior adaptation thereof, and other versions of the story in different ways, as evinced here by this divergence in the idea of dignity between the two Shakespearean plays that concern parallel siblings. Several characters in Plautus's play assert the power of their own social station, most of all Menaechmus, while the repeated pleas of Peniculus for food emphasize his degradation, and probably provide a hint for Malvolio's enclosure in a dark room. The jocular dynamics between Menaechmus (S) and his slave are counterpoised with the more indifferent and cold connection between Menaechmus and his parasite. At one point Menaechmus (S) takes his money back from his slave, Messenio. Messenio asks why:

Menaechmus (S)
iam aps te metuo de verbis tuis.

Messenio
quid metuis?

Menaechmus (S)
ne mihi damnum in Epidamno duis.
tu magnus amator mulierum es, Messenio.
ego autem homo iracundus, animi perciti. (266-69)[11]

Menaechmus (S)
I have my fears of you now, from what you say.

Messenio
Fears of what?

Menaechmus (S)
Of your doing me some damage in Epidamnus. You, Messenio, are a great lover of the ladies, and I am a choleric man, of ungovernable temper; so long as I hold the money I'll guard against both dangers – a slip on your part, and resultant choler on my own.

In Plautus's play, the feeling of social rank plays out in odd ways. Peniculus is truly subservient to his Menaechmus, whereas Messenio, who is legally a slave, and Menaechmus (S) have more of a teasing, familiar relationship. Here, part of the humor lies in the fact that both men have a weakness for erotic desire, and Menaechmus (S) is trying to put that problem on Messenio alone.

Of particular interest is Menaechmus (S)'s line, "tu magnus amator mulierum es, Messenio". Latin is one of many languages that uses one word for both physical size – a large thing – and metaphorical grandeur – a serious, important thing. It seems likely that a young Shakespeare would notice this gap between Latin and English lexicons, especially because it is an important part of the sentence. Menaechmus (S)'s primary meaning is that Messenio is metaphorically expansive in his devotion to women, and thus cannot be trusted with money, but that sentence cannot be translated into English without deciding whether to call that devotion 'big' or 'great'. Indeed, there is probably some ambiguity in the original Latin, in the sense that it may be understood to imply either that Messenio likes women a lot, or that he has a physically large ability to please them.

In context, the remark is particularly interesting because of the subtle power relationship between the two. Messenio teases his

11 All Latin quotes from Plautus are taken from Gratwick 1993.

master, as slaves in Roman drama often do, and at one point he needs to take the money back, because he has the same concern about Menaechmus wasting it (385). Thus the comment about being a *magnus amator*, and its position vis à vis English, raises interesting issues of rank and sexual levity, and the socially perceived importance of male devotion to women, with regard to the body, the mind, and the perceived social fabric. That final issue, of social connections, is particularly emphasized by the transfer of money here. Money only has value because of social perception of its worth, and that valuation can be fickle even in the best of times. In anything other than a perfectly safe city, money can always be stolen or otherwise extracted[12]. What value does Messenio have, and what are his vulnerabilities? Is he as fungible as the money he surrenders? Social rank marks master and slave as distinct, but in their bodies, and in their proclivities, it vanishes.

Some of these issues are detectible in other instances where Shakespeare uses words like 'big' and 'great'. When Fluellen and Gower in *Henry V* are discussing their king and his place in history, they compare him with an important Macedonian predecessor:

> Fluellen
> Ay, he was porn at Monmouth, Captain Gower. What
> call you the town's name where Alexander the Pig was born!
>
> Gower
> Alexander the Great.
>
> Fluellen
> Why, I pray you, is not pig great? The pig, or the
> great, or the mighty, or the huge, or the
> magnanimous, are all one reckonings, save the phrase
> is a little variations.
>
> Gower
> I think Alexander the Great was born in Macedon: his
> father was called Philip of Macedon, as I take it.

12 Lothian and Craik (1975) highlight the change of tone when the farcical denial of financial debt by mistaken twin in Plautus is transformed into the more serious moment when Sebastian denies taking money from Antonio (Shakespeare 1975, xlviii).

Fluellen
I think it is in Macedon where Alexander is porn.
(*Henry V*, IV.vii.11-23)

Fluellen is comparing present kings to their past patterns, and his point here is about origin. Henry was born in Monmouth (Curry 2013, 28) and is associated with Wales, whereas Alexander was similarly associated with Macedon. The fact that each king came from one country and then ruled another gives them a claim to the kind of epithet that emperors would claim; history might call them great.

But Fluellen is a stage Welshman, so he has trouble making the *b* sound, which is why he comically says "Alexander the Pig", and says "porn" in place of "born". His confusion is phonetic, and it is also lexical. As English is his second language, he gets confused about the words "big" and "great". In fact, he is probably consciously translating Alexander Magnus from Latin to English, misplacing the target by calling the ancient king big, which in turn is further foreignized as his accent makes the word sound like the barnyard animal. Gower corrects him, and Fluellen does not seem to appreciate the difference between the two English alternatives, and in so doing he references "magnanimous", a cognate of the Latin word that he is struggling to place in English.

Similarly, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, there is a show of ancient worthies near the end of the play. A group of lower-ranked characters come onstage to present their embodiment of important characters from history, including Holofernes, Judas Maccabeus, and Hercules. Costard, the clown, presents Pompey the Great:

Costard
I Pompey am, Pompey surnamed the Big.

Dumain
The 'Great'.

Costard
It is 'Great', sir: Pompey surnamed the Great….
(*Love's Labour's Lost*, V.ii.546-48)

Once again, a lower class character gets confused about how to translate *magnus*, and he is corrected by an upper class character. In this

case, Costard does not resist the correction, perhaps because he is performing a memorized part and recognizes that he made an error.

Between these situations, it is clear that the word *magnus* itself, and its translation, is a focus of interest for Shakespeare, at least as much as an epithet, which is how Menaechmus (S) applies it to Messenio. In Shakespeare's second play about twins, he echoes this line in two fascinating instances. First, when Olivia is entranced by Cesario, she sends Malvolio off deliver a ring to them. When he leaves, she reflects on her own position,

> Olivia
> I do I know not what, and fear to find
> Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind.
> Fate, show thy force, ourselves we do not owe.
> (*Twelfth Night*, I.v.303-05)

In common with the quotation from Plautus, a thing of value is exchanged, and the word for "fear" immediately precedes the word "great". There is a general sense of trickery and desire, and a servant is being commanded in the context of a potential erotic entanglement. An *amator* is not precisely a flatterer, but the meanings are not that far apart, so "magnus amator" comes relatively close to "great flatterer"[13]. In both cases, the higher class character follows these reference to *magnus* by reflecting in a distinctively detached, one might say haughty, way about their own personality.

In the next act, Shakespeare gives that same servant a particular line that hovers around the idea of greatness. In *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio is associated with one of the most famous lines in the play, where he is given a line that reflects Shakespeare's persistent fascination

13 Iolanda Plescia has explored the tension of Latinate and Germanic words in Shakespeare, and how the audible tension between those systems is linked not just to legitimacy and plebeian roughness, but also to ways of reading history and origins, particularly with regard to ambiguous figures within Britain's history, such as Cymbeline (Plescia 2022). Within this context, it is interesting that there are four characters examined in this essay who touch on the idea of greatness in an echo of Plautus: Costard, Fluellen, Malvolio and Olivia. Of all these, only Olivia uses the Germanic word 'great' to translate the Latin *magnus* without any risk of embarrassment at all, and of course she is the highest ranked of the four. The implication may be that navigating such gaps is a privilege of the social elite.

with grammatical alternatives and intricacies, in this case as a meditation on the relationship of various people to the idea of greatness. In a manner quite rare in Shakespeare, it operates as a kind of ubertext for the play, chiming like a leitmotif three distinct times, in its first instance audible for its invitation to pride, in its second instance for its gloriously misplaced eroticism, and in its final arrival as a form of poetic justice, which Feste calls a "whirligig" (V.i.371).

First, Malvolio reads a letter left for him by Maria, who has imitated her mistress's handwriting in order to deceive Malvolio into thinking that his superior is in love with him. He reads, with transparent arousal, "In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them" (II.v.142-45). I suggest that these lines are a poetic expansion or "tu magnus amator mulierum es" (*Menaechmi*, 268). The Latin line shares with Maria's letter notable similarities: familiarity from a superior, an ambiguous invocation of greatness, the anticipation of eros, an ambient sense of trickery, and the proximity of words for fear and large physical or metaphorical size.

In the first instance of the text that sparks Malvolio's romantic and social ambition, the discussion of greatness raises issues of arousal, and a double entendre that recalls Plautus. Like Messenio, he has an official relationship of subservience with his superior, and that relationship is being transgressed with innuendo[14]. For both Messenio and Malvolio, the superior is referencing the sexual arousal of the male inferior, and associating that arousal with an adjective connected to size. Part of the joke in *Twelfth Night* is the fact that these four references to a variant on the word "great" in one quotation operate in very different ways from each other. To fear greatness mainly alludes to the notion that Olivia is too high to be matched with him, though it probably also carries a hint of Malvolio's fear of his own tumescence. The second use of "great" is definitely metaphorical: no

14 Urvashi Chakravarty has argued that Toby is more threatened by Malvolio than most readers assume, and that the competition between bonds of blood and bonds of service speaks to discursive shifts that are tied to the gradual institutionalization of chattel slavery. Chakravarty suggests that the message from Maria, as well as the behavior of Olivia herself when she sees her steward point to "problematic slippages between duty and dependency, insubordination and inseparability in early modern service" (Chakravarty 2022, 120).

baby is born large. To achieve greatness is very much ambiguous: babies get big, menial characters with ambition get important, and other things get larger as well. The final use offers a different kind of sexual humor. It could mean either that Malvolio has metaphorical importance presented suddenly to him, or it could mean that the high-ranking "great" Olivia could thrust herself upon him, a confusing image which bears unmistakable hints of homoeroticism. The very ambiguity and flexible quality of the text helps Maria to induce her general project of causing Malvolio to overstep his bounds and misread the entire situation in the house[15].

The second time these phrases appear, Malvolio is saying them to Olivia:

> Malvolio
> 'Be not afraid of greatness'--'twas well writ.
>
> Olivia
> What mean'st thou by that, Malvolio?
>
> Malvolio
> 'Some are born great' –
>
> Olivia
> Ha?
>
> Malvolio
> 'Some achieve greatness' –
>
> Olivia
> What sayest thou?
>
> Malvolio
> 'And some have greatness thrust upon them.'
> (*Twelfth Night*, III.iv.39-46)

In this scene, both people involved exist within complicated layers. Malvolio is himself, transformed physically and in personality, recit-

15 As Nancy Lindheim point out, "for a play that is said to subscribe to or manifest so many 'class' attitudes, it is remarkably casual in conferring titles and status" (Lindheim 2007, 698); this apparent imprecision may function as a comic trap.

ing words back to Olivia that Olivia has never heard. He views his experience as a transformation based on a complete obedience to the will of Olivia: "I will do everything that thou wilt have me" (II.v.175).

He bases his performance on a text created by Maria in the guise of Olivia, and he thinks he is playing a private game of recognition with Olivia, whereas he is in fact playing a public game of his own humiliation, thanks to the view of the knowing observers, Maria and the offstage audience. Olivia responds with the kind of basic, functional questions that are so typical of Plautus and so uncommon in Shakespeare. The language and the emphasis on dignity are Plautine, but nowhere in the *Menaechmi* or in *The Comedy of Errors* do characters engineer misrecognition.

The third time these words are staged, they are uttered by Feste:

> Why, 'Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrown upon them.' I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas, sir, but that's all one. 'By the Lord, fool, I am not mad.' But do you remember? 'Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal, an you smile not, he's gagged?' And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges. (V.ii.365-72)

Feste's small but not inconsequential edit, making 'thrust' into 'thrown', puts salt into the wound, by transforming a sexual innuendo to a raw physical insult. What Malvolio heard as an erotic invitation was, in the end, merely a physical casting off, a deflation of his pride. There was no thrusting, only throwing.

Would this echo have been audible to any in the audience? Almost certainly, no. But it was part of the textual fabric that Shakespeare navigated to create this play, and there is evidence that the effect of the gap between languages, evident in the word *magnus*, was a part of the larger dramatic project[16]. Though audience members had no particular reason to hear Latin behind Malvolio's lines, they certainly heard friction between Malvolio's lofty vanity and the crude insults of Sir Toby and Maria. To aspire to greatness inevitably involves the navigation of multiple dialects and linguistic registers as well as actual

16 Laetitia Sansonetti and Rémi Vuillemin have argued that "plurilingual" readers of Shakespeare's time could hear multiple languages embedded in "apparently monolingual" texts, and thus gain fuller access to "the concentric communities the text creates around itself" (Sansonetti and Vuillemin 2022, 15).

linguistic difference. Though Malvolio's text itself is monolingual, it becomes part of a plural set of perspectives in the scenes in which it occurs, and something very similar happens to Fluellen, who is made to appear foolish because of his inability to bridge a gap between his status as a Welshman and his place under Henry, as well as a gap between his speech and English translations of *magnus*. At least in Fluellen's case, and in that of Costard as Pompey, the underlying word is audible to many audience members, as is the social risk of getting the word wrong. That risk characterizes Malvolio's situation as well.

Pompey and Alexander are long gone; Henry is alive in that play but not onstage in that scene. The figures who are, or might be, big or great are generally aloof from the characters who call them so. Those characters who speak of greatness are clearly at risk: Fluellen is mocked, Costard accepts correction. Malvolio differs from them, and resembles Olivia, in the fact that he speaks of greatness and also aims for it to apply to himself, which constitutes a level of narcissism pointedly absent in Plautus. And of course, Maria's trap has an omission that should be obvious if one is willing to see it. It may be true that some people begin with importance, like Menaechmus, and some attain it through labor, like Messenio, who is freed at his play's conclusion, while others stumble into good fortune by accident, like Menaechmus (S). But it is also true that the great majority of people never come anywhere close to grandeur. In Malvolio, Shakespeare captured the paradox of a character who, ultimately, is great only in his hilarious folly and his undercurrent of pathos, a tragic actor who has stumbled into a Plautine comic world. All of that is not fundamentally new; the understanding of Shakespeare as an artist who progressively built on his early encounters with pivotal texts, such as the Bible, Plautus, Ovid, Holinshed, Daniel and Marlowe, is a familiar tale. What is new in this analysis is the notion that the multilinguistic environment in which Shakespeare was steeped was not just a source of ideas and patterns but also a site of gaps and dissonances that were a source of creative energy as well as psychological and social interrogation. We have long known that Shakespeare was fascinated by the ways in which the meaning of a word changes from one utterance to the next. The gaps between languages, the ways in which words often do not fit their translations, were also a fundamental element of what inspired Shakespeare to see new possibilities in old books.

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Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 69-93 (2024)

Venus and Adonis *(1593): Shakespeare's Translation Memory*

Laetitia Sansonetti

Venus and Adonis, a narrative poem adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, was Shakespeare's first work to be printed with a dedication to a patron in which he claimed authorship. Although *Venus and Adonis* is not a translation in the stricter meaning of the term, and was not marketed as such, Elizabethan translation practices as originating in schoolroom exercises designed to improve mastery of Latin and reliant on memory techniques are crucial to understand how the poem was composed and how it was received. This article will argue that in *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare alludes to schoolroom exercises, and more precisely to the method of "double translation" advocated by Roger Ascham: that he composed his poem thanks to memories of grammar-school translations of Ovid, and aimed to trigger similar memories in his readers.

Keywords: Ascham, Roger, Clapham, John, commonplacing, computer-assisted translation, Golding, Arthur, mediated translation, pedagogy, Ovid

Venus and Adonis, a narrative poem adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (one of the most popular texts from classical Antiquity in Elizabethan England – see for instance Baldwin 1944, 1.XXII and 2.XLI; Bate 1993, chapter 1; Braden 1978; Oakley Brown 2006), was Shakespeare's first work to be printed with a dedication to a patron in which he claimed authorship[1]. Although *Venus and Adonis* is not a translation in the stricter meaning of the term, and was not marketed as such, Elizabethan translation practices as originating in schoolroom exercises designed to improve mastery of Latin and reliant on memory techniques are crucial to understand how the poem was composed and how it was received. This article will argue that in *Venus and Adonis*,

1 I would like to thank Iolanda Plescia for her generosity as editor as well as the two anonymous reviewers for their most valuable suggestions.

Shakespeare alludes to schoolroom exercises, and more precisely to the method of "double translation" advocated by Roger Ascham: that he composed his poem thanks to memories of grammar-school translations of Ovid, and aimed to trigger similar memories in his readers[2].While my analysis is grounded in sixteenth-century practices, it brings together early modern and present-day translation studies by focusing on two issues in which the use of memory in translation is both central and problematic: mediated translation and the ownership of texts[3]; commonplacing and the definition of a textual unit[4].

Translation, past and present

Recent advances in computing science, with the threatening promise of dehumanising processes of thought that they sometimes carry, seem at odds with the values and practices that we associate with Renaissance humanism as a pedagogical movement, in particular when translation is concerned. While the more and more sophisticated automatic translation tools that are developed nowadays can be seen as

2 See Lyne 2016, 1: "how English Renaissance writers imitated, and how they remembered", "how their imitative works can be read as acts of memory", "how such works are about memory". Lyne's approach to the topic of memory and intertextuality is from the perspective of cognitive studies. Enterline 2012 analyses Shakespeare's evocations of his schoolroom experiences from the point of view of psychoanalysis. About *Venus and Adonis* in particular, see Oakley-Brown's assimilation of the rhetorical use of polyptoton on line 610 ("She's loue; she loues, and yet she is not lou'd") to a recollection of parsing practices (2016, 218). The poem's dedicatee, the Earl of Southampton, was educated privately, but this does not entail that we should envision two different readerships: there was continuity, or common features, between Latin-language teaching by private tutors and in grammar schools. Roger Ascham had been Queen Elizabeth's Latin tutor, but his book of recommendations was entitled "The Scholemaster".

3 On mediated translation in the early modern period see for instance Bistué 2013, Hosington 2022 and Belle and Hosington 2023. I am aware that a mediating translation is usually in a different language from the ultimate target language (e.g., a French translation mediating between an Italian original and an English version, or Latin between Greek and English). Here, I suggest we expand the scope of this mediation in order to link interlingual translation and intertextual processes through memory by considering a translation memory to be a form of mediating translation.

4 See Blair 2010 and Moss 1996.

the harbingers of the end of human translation, I would like to look at the relationship between human and machine translation from another perspective, arguing that current breakthroughs in computer-assisted translation need to be thought of in the quantitative terms inherent to computing science as developments in storage and information retrieval – two areas in which the Renaissance witnessed its own revolution, with the advent of the printed book. Taking my cue from the inspiring essays gathered in *The Renaissance Computer*, a collection that is now twenty-five years old (Sawday and Rhodes 2000), I will draw a parallel between Renaissance management of information and present-day technologies by asking what twenty-first-century advances in computer-assisted translation can tell us about memory in translation for early modern texts – and vice versa.

The editors of *Memory Before Modernity* claim that "in terms of mediality, the differences between modern and pre-modern memory are mainly ones of scale" (Pollmann and Kuijpers 2013, 22). And if we look at the definitions provided by Lynne Bowker in *Computer-Aided Translation Technology: A Practical Introduction*, we find a continuum between past and present practices when it comes to "reus[ing] or recycl[ing] previously translated segments": "In the past, many people did not keep archives of previous translations, and those who did often collected them in an unsystematic way or in a form that could not be searched easily (e.g., on paper)" (Bowker 2002, 93). Simply defined, a translation memory is "a type of linguistic database that is used to store source texts and their translations. The texts are broken down into short segments that often correspond to sentences […and] a translation unit is made up of a source text segment and its translated equivalent" (92). Concretely, a translation memory (TM) is a "parallel corpus" or "bitext" (92) that can be searched automatically for matches. The main advantage is the time saved because a machine can work on large quantities of data faster than a human being:

> When a translator has a new segment to translate, the T[ranslation] M[emory] system consults the database to see if this new segment corresponds to a previously translated segment. If a matching segment is found, the TM system presents the translator with the previous translation […]. The translator can consult this previous translation and decide whether or not to incorporate it into the new translation. (94)

As opposed to machine-translation tools in which the machine produces a translation which the translator then checks and edits, with TM the translation provided comes from a human being and the human translator is the one making decisions for discrete segments, instead of validating a full text (105, 116). Bowker underlines the questions that this practice raises, issues which have become more and more stringent with the development of more and more sophisticated tools to sieve data but which also remind us of key points in early modern translation and commonplacing techniques: "Deciding what constitutes a segment is not as trivial a task as it might appear to be" (94); "Given that a TM can be a valuable resource, both translators and clients are naturally anxious to claim ownership" (122)[5]. My key notion will thus be 'translation memory' taken in both the restricted meaning that it has in computer-assisted translation and, more broadly speaking, as the memory strategies on which translation processes rely and the textual memories that a translation can trigger in readers.

My starting point will be the parallel display of text and translation on which Latin teaching relied in early modern England, and in particular Roger Ascham's method of "double translation". I will then analyse the triangular relationship between Ovid's text, Arthur Golding's English translation (first printed in 1567) and Shakespeare's poem, which raises issues of ownership in the use of mediated translations. I will then turn to John Clapham's Latin version of another story from *Metamorphoses*, the tale of Narcissus (from Book IV), to show how Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* offers a reflection on commonplacing as identifying segments and a vindication of interlingual translation (Ascham's *translatio linguarum*) as opposed to intralingual versions of Latin texts (Ascham's *paraphrasis* and *metaphrasis*). This will lead me to ask whether the aim of memory and/in translation is reduplication.

Double translation and parallel displays

In *The Scholemaster* (published posthumously in 1570), Roger Ascham, Queen Elizabeth's once Latin tutor, provides advice to Latin teachers of school pupils. In the model which he advocates, after parsing (i.e.,

5 More recent sources provide similar definitions (see Mitkov 2022 and Melby and Wright 2023).

dividing into semantic and syntactic units) a text selected for its stylistic qualities (preferably Cicero) with the master, the pupil is left on his own to translate the Latin text into English, and then after a while, to translate his English version 'back' into Latin, aiming to approximate the original text as closely as he can (Ascham 1570, Cv-Ciir). Ascham returns to the same topic at the beginning of Book 2 of *The Scholemaster*, repeating his advice with slight but significant variation. Cicero is still the recommended set-text, and the pupil is expected to translate an English version 'back' into its Latin original, but this time the first translation, from Latin into English, is to be the work of the master himself, not the pupil: "translate it you your selfe, into plaine naturall English, and than giue it him to translate into Latin againe" (Ascham 1570, Kiiiv). The kind of "memory" (the word is used in this passage but not in the first statement of the method) that is put to the test here differs from the kind required when the pupil is translating his own version into Latin. As Colin Burrow has noted, "Students with good memories must certainly have found 'double translation' much easier than those who had painstakingly to reinvent their Latin originals from the ground up" (Burrow 2004, 14). Although a sufficient pause is to be observed between the two exercises, a pupil translating from his own translation back into the original will indeed remember the first stage (the parsing of the Latin original) more easily than with Ascham's second version of the method, in which the pupil is deprived of this first acquaintance with the specific text, although it be "some notable common place": what he has to translate is a version deliberately phrased in "plaine naturall English" for which he has to find Latin phrasings that are not just idiomatic but also idiosyncratic, reflecting Cicero's style, since the last step of the process, the comparison with the model, remains the same.

In this second iteration of his method, Ascham refers to another central element of humanist pedagogy, commonplacing. Burrow has drawn attention to the possible divergence between the skills that these two practices developed:

> where double translation encouraged a mastery of, and perhaps a servility to, the style and lexis of one particular author, commonplacing fostered a quite different set of implied attitudes: a phrase from *any* author might be set down under a particular heading next to a phrase from any other author, and often such phrases might be entirely divorced from any indication of authorship when they were set down in commonplace books. (Burrow 2004, 18)

But in Ascham's advice to schoolmasters, the stage in the process that involves commonplacing concerns the more advanced translator of the two, namely the master. This is in keeping with Ascham's belief that working from epitomes, or condensed abridged versions, is better suited to more advanced scholars: "This is a way of studie, belonging, rather to matter, than to wordes: to memorie, than to vtterance: to those that be learned alreadie, and hath small place at all amonges yong scholers in Grammer scholes" (Ascham 1570, Niiv). More generally, selecting, reordering, recomposing, reapplying, in short rewriting an author's work in the same language is a harder task than *translatio linguarum*, as Ascham explains:

> *Paraphrasis* is, to take some eloquent Oration, or some notable common place in Latin, and expresse it with other wordes: *Metaphrasis* is, to take some notable place out of a good Poete, and turne the same sens into meter, or into other wordes in Prose. (Ascham 1570, Liv)

Coming after *Translatio linguarum*, *Paraphrasis* and *Metaphrasis* and before *Imitatio*, *Epitome* is thus for more advanced scholars. Although he finds it best for personal use, Ascham gives examples of public epitomes that he deems worthy of note, one of which being that of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* abridged by Willem Canter[6]:

> And although a man growndlie learned all readie, may take moch proffet him selfe in vsing, by Epitome, to draw other mens workes for his owne memorie sake, into shorter rowme, as *Conterus* hath done verie well the whole *Metamorphosis* of *Ouid*, […] (Ascham 1570, Niiiiv)

Recent English translations, by contrast, he criticises for their use of rhyme as a poetic practice closer to "the Gothians" than "the Grecians" (Ascham 1570, Kiiijr).

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* does not feature among the texts recommended by Ascham for "double translation", but we can guess how Ovid's works could be used to teach Latin through translation by looking at a 1513 bilingual edition of *Ars Amatoria*, which for Daniel Wakelin "seems to be a textbook" similar to the many bilingual epitomes of Terence and Cato that were published at the time (Wakelin

6 Canter 1564.

2008, 467 about Ovid 1513). The two languages alternate in an interlinear layout, first English in smaller Gothic font, "as if a mere prompt" (Wakelin 2008, 467), and then the Latin elegiac couplets in larger Gothic. Sometimes, because the excerpts selected were so brief as to consist only of a few words, the two languages were on the same line, as with the *Floures for Latine spekynge selected and gathered oute of Terence, and the same translated in to Englysshe* (Terence 1534) and the *Vulgaria* tradition that dated back to the early days of printing (Terence 1483). Books in which the editor wanted to reproduce longer excerpts, or whole texts, had to alternate languages sequentially by dividing the texts into chapters (or scenes, for plays), as with Alexander Barclay's 1509 translation of Sebastian Brant's *Stultifera nauis* or John Palsgrave's translation of Gulielmus Gnaphaeus' *Acolastus* (1540).

The list compiled by Wakelin (2008, 405) for the first half of the sixteenth century shows that it was possible to print bilingual versions with the two languages on the same page in parallel columns as early as Alexander Barclay's translation of Sallust's *Jugurtha* in 1522[7], the Latin column being considerably narrower than the English one and therefore giving the visual impression of a marginal text, without quite enabling the two texts to run in perfect parallel any more than had been the case in Barclay's translation of a neo-Latin work in verse, Domenicus Mancinus' *De quatuor virtutibus* (1518). A change from folio to octavo format entailed placing one language per page, as with Robert Whittinton's version of Cicero's *De Officiis* (1534), printed by Wynkyn de Worde with almost perfectly-aligned texts, and in a series of translations by the same Whittinton over the 1530s and 1540s. According to Miller (1963, 165-66), it was against the tradition of *Vulgaria* that Ascham reacted by formulating a method for longer excerpts that had probably been in use for quite a while when *The Scholemaster* was published in 1570, about a year after Ascham's death. Combined with intensive learning of grammar (and sometimes opposed to it when it came to the *Vulgaria*, which purported to teach spoken phrases), translation from English into Latin was the privileged method to learn Latin (Binns 1990, chapter 16; Knight 2017; Ong 1959).

The issue of layout and the best format for translation memories is tackled by Youdale and Rothwell in their discussion of the use of

7 Terence 1520 was printed in Paris.

CAT tools to analyse existing translations, in their particular case a translation from Spanish into English by Youdale himself (Youdale and Rothwell 2022; see also Youdale 2020). They compare several layouts in different CAT tools and the screenshots they provide show that whether on a page or on a computer screen, offering a synoptic view of several texts in several languages draws attention to potential discrepancies between source and target, original and translation. If the sentence is taken as a reference segment, then examples in which two sentences are translated as one or one as two will show the limitations of this criterion – or will incite translators to adopt a more systematic approach to their work in order to be able to use TM more easily. The tendency of translated texts to be slightly longer than originals because of the explaining bias in translation is also immediately visually apparent. If, regardless of length, the CAT tool displays segments sequentially, not in parallel, with their translations, then the coherence of the text as a whole may be jeopardised.

In early modern English printed books, the several layouts adopted reflect a growing awareness of these issues corresponding to advances in printing techniques. Segments made of preexisting chapters of a given text and their consecutive translations would be more useful to masters needing to select adequate source texts than wishing to check word for word their pupils' translations into English (Ascham's method no. 1). Interlinear translations could only work downwards and on short segments, thus restricting the bilingual use to which they could be put as well as the length of the reference unit. Parallel versions on the same page could play on column length, as was the case of Alexander Barclay's translations, in order to have the same amount of text in both languages on the same page, and two-page displays juggled with fount size to reproduce this correspondence.

What is specific about Ascham's method is that the parallel text (or "bitext" in CAT terminology), with the original and its translation, exists virtually for most of the exercise itself, precisely because the method depends on memory. The passage selected by the master has to be parsed and then reproduced whole by the pupil in another language. When this stage has been completed, the master's review of the pupil's translation brings together the two texts as a dual unit and assesses the quality of the "matches" (another CAT term). When the pupil starts from his own, or from the master's English version

(method no. 2), and tries to produce a text that is as close as possible to the Latin original, the source is both origin and target and thus serves as the ultimate translation memory against which to compare the pupil's own attempt. The results of these translation exercises from Latin into English and from English into Latin can be integrated into the pupil's own translation memory (in the pre-computer sense of the term), with the specificity that the Latin versions are just as much the products of translative processes as the English ones. This reversible translative relationship between origin and target, which is the test by which CAT TM are assessed (segments are expected to "match" each other as fully as possible in the two languages), appears to be crucial in Shakespeare's creative process when he uses an existing English translation of Ovid's Latin text with a critical eye, correcting it according to Ascham's requirement of back-translatability.

Shakespeare, Ovid and Golding: double translation

As recalled by Burrow, we have no records from the King's Free Grammar School in Stratford-upon-Avon for the period of Shakespeare's childhood (Burrow 2004, 11). Yet since T. W. Baldwin's monumental study of grammar-school curricula in Shakespeare's England, we have a precise idea of what Shakespeare the grammar-school boy probably studied in a cursus grounded in Latin, from grammar to rhetoric (see Baldwin 1944, and the summary in Bate 1993). It seems to be a truth universally acknowledged among critics that Shakespeare used Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* both in its Latin original and in Golding's translation to create his narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*. There have been detailed studies of his composition process (Bate 1993, chapter 2; Martindale and Martindale 1990, chapter 2; Kiernan 2000; Roe 2000) and one may wonder whether there is anything new to add[8]. I think that placing Golding's translation in the context of Ascham's method can yield interesting results.

Raphael Lyne has insisted on the "language of heightened Englishness" used by Golding in his translation: "Golding often replaces Latin words with strong and specific cultural associations with Eng-

8 See also Stapleton 1997 about Shakespeare's borrowings from another Ovidian text, *Ars Amatoria*.

lish equivalents with English associations, rather than attempting to capture the original in paraphrase" (2001, 53; 54)[9]. Lyne concludes that Golding is engaging in the "competitive" type of imitation defined by George W. Pigman as "'eristic'" (Pigman 1980, quoted in Lyne 2001, 54). But this is also reminiscent of Ascham's advice to schoolmasters to provide their pupils with a translation of a Latin commonplace passage in "plaine naturall English" (Ascham 1570, Kiiiv, quoted above). We can thus view Golding's relation to his source text as one of translingual rivalry, but also as one of pedagogical transmission, matching the moral pedagogical programme put forward in the dedicatory epistle to Robert Dudley and in the preface to the reader (in Ovid 1567). But Liz Oakley-Brown, commenting on Lyne's analysis, has noted that "Golding's own rendition of Venus and Adonis is not especially Englished" (Oakley-Brown 2017, 33) – which means that it could have provided an incentive for a younger poet to "English" it more (success)fully. Golding may have been a grammar-school pupil himself; he went to university but seems to have left Cambridge without a degree (Considine 2004), which placed him a little above Shakespeare in terms of classical education. If we look upon the two writers, Golding in the mid-1560s and Shakespeare in the early 1590s[10], as translators wavering between the two roles in the process of double translation detailed by Ascham, that of the pupil (in Book 1 of *The Scholemaster*) and that of the master (in Book 2), I think we can understand better the triangulation between Ovid's text, Golding's, and Shakespeare's. I will take two examples, one grammatical and one lexical, to illustrate how Shakespeare presents his text as correcting Golding's translation or as emulating (and outdoing) it.

In Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the story of Venus and Adonis is told by Orpheus, an embedded narrator who also relates the fates of Hyacinth, the Propoetides, and Pygmalion, Adonis's ancestor via the incestuous Myrrha. Famous for his talent as a poet, Orpheus can be expected to fascinate his audience with his tales of

9 See also Bate 1993, 29, who speaks about Golding's "robust vernacular vocabulary" and calls Golding's translation "an important precedent for Shakespeare's own combinations of the native and the classical."

10 Incidentally, Golding was 29 when the first instalment of his translation of Ovid (the first four books) came out in 1565, and Shakespeare was also 29 when *Venus and Adonis* was first published in 1593.

doomed love (see *Metamorphoses* X.64-105 for the impact of his singing on natural elements). One of the rhetorical tools contributing to his efficacy as a narrator in creating *enargeia*, vividness[11], is his use of the narrative present. When telling of Venus's *innamoramento* with Adonis, Orpheus uses present forms which Golding translates with past forms in English. In particular, in describing Adonis's beauty, the transition from child to man is rendered with the anaphora of *jam* (already) and the present tense: "iam iuvenis, iam vir, iam se formosior ipso est: / iam placet et Veneri matrisque ulciscitur ignes" (523-24). Golding uses the past tense to render these lines: "Anon a stripling hee became, and by and by a man, / And every day more beawtifull than other he becam, / That in the end Dame Venus fell in love with him" (Ovid 1567, 602-04). Ovid's Orpheus has atemporal formulae, such as "quae causa, roganti" (to him asking for what reason) and "ait" (from *aio*, to say), a form that is used both for the present and the past tense (552-553), and plays upon "ait" to trigger a switch from present to past and past to present ("ait […] pressit […] ait […] interserit", 553; 557; 559). Golding's Orpheus manages the same ambiguity for the first occurrence but has to make choices for the conjugated verbs: "Too him demaunding why? / A monstrous chaunce (q[uoth] *Venus*) I will tell thée by and by, […] / They sate them downe anon. / […] Shée thus began: and in her tale shée bussed him among") (Ovid 1567, 640-41; 645; 647).

Although a word for word comparison is not possible, we can see instances in which the Ovidian strategy of alternating verb tenses is put to good use by Shakespeare's unidentified narrator. The first four lines of the poem set the scene with a series of past tenses, immediately followed by present forms in the first stanza's rhyming couplet to create a sharp contrast that adds vividness to the encounter ("Sick-thoughted Venus makes amaine vnto him, / And like a bold fac'd suter ginnes to woo him", *Venus and Adonis*, 5-6)[12] before switching back to the past with a set phrase evocative of Golding's

11 See the definition in Puttenham 1589, Rijr: "to satisfie & delight th'eare onely by a goodly outward shew set vpon the matter with wordes, and speaches smothly and tunably running: […] that first qualitie the Greeks called *Enargia*, of this word *argos*, because it geueth a glorious lustre and light".

12 Shakespeare 1593, available online:
https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Ven_Q1/index.html (ed. Hardy M. Cook).

translation of "ait": ("thus she began") (7). The difference between Venus's eagerness and Adonis's reluctance is also enhanced by the choice of tenses – present for the goddess, past for the young man: "With this she ceazeth on his sweating palme" (25) and "The studded bridle on a ragged bough, / Nimbly she fastens" (37-38) frame Adonis's helplessness, as "Ouer one arme the lustie coursers raine, / Vnder her other was the tender boy, / Who blusht, and powted in a dull disdaine" (31-33). Conversely, when Venus's speech is interrupted because the sun burns too hot and Adonis seizes this opportunity to speak and try to break free, the past is associated with Venus and the present with Adonis, with the same clever use of the rhyming couplet to change the tone: "By this the loue-sicke Queene began to sweate, […] / And now Adonis with a lazie sprite, […] / […] cries, fie, no more of loue, / The sunne doth burne my face I must remoue" (175; 181; 185-86). As we can see with this example, the question of whether Shakespeare had Ovid's text on his desk is less easily answered than that of whether he was looking at Golding's text while writing. Some specific features in Golding's text that depart from the Ovidian original seem to have reminded Shakespeare of Ovid's own strategies, to which his grammar-school teacher is likely to have drawn his attention in parsing the text, rather than of specific words or lines.

My second example is precisely a word used repeatedly by Golding where there was no equivalent in Ovid. Venus advises Adonis to hunt safe ("tutae", 537) preys, as she does, only "Pursewing game of hurtlesse sort, as Hares made lowe before / Or stagges with loftye heades, or bucks" (Ovid 1567, 622-23; cf. "lepores", "cervum", "dammas", 538-39)[13]. The motif of the *cervus*, a commonplace which for early modern readers merged several traditions, classical and Christian[14], becomes much more central in Golding's text than it was in Ovid's, through the homophony, and even homonymy sometimes, of the term 'hart' with the heart, where love is traditionally located. Golding tends to add 'hart(s)' in contexts where it is not the most obvious translation, amplifying the Ovidian text.

13 Here too Golding can be seen to normalise Ovid's text by putting all three nouns in the plural when in Latin *cervum* was in the singular.

14 See for instance Bath 1992 and Thiebaux 1974.

While "'harts'" (Ovid 1567, 637) is a close rendition of "'animos'" (549), in the line immediately preceding, "'Venerem movere'" is translated as "'too win the hart of Venus'" (635), thus adding a repetition. This is not an isolated case: "'invisumque mihi genus est'" (552) becomes "'And sure I hate them at my hart'" (640); in the embedded story of Atalanta and Hippomenes, the three occurrences of 'hart' similarly amplify the original text to the point of padding ("'nec forma tangor'" [614] becomes "'Neyther dooth / His beawty moove my hart at all'" [718-19], "'cum quo sociare cubilia vellem'" [635] becomes "'with whom I would be matched with all my hart'" [747] and "sollicita […] voce" [639] becomes "With carefull hart and voice" [752]). Given this isotopy, which he has created from a minor motif in Ovid's text, the appeal of 'hart' close to 'dear', which translates *carus*, proves irresistible to Golding: "'hos tu, care mihi, […] effuge'" (707) thus becomes "'Shonne / Theis beastes, deere hart'" (826-27). Thanks to the unfixed nature of English spelling at the time, 'deer' can be not only homophonous but also homonymous with 'dear', just as 'hart' conflates a stag and the heart.

Shakespeare makes this motif one of the structural elements in his own poem, down to the comparison of Venus to "a milch Doe, whose swelling dugs do ake, / Hasting to feed her fawne, hid in some brake" (*Venus and Adonis*, 875-76). But he focuses on 'deer' / 'dear' rather than 'hart' / 'heart'[15], and contrary to Golding, he chooses the spelling that is primarily evocative of love. Venus thus tries to lure Adonis with a body-as-landscape analogy: "'Ile be a parke, and thou shalt be my deare'" and "'Then be my deare, since I am such a parke'" (231; 239). Then when she advises him to hunt "'fearfull creatures'" that will not hurt him (677), she singles out "'the purblind hare'" who "'sometime sorteth with a heard of deare'" (679; 689) – Shakespeare's own version of Golding's "stagges […] or bucks" for Ovid's "cervum". He may have chosen 'deer', a word that usually takes no -s in the plural in English, because "cervum" was in the singular in the Latin text. More precisely, he chose "deare"[16], here as for the two occurrences which introduce the motif.

15 See the opening scene in *Twelfth Night*.

16 If we assume that he supervised the publication of this work, with whose printing he entrusted another former Stratford pupil, Richard Field.

With *Venus and Adonis*, we can see Shakespeare entering a sort of competition with his elder Golding to determine who has the better English text for a potential back translation after Ascham's method[17]. While with the example of verb tenses Shakespeare seems to pose as the pupil keeping closer to Ovid's strategies when translating into English with a view to back translating, in the case of the 'h(e)art' / 'deer/dear' pun he shows himself able to provide an English version "in plaine naturall English" akin to what Ascham expected of the master. Whether he had the two texts in front of him while composing remains difficult to establish, but we can imagine that reading Golding he was reminded of the original and either relied on his memory for particular points and general strategies or turned to a recent edition of the Latin text, such as the one printed in 1589 by the same Richard Field who was to print his *Venus and Adonis*. This brings us back to Bowker's second question about translation memory in CAT processes: who owns the text that is searched for possible matches to help produce a coherent translation? Authors like Shakespeare remembered their own schoolboy translations and could thus search their own personal TM for phrases and motifs, but that TM was always by definition collective, because of the input from the master in translation exercises (and maybe with the help of a manual such as those mentioned above), so that the production of an 'original' poem like *Venus and Adonis* relied on mediated translation[18].

Shakespeare and Clapham: translation vs paraphrasis/metaphrasis

Venus and Adonis is also the locus where Shakespeare develops another type of rivalry about Ovid in translation, one that echoes Ascham's advice to inexperienced pupils not to venture into rewordings of great authors in the original language, for fear of falling short of the mark. Very little is known about the education of John Clapham, the author of a poem in Latin entitled *Narcissus* which he dedicated to Hen-

17 Golding's translation was reissued in 1575, 1584, 1587 and 1593.

18 For lack of space, I cannot deal with the vernacular Ovidian traditions that served to mediate Ovid's reception in England, such as *Ovide moralisé* (for the Italian tradition in particular, see Mortimer 2000, chapter 5).

ry Wriothesley, earl of Southampton, two years before Shakespeare chose the same patron for his own mythological poem about a chaste boy and an overly eager woman inspired from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. According to D. R. Woolf, "Clapham does not appear to have attended either university, but entered the service of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, as a young man, serving as clerk to the lord treasurer from about 1590" (Woolf 2004). If the rivalry staged with Golding involved two grammar-school boys translating into English, here Shakespeare seems to have identified a use of commonplacing in Latin that made clear Clapham-the-clerk's incompetence as a poet. Clapham's poem has been analysed in detail, compared with Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and translated by Charles Martindale and Colin Burrow, and my own analysis will build on their study, focusing on one specific example which highlights the competition between writing a *paraphrasis* or *metaphrasis* in Latin with the help of ready-made commonplaces and producing a good poem in English with a view to crafting memorable phrases that will become commonplaces.

The opening line of Clapham's poem, "Ver erat, & roseis surgens Aurora quadrigis" (Clapham 1591, 1), starts with one of the most famous phrases in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where it refers to the Golden Age and its eternal springtime, but here it has been truncated to serve as setting for the scene: "Ver erat aeternum" (*Metamorphoses*, I.107). The phrase *ver erat* opened a poem by Ausonius that was associated to Virgil, "Ausonii Roase": "Ver erat: & blando mordentia frigora sensu" (see Virgil 1581, Qq3 and Ausonius 1575, m3r-v). As for "roseis surgens Aurora quadrigis", it "conflates two Vergilian phrases, *surgens Aurora reliquit* and *roseis Aurora quadrigis*" from the *Aeneid* (IV.129 and VI.535 respectively), as noted by Martindale and Burrow (1992, 148). The whole poem "is decorated with such typical epic features as ecphrases of time and place, which often recall some of the great primary loci in Vergil and Ovid", which Martindale and Burrow claim "illustrate the way Elizabethan schoolboys were taught to memorize, analyze, and imitate passages of Latin poetry" (1992, 148). If we heed Ascham's advice to teachers, we may nuance this interpretation by recalling that schoolboys, in Ascham's opinion, were not to be encouraged to paraphrase, because they were deemed too inexperienced. Likewise, epitomes were reserved for more mature scholars. And I think it was precisely to this beginner's mistake that Shake-

speare responded in *Venus and Adonis*, showing the clerk, who was two years his junior, what could be achieved in an English version.

Rather than cramming his lines with bits and pieces from Latin poets, Shakespeare alters well-known images so that they will still remind his readers of the original phrases but not evoke servile imitation or plain pilfering for lack of imagination. The opening lines in *Venus and Adonis* set the scene by establishing the time of day through the use of the expected deities, but with a twist:

> EVEN as the sunne with purple-colourd face,
> Had tane his last leaue of the weeping morne,
> Rose-cheekt Adonis hied him to the chace […]
> (*Venus and Adonis*, 1-3)

The dawn is not the one leaving, she is being left, an abandoned woman announcing Venus's fate in the poem, and the rosy colour is now associated with the main protagonist, Adonis, rather than with Aurora, while the sun's face is "purple". The two variations on red are phrased in compound adjectives that are reminiscent of Homeric adjectives (his rosy-fingered Dawn, for instance), a structure with which even a grammar-school boy with "small *Latine* and lesse *Greeke*" (Jonson in Shakespeare 1623, A4r) would have been familiar. And "purple-coloured" in the first line serves to link the poem with its epigraph through translation, since Shakespeare chose a couplet from Ovid's *Amores* that states the poet's disregard for the crowd: "Vilia miretur vulgus: mihi flauus Apollo / Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua" (*Venus and Adonis*, epigraph; cf. *Amores*, I.xv.35-36). The epithet ascribed to the god Apollo, who was assimilated with the Sun in post-classical times, *flavus*, can mean "golden yellow" (for the hair), but also "reddish yellow", in particular to express modesty on a face (Lewis and Short 1879, "flavus"). Speaking of "the sunne with purple-colourd face" in the first line not only links the epigraph with the poem, it launches one of the central dual isotopies in the story, Venus's red-hot passion and Adonis's blushing shame. Indirectly, it also establishes Ovid's *Amores* as another Ovidian source for the poem.

As a reader, what you are expected to notice is not just the resemblance, it is the difference that goes with it. Your memory is activated not by an identical reiteration of the same but by a similarity that adds to the game of source-hunting. As with the pun on "deer / dear" that

revises Golding's excessive use of "hart", and contrary to Clapham's mechanical strategies of reuse, there is a thematic and narrative logic to the links drawn between the poem and the texts to which it refers: pointing to *Amores* is a self-reflexive gesture. There have been detailed studies of early responses to *Venus and Adonis* among Shakespeare's contemporaries (Roberts 2003; Sansonetti 2015; Tregear 2023). Rather than repeat the list of texts, poetic anthologies and plays from the turn of the century in which Shakespeare's lines are quoted, misquoted, and recycled, I would like to note how strangely evocative the deliberately parodic mentions in the plays are of Clapham's relationship with his Latin sources, a fact that validates the status of Shakespeare as a vernacular "classic" for his contemporaries, a provider of sententiae which inept scholars will reuse indiscriminately, piling one upon the other. The phrases that drew the attention of silly characters were often taken from the well-crafted beginning of the poem, such as Venus's hyperbolical "'Thrise fairer then my selfe'", a compliment which becomes ridiculous when it does not emanate from the goddess of beauty[19].

In a process that is typical of commonplacing, the differences between author, narrator and character tend to be erased as the phrases are ascribed to "Shakespeare". This sheds another light on Francis Meres's famous analogy involving Ovid and Shakespeare: "As the soule of *Euphorbus* was thought to liue in *Pythagorus*: so the sweete wittie soule of *Ouid* liues in mellifluous and hony-tongued *Shakespeare*, witnesse his *Venus* and *Adonis* […]" (Meres 1598, 281v-82r). When we look at this relationship as one that involves translation, then we can understand how metempsychosis can be a way for Meres to both evoke and bypass translation as a linguistic/lexical operation: through a fittingly Ovidian transmigration of soul from one body to another, Shakespeare can voice Ovid's sweet wit with his tongue. He becomes a new creator of Ovidian content, which can be in turn imitated and reused.

19 See for instance III.i in *The Returne from Parnassus* 1949, 183:
Gullio
Thrise fairer than my selfe, thus I began,
The gods faire riches, sweete aboue compare,
Staine to all Nimphes, [m]ore louely the[n] a man,
More white and red than doues and roses are: […]

The issue of ownership is thus seen to be coextensive with that of the basis for a 'segment' or unit in translation memory, an issue that is usually solved by TM systems with the choice of the sentence as a segment, but translators can also decide that a segment is a semantic unit which can be shorter than a sentence or run over a paragraph. This is the same question that early modern commonplacers asked themselves: what is the recommended length for a phrase to become a commonplace? I have discussed elsewhere the criteria given in turn-of-the-century poetic anthologies for their selection (Sansonetti 2021), and here I will just recall the motive given by the editor of *Belvedere* for excluding such eminent English poets as Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate: "because it was not knowne how their forme would agree with these of ten syllables only, and that sometimes they exceed the compasse herein obserued, hauing none but lineal and couplet sentences" (Bodenham 1600, Q6r). In Clapham's paraphrasis of Ovid, whose text he translated intralingually into Latin with the help of set phrases plucked from divers unacknowledged sources which he may have expected his readers to recognise, or which may have been so ingrained in his memory as a former pupil having learnt Latin by trying to reproduce stylistic models whose exact source he could not remember precisely, the link between commonplacing and memory is obvious. Shakespeare's translation of Ovid via Clapham proves his capacity "to absorb, animate, and transcend the poem", showing the common dedicatee of the two texts "vernacular literature growing an abundant life from a zestless and old-fashioned Neo-Latin prototype" (Martindale and Burrow, 152).

Origins and ends

Just as memory is not only storage, but also *recollectio*, the ability to remember and the activation of a particular memory[20], translation is not only a product (a translated text), but also a process, a starting point for more translations and a gateway to composition that can both promote variation and aim for exact reproduction. As I have tried to show with the example of *Venus and Adonis*, Shake-

20 On memory as *recollectio*, see Sullivan 2005, introduction. See also Engel *et al.* 2016; Hiscock 2011, and the references therein.

speare's Ovidian translation memory worked as a store of intermediate English versions (some published, some unpublished, some written, some oral) together with their Latin originals, as well as an incentive to back-translate English texts into Latin. Just like a modern TM, it existed virtually as a collective database, waiting for a textual trigger to be activated individually. By bringing together two of the most common textual practices in the Renaissance, mediated translation and commonplacing, and studying their uses of memory, we can understand better issues that are usually labelled under the blanket word "intertextuality"[21]. Rather than make translation one sub-class of intertextuality, or "hypertextuality", both in Genette's literary meaning (Genette 1982, 238ff; 1997, 214ff) and in the meaning developed in information technology[22], we could consider hypertextual, or intertextual phenomena as varieties of translation (Ascham's *translatio linguarum* or *paraphrasis/metaphrasis*, a distinction itself indebted to Cicero).

We can also explore issues that arise for present-day translators using CAT tools such as TM and automatic translations (post-editing): what do we translate? (words, sentences, language itself, meaning?); where do we store information and whom do we trust to hold it? (who owns the texts that are used in TM? does post-editing make human mediation disappear or just less visible?). Commonplacing translation segments can make translators more or less visible, as Shakespeare's own authority became more visible in the excerpts from *Venus and Adonis* which ridiculous characters in contemporary plays tried to pass off as products of their own invention. There is probably no better example of the canonising role of translation memory than C. K. Scott Moncrieff's choice to entitle his English translation of Proust's *Recherche du temps perdu* after a line from Shakespeare's Sonnet 30, *Remembrance of Things Past* (1922-1930). Shakespeare himself metonymically becomes a mediating instance in the translation process and in the reception of Proust's work at the same time as the

21 See Lyne 2016 and, most recently, Bigliazzi 2024 and the references therein.

22 See Genette 1982 (French) and 1997 (English translation); Sarah Carter's attempt to provide a hypertextual model for intertextuality does not mention Genette (Carter 2021, chapter 6). I think there is a fruitful tension to explore between the image of the "palimpsest" (which is Genette's own) evoked by Bigliazzi 2024 (n.p., ebook) and that of the hyperlink.

English language is identified as "Shakespeare's" – and, if it did not make Proust the French Shakespeare, Scott Moncrieff's authority as a translator and ownership over the translation of Proust was asserted so strongly that it took over fifty years for the title to be translated more literally as *In Search of Lost Time*.

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Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 95-116 (2024)

A Wrinkle in Time: Shakespeare's Anachronic Art

Carla Suthren

This essay proposes that the vocabulary of the anachronic might usefully be brought to bear on the complex temporality (or temporalities) involved in classical reception, which necessarily 'remembers' the classical past in one form or another. Nagel and Wood's (2010) definition of the anachronic work of art could almost have been formulated with Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* in mind, a 'late' play in which an oracle projects the conditions for an idealised resolution, Time appears as the Chorus, and a statue apparently comes to life. In particular, the essay argues that both the oracle from Apollo and the 'statue' of the final scene can be viewed as operating anachronically, in ways which "fetch" or "create" (textual) memories of the classical past, projecting it into the future.

Keywords: *The Winter's Tale*, anachronism, temporalities, classical reception

In their book, *Anachronic Renaissance*, the art historians Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood posit that "[t]he work of art when it is late, when it repeats, when it hesitates, when it remembers, but also when it projects a future or an ideal, is 'anachronic'" (2010, 13). They distinguish the "anachronic" from the "anachronistic", using the striking clock in *Julius Caesar* as an example of the latter, which "carries with it the historicist assumption that every event and every object has its proper location within objective and linear time" (Nagel and Wood 2010, 13). Reflecting on the possibilities of classical reception studies in an essay entitled "Reception – a new humanism? Receptivity, pedagogy, the transhistorical", Charles Martindale observed that "the temporality of the classic is a complex matter. In one sense the classic is always simultaneously both modern and ancient" (2013, 175). This essay proposes that the vocabulary of the anachronic might usefully be brought to bear on the complex temporality (or temporalities) involved in classical reception, which necessarily 'remembers'

the classical past in one form or another. Nagel and Wood's definition of the anachronic work of art could almost have been formulated with Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* in mind, a 'late' play in which an oracle projects the conditions for an idealised resolution, Time appears as the Chorus, and a statue apparently comes to life. In particular, I will argue that both the oracle from Apollo and the 'statue' of the final scene can be viewed as operating anachronically, in ways which "fetch" or "create" (textual) memories of the classical past, projecting it into the future (Nagel and Wood 2010, 18).

Central to Nagel and Wood's conception of the anachronic artwork is its "ability […] to hold incompatible models" of its own temporality "in suspension without deciding", specifically the models of 'substitution' and 'performance' (2010, 18). The substitution model posits a "principle of identity across a series of substitutions", as might be found in a religious icon which could be restored, replaced, or replicated, yet still maintain its identity; this "is in tension with a principle of authorship" which views the act of creation as an authorial performance, and the artwork as therefore singular and not substitutable (Nagel and Wood 2010, 14)[1]. The particular combination of the development of printing technologies and the theological disputes of the Reformation contributed to bring these two models into mutually destabilizing conflict, so that "[w]hat was distinctive about the European Renaissance, so called, was its apprehensiveness about the temporal instability of the artwork, and its re-creation of the artwork as an occasion for reflection on that instability" (Nagel and Wood 2010, 13). Lucy Munro, in her study of *Archaic Style in English Literature, 1590-1674*, suggests that Nagel and Wood's "comments on visual art also hold true for the literary text", which may "use source texts or narratives" and "appeal to not only contemporary but also future readers" (2013, 19). More particularly, I suggest that the tension between the substitution and performance models seems transferrable in interesting ways to classical reception, where we might map out a spectrum with a model of translation at one end which imagines the perfect substitutability of one text for another, and adaptation or appropriation at the other which strongly asserts the new text as

1 The principle of substitution has been further elucidated by Jakub Stejskal (2018).

an intervention. The more or less submerged presence of the classical intertext triggers the kind of temporal instability and reflection on origins and authority which Nagel and Wood describe.

It is not coincidental that the thinking in *Anachronic Renaissance* resonates strongly with classical reception studies. For one thing, there is "the peculiar hold of ancient Greece and Rome on the European imagination" in this period, which both relied on or fashioned a sense of temporal distance – the "differentness of the past" which "made repetition an option" – and at the same time projected identity or synchronicity, manifested for instance in typological interpretations of classical texts (Nagel and Wood 2010, 9-10). In addition, Nagel and Wood's conception of the work of art as "a strange kind of event whose relation to time is plural" is significantly inflected by theories of reception: while "[t]he artwork is made or designed by an individual or by a group of individuals at some moment […] it also points away from that moment", both backward (as a classically-inflected text always must) and forward, "to all its future recipients who will activate and reactivate it as a meaningful event" (2010, 9). In classical reception theory, as put forward by Martindale, "[m]eaning […] is always realized at the point of reception", while reception itself "should be figured dialogically, as a two-way process of understanding, backwards and forwards, which illuminates antiquity as much as modernity" (Martindale 1993, 3; 2013, 171)[2].

In conceptualizing the conditions of the relationship between present reader and ancient text which make possible the realization of meaning, Martindale influentially introduced the image of the "chain of receptions", proposing that "our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected" (1993, 7)[3]. The relationship of *The Winter's Tale* to Greek romance (discussed below) is a case in point: renewed critical interest in Shakespeare's 'late romances' has certainly directed more attention towards the Greek romances themselves, as

2 Though, as he continues, this "is not to say that such dialogue is necessarily productive in outcome or easy to conduct" (Martindale 2013, 171).

3 The image has sometimes been modified; Craig Kallendorf, for instance, points out that not "every past interpretation links on to the chain that reaches us" (2015, 171).

well as inevitably shaping the ways they are legible to us; the Shakespearean link in the chain is a powerful one[4]. Nagel and Wood also use the image of a chain, in this case applied specifically to the substitution model. They see the chain

> not as a historical reality but as a fiction that the artist and a viewing public create backwards from present to past. The new work, the innovation, is legitimated by the chain of works leading back to an authoritative type. But the chain also needs the new work. It is the new work that selects the chain out of the debris of the past. (2010, 11)

The chain, whether of receptions or substitutions, brings the past into the present. At the same time, the anachronic artwork also participates in the model of authorial performance, which instead asserts its novelty against what has come before it; but since "[t]he absolutely new would be incomprehensible", here too the past is "doubly present", "first in the conventions that the artist must conform to, and second in the idea of the past […] formed in the artist's own imagination" (Nagel and Wood 2010, 15). By holding "substitutional and authorial myths of origin in suspension […] it hesitates between hesitation itself (the substitutional system's unwillingness to commit itself to linear time) and anchoring in time (the punctual quality of the authorial act)"; in this lies its power "to 'fetch' a past, create a past, perhaps even fetch the future" (Nagel and Wood 2010, 18). This conception of the anachronic thus seems particularly pertinent to classical reception studies. In the case of *The Winter's Tale*, the combination of the explicit evocation of an ancient Greek past and the submerged presence of Graeco-Roman source materials with the thematic exploration of the possibilities of art in relation to time makes the anachronic an exceptionally fertile category for analysis.

It is hardly possible here to go into all the ways in which *The Winter's Tale* is late, repeats, hesitates, remembers, and projects. The critical literature considering it as part of the grouping of Shakespeare's 'late' plays, for instance, is vast, and much has been written about how these works repeat or remember material from his own earlier writings, and on the "intriguing suspensions and reactivations" in-

4 As Stuart Gillespie observes, "Shakespeare's Late Plays are now part of the meaning of the Greek romances" (2004, 228).

volved in the complex "structure of time" which they present (Lyne 2007, 4)[5]. My focus will be on those aspects which pertain to the reception of Graeco-Roman material in the play, to the ways in which it 'fetches' or creates an ancient past. Shakespeare's main source for *The Winter's Tale* was Robert Greene's prose novella *Pandosto*, subtitled *The Triumph of Time*, which was first printed in 1588 and went through several editions up to 1611. Greene tells the story of the jealousy of the king of Bohemia, Pandosto, who becomes convinced that his wife Bellaria is having an affair with his friend Egistus, the king of Sicily, and that the daughter she gives birth to is illegitimate. He orders the exposure of the baby and puts his wife on trial, leading to her death. The baby, Fawnia, washes up in Sicily, is raised by shepherds, and falls in love with Egistus' son, Dorastus. Greene's conclusion is less positive than Shakespeare's, since although reconciliations are brought about, Bellaria remains dead, and Pandosto kills himself out of remorse. Clearly, Shakespeare follows the bones of this tale quite closely, albeit with some adjustments to the plot and reversal of the settings. But there is one moment at which Shakespeare's use of Greene takes on a different quality, in the almost direct importation of the oracle from Apollo as a textual object from Greene's novella into Shakespeare's play.

After accusing his wife Hermione of adultery and having her arrested, Leontes, the king of Sicily, sends messengers "To sacred Delphos, to Apollo's temple" (II.i.221) for "spiritual counsel" (224), which he claims "Shall stop or spur me" (225), even though he declares: "I am satisfied and need no more / Than what I know" (228-29)[6]. The messengers return bearing Apollo's pronouncement, which is read out at Hermione's trial. The oracle is a textual artefact, which insists on the centrality of its material presentation to its meaning – or rather, to its ability to signify at all. Nagel and Wood suggest that "nondocumentary verbal texts" such as poems "were obviously substitutable, handed down through time from one material vehicle to another without loss of authenticity"; "The force of an old poem", they assert, "did not de-

5 The terminology used to describe such a grouping of Shakespeare's last works is contentious; Gordon McMullan (2007) has helpfully interrogated the critical "discourse of lateness" in relation to Shakespeare.

6 Quotations from *The Winter's Tale* are from Shakespeare (2010), edited by John Pitcher.

pend upon the literal antiquity of the page it was written on" (2010, 31). Particularly in light of the 'material turn' in literary studies, the idea that a work of literature has "a reality independent of the physical texts in which we engage them" has been challenged, since "the material form and location in which we encounter the written word are active contributors to the meaning of what is read" (Kastan 2001, 3; 2). But, clearly, literary works as well as other documents can engage more or less self-consciously with their own material forms, and may move between the "two poles" of "nonsubstitutability" and the idea of "the perfect substitutability of the linguistic text" (Nagel and Wood 2010, 31). On the one hand, the oracle derives its authority from its divine origin, and relies upon being understood as a perfect substitution of the voice of Apollo. But the very circumstances which link it to Apollo also acknowledge that it is a mediation, "by the hand delivered / Of great Apollo's priest" (III.ii.125-26), which could in theory be tampered with. Its authority therefore depends upon its physical status as the "sealed-up oracle", and the oath of the bearers that they "have not dared to break the holy seal, / Nor read the secrets in't" (127-28); otherwise, the implication is, the oracle will be rendered invalid.

The word 'oracle', both as I have been using it here and as Shakespeare uses it in *The Winter's Tale*, can refer both to the material object of the textual artefact and to its content. It is clearly a scroll, as Greene specifies; the emphasis on the seals is Shakespeare's. On the scroll is written: "*Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the king shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found*" (130-33). This repeats, with only the names changed, Greene's oracle in *Pandosto*[7]; there, its special textual status is indicated descriptively through the information that it is written in gold letters, and typographically by a change from blackletter to roman (which in the First Folio becomes a shift into italic). The voice of divine authority in Shakespeare's play speaks from outside the text, pointing backwards to the play's own origins, first in Greene, and then in the longer history of Greek romance on which Greene himself was drawing.

7 Greene's *Pandosto* is quoted from Shakespeare 2010, 405-45. Shakespeare omits the opening of Greene's oracle, which reads "Suspicion is no proof; jealousy is an unequal judge" etc. (418).

Greek romance was experiencing something of a vogue in the later part of the sixteenth century. Philip Sidney twice mentions Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*, featuring the adventures of the young lovers Theagenes and Chariclea, in his *Apology for Poetry*: first in demonstrating that poetry can surpass nature (which never "brought forth so true a lover as Theagenes"), and later to argue that a poet might write in prose rather than verse ("So did Heliodorus in his sugared invention of that picture of love in Theagenes and Chariclea") (Sidney 2002, 85; 87). The story of the rediscovery of the *Aethiopica* (as far as Western European humanists were concerned) is worthy of a romance narrative itself: apparently, during the Turkish sack of Buda in 1526, it was taken from the library of the King of Hungary by a German mercenary soldier (see Forcione 1970, 49). It was printed in Greek in 1534, and unusually the first vernacular translation, into French by Jacques Amyot (dated February 1547, i.e. 1548), actually appeared before a Latin translation and was made directly from the Greek[8]. The first full Latin translation was published in 1552, and from this Thomas Underdowne made his English translation, probably first printed in 1569 and reprinted in 1577, and certainly reprinted in 1587 and 1605[9]. Sidney himself practised what he preached; the Heliodoran influence is particularly strong in the revised *New Arcadia* (see Skretkowicz 1976).

The *Aethiopica* also has the distinction of being the only Greek romance explicitly referred to by Shakespeare, when in *Twelfth Night* Orsino suggests that he might "Like to th'Egyptian thief at point of death, / Kill what I love" (V.i.114-15). At the beginning of the *Aethiopica*, the "Egyptian thief" Thyamis, who has taken Chariclea captive, decides to kill her when his camp is attacked rather than let her fall into the hands of his enemies (though in fact he mistakenly kills another Greek woman in her place). Orsino's reference "is so specific as to prove that Shakespeare knew, by some route we cannot now absolutely determine, at least one form of Heliodorus' famous tale"; Mark Houlahan suggests that he probably first encountered it at school, since it regularly featured in humanist educational reading lists and

8 For a detailed overview of early modern editions in Greek, Latin, and vernacular languages, see Hofmann 2018.

9 The earliest extant edition is undated; the issue of dating is discussed by Wolff 1912, 230, who suggests that there may in fact have been two editions, printed in 1569 and 1577, prior to the earliest dated edition in 1587.

grammar school curricula (Houlahan 2010, 313; 309-10). This is an unusually direct point of contact, not just for Shakespeare but when it comes to the reception of Greek romance in early modern English literature more generally. As Helen Moore puts it, "[t]he classicism of most early modern English romance […] is much more likely to be diffuse and allusive than it is to be an act of considered imitation like Sidney's homage to Heliodorus in the deliberately 'philhellene' *New Arcadia*"; it is characterised by "acts of internal recycling and imitation" amongst English texts, and a mode of reception which is "simultaneously direct and indirect" (2015, 295). This is what we will find in *The Winter's Tale*, in which the Greek echoes which had become mostly submerged in Greene's *Pandosto* are re-emphasised and augmented.

Greene, always responsive to literary trends, picked up the interest in Greek romance in the 1580s. At the same time, he apparently "knew enough about the *Old Arcadia* by the middle of the 1580s to be consciously imitating its themes" – although it was not available in print, he may have gained access to a manuscript (Wilson 2006, 113). Arthur Kinney writes that *Pandosto* "draws knowingly from Alexandrian romance" and "brilliantly joins scattered motifs from them all" (1986, 222). He also seems attracted by Heliodorus' penchant for theatrical language[10]: when we read in Underdowne's translation that "that which men thought should be finished with bloud, had of a Tragicall beginning, a Comicall ending" (Underdowne 1895, 182), it is hard not to think of Greene's comment at the end of *Pandosto*, "to close up the comedy with a tragical stratagem" (445)[11]. But in spite of the pervasive influence of Greek romance, both direct and indirect, there is remarkably little in *Pandosto* that overtly evokes this setting. Shakespeare, on the other hand, "has infused into his adaptation" a certain "classical coloration", as Louis Martz puts it (1991, 131). Martz observes that his reversal of the settings puts more of an emphasis on Sicily, part of Magna Graecia, which goes along with his reassigning the characters predominantly Greek names – Greene's vaguely Italianate Pandosto and Bellaria become Leontes and Hermione, for

10 On which see J. W. H. Walden (1894).

11 Shakespeare's version of tragicomedy in *The Winter's Tale* reverses the order of comedy and tragedy again.

instance – and Martz notes that even the unclassically named (Bohemian) Florizel is initially in disguise as Doricles (1991, 131).

In fact, Greene's most explicitly Greek detail in *Pandosto* is the oracle of Apollo, which, as we have seen, is transferred almost verbatim into *The Winter's Tale*. Oracles abound in Greek prose romance and in the literature inspired by it; Sidney's *Old Arcadia* begins with one, and Greene makes liberal use of them in his prose fiction. In *Pandosto*, at Bellaria's suggestion, Pandosto "chose out six of his nobility […] and providing all things fit for their journey, sent them to Delphos" (417). In Shakespeare, these six anonymous noblemen become Cleomenes and Dion, who are given a brief but strikingly evocative scene on their return from the oracle. Colin Burrow has described the "sudden Hellenic openness" in this scene, classing it as one of the "few pieces of Greek mood music in the canon, which imply at least an imaginative sense of what a 'Greek' atmosphere might be" (2013, 13). Shakespeare expands Greene's hint that the noblemen were "desirous to see the situation and custom of the island" (417) into a little exchange about their experience there:

> Cleomenes
> The climate's delicate, the air most sweet,
> Fertile the isle, the temple much surpassing
> The common praise it bears.
> Dion
> I shall report,
> For most it caught me, the celestial habits –
> Methinks I so should term them – and the reverence
> Of the grave wearers. O, the sacrifice,
> How ceremonious, solemn, and unearthly
> It was i'th off'ring!
> (*The Winter's Tale,* III.i.1-8)

Burrow rightly observes that this description is evocative but non-specific, and concludes that "Shakespeare's 'Greek' vision in this scene is a kind of optical illusion brought about by brilliant use of numinously vague adjectives" (2013, 14). Interestingly, Burrow states that this "scene may bring to mind oracles in Greek tragedy […] but there is no sign that Shakespeare looked at Greek material in order to evoke this environment", while also suggesting that "he was primed by his reading of translations and imitations of Greek prose romance

to associate Greece with the oracular and the marvellous" (2013, 14). This implies that classical tragedy would count as Greek material, but prose romance (in translation or adaptation) does not. This, though, is a distinction which Shakespeare and most of his contemporaries were unlikely to make; as Samuel Lee Wolff observed, "[t]he Renaissance, in its uncritical acceptance of everything Greek and Roman as *ipso facto* classical, felt at liberty to choose according to its own unquiet taste, and thus established and for centuries maintained among the canons of classicism the late works of Alexandria and of the Hellenized and Romanized Orient – works which today are perceived not to be classical at all" (1912, 235-36).

In Book 2 of the *Aethiopica* – the same book which features the incident with the Egyptian thief mentioned in *Twelfth Night* – a trip to Delphi is narrated which resonates with several of the embellishments that Shakespeare makes to Greene. Calasiris, who has been sent in search of the lost royal daughter Chariclea, gives a fictional account of his travels, claiming that he came to Delphi out of curiosity. As soon as he arrived, he says, "I fealt a certaine divine odour breathe upon me", and admired "the naturall situation" of the place (Underdowne 1895, 67). He reports: "I went into the Citie, and praysed it much in my minde, for the places of exercise there, and the pleasaunt fieldes, and the springs, with the fountain of Castalius, this done I went to the Temple" (a marginal note here advertises "The pleasant commodities of Delphi") (67). After visiting the oracle, he asks about the "manner of the sacrifices which were very divers, and many" (the response goes unreported) (68). This is not to suggest that Shakespeare had a copy of Heliodorus open to this page when he was writing the scene, or to dispute Burrow's point that Shakespeare's "Greek music" is quite different from the concrete precision of his Roman detail. But this, perhaps, has something to do with what we might call the different chronotopologies of Shakespeare's Greek and Roman worlds.

The concept of the "chronotope" was introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin, to describe "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (1981, 84). Bakhtin characterizes the narratives of Plutarch's *Lives* (which provide much of the source material for Shakespeare's Roman plays) as operating within biographical time and historical reality. In this

context, anachronism becomes possible, as in the case of the chiming clock in *Julius Caesar*. By contrast, the "adventure chronotope" of Greek romance is "characterized by a *technical, abstract connection between space and time*, by the *reversibility* of moments in a temporal sequence, and by their *interchangeability* in space" (1981, 100). The characters' adventures are "strung together in an extratemporal and in effect infinite series" which "in itself […] has no necessary internal limits" (94). This kind of adventure-time requires "an *abstract* expanse of space"; expansive, since "[t]he contingency that governs events is inseparably tied up with space, measured primarily by *distance* on the one hand and by *proximity* on the other" (e.g. of escape and capture), and abstract on the logic that, as Bakhtin points out, "[f]or a shipwreck one must have a sea, but which particular sea (in the geographical and historical sense) makes no difference at all" (1981, 99-100). The concrete trappings of historical time and place would be actively inimical to the functioning of adventure-time, ruled as it is by chance (or Fortune) rather than necessity; therefore "the world of Greek romance is an *alien world*: everything in it is indefinite, unknown, foreign" (101)[12]. Within the chronotope of Greek romance, anachronism and its spatial equivalent, anatopism, are essentially irrelevant: this is the chronotope in which Shakespeare's Bohemian coast exists.

Nagel and Wood describe their "method" as "a working from the artworks backwards, by a process of reverse engineering, to a lost chronotopology of art making" (2010, 34). By working backwards from the anachronic artefact of the oracle in *The Winter's Tale*, we arrive at a chronotopology which underlies Shakespeare's "Greek music" in Act III, scene i, and which is in accordance with the Greek material that is most likely to have been recalled to his mind by Greene's more prosaic account of the oracle in *Pandosto*. Michael Bristol, applying Bakhtin's analysis to *The Winter's Tale*, observes that "the adven-

12 Bakhtin also distinguishes this from the "*classical* Greek chronotopes" of Greek tragedy, in which historical and mythological time were "tightly interwoven" and "profoundly localized, absolutely inseparable from the concrete features of a characteristically Greek natural environment, and from the features of a 'man-made' environment,' that is, of specifically Greek administrative units, cities, and states" (1981, 103). The oracles of Greek romance and Greek tragedy operate within these profoundly different chronotopes.

ture-time chronotrope of Greek romance is implicated in the notion of 'growth untried' that Time, in *The Winter's Tale*, wants to have decriminalized" (1991, 147). However, as he goes on to note, "the play as a whole is not dominated by an abstract or empty time", but is "full of richly concretized time"; the combination of the two contributes to the play's "spaciotemporal peculiarities" (148). Bakhtin's description of the static nature of Greek romance's adventure-time is more or less inverted by the end of Shakespeare's play:

> This most abstract of all chronotopes is also the most static. In such a chronotope the world and the individual are finished items, absolutely immobile. In it there is no potential for evolution, for growth, for change. As a result of the action described in the novel, nothing in its world is destroyed, remade, changed, or created anew. What we get is a mere affirmation of the identity between what had been at the beginning and what is at the end. Adventure-time leaves no trace. (110)

Time in *The Winter's Tale* does leave a trace. Indeed, Hermione's wrinkles appear almost as a deliberate comment on the impossibility of the unchanged youth of the lovers at the end of Greek romances like the *Aethiopica*[13]. They could not appear in Greek romance, and they do not appear in Greene, whose Bellaria remains dead. But they are key to the anachronic vision of Shakespeare's final scene.

In the last act of *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare brings the mutually incompatible models of substitution and authorial performance into conflict, in order to produce a particular kind of epistemological uncertainty in the audience. The foundations are laid in Act V, scene ii, in which Paulina's steward delivers the information that a statue of Hermione has been "performed by that rare Italian master Giulio Romano" (94-95). This is, notably, the only time Shakespeare refers to a Renaissance artist by name. Giulio Romano was born in Rome around 1499, and died in Mantua in 1546. He was a pupil of Raphael, and became a painter and architect whose work was influential throughout Europe. How exactly Shakespeare knew

13 Bakhtin notes that Voltaire parodied this kind of romance in *Candide* precisely by taking "into account the real time that would have been required in such romances", so that the lovers are old and ugly by the time they reach their happy ending (1981, 91).

about him, and why he selected his name in this context (especially given that Giulio Romano is not known to have been much of a sculptor), has been the subject of much critical speculation. As Tom Rutter, who includes a useful overview of the various theories on the subject, puts it, either "Shakespeare did not know much about Italian Renaissance art, or […] the choice of Giulio has a hidden significance that the critic must seek to explain"; at the same time, he acknowledges that the reference is itself a piece of "misdirection", since "the statue is not a statue at all", so that the painter's "apparent presence in the play [is] an illusion" (2019, 248; 249). If Shakespeare knew that Giulio Romano was, as Stuart Sillars points out, "at the time probably the most important designer of trompe l'oeil frescoes, in which events painted on flat surfaces are made, through skilful distortions of perspective and effects of shadow, to appear as solid, three-dimensional forms" (2015, 255), then the invocation of a painter of illusions in service of Shakespeare's own illusion certainly seems appropriate on multiple levels.

For our purposes, the significance of the naming of Giulio Romano is what it does to time within the play. Indeed, even the phrase which introduces him into the play describes the statue as "a piece many years in doing and now newly performed by that rare Italian master", introducing two distinct temporal "phases in the realization of the sculpture: first, the long period of carving or modelling, and afterwards, the bravura touches that complete the work, which constitute the 'performance' by the master" (Talvacchia 1992, 164). Bette Talvacchia, observing that the verb "perform" could be used to denote "completion by painting", uses this to argue that this is consistent with Giulio's reputation as a painter rather than a sculptor (164)[14]. My interest in the statement, however, is more in the way that it emphasizes the artwork's existence in and (plural) relations to time, including the "punctual quality" of authorial performance, which "cuts time into before and after" (Nagel and Wood 2010, 15).

It has been noted that "including a reference to a painter of the cinquecento in a play set in the ancient world" amounts to something

14 Talvacchia also stresses that Giulio Romano "incorporated a great deal of sculpture, in the form of friezes and bas-reliefs made of stucco, modeled upon classical prototypes" (1992, 164).

like an "anachronism" – Rutter, for instance, compares it once again to the "chiming clock in *Julius Caesar*" (2019, 249). Giulio Romano and his works are rooted in, and limited by, chronological (historical, biographical) time, as is underlined by the steward's shift into the hypothetical as soon as he mentions the artist's name, "who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly is he her ape" (95-97). An important development in the Renaissance, Nagel and Wood argue, was that "the artistic author was for the first time institutionalized, in the sense that he was enshrined as a protagonist in histories and theories of art" (2010, 16). Frequently invoked as a possible source for Shakespeare's knowledge of Giulio Romano is Giorgio Vasari's monumental contribution in this vein, his Italian *Lives of the Most Excellent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors* (*Le vite de' più eccellenti architettori, pittori, et scultori*), first printed in 1550. Vasari's Life of Giulio Romano in this edition ends with a Latin epitaph:

> *Videbat Iuppiter corpora sculpta pictaque*
> *Spirare, & aedes mortalium aequaruer Caelo*
> *Iulij uirtute Romani: tunc iratus*
> *Concilio Diuorum omnium uocato*
> *Illum e terris sustulit; quod pati nequiret.*
> *Vinci aut aequari ab homine terrigena.*
> (Vasari 1550, 893-4 [vv3*r*-*v*])
>
> (Jupiter saw sculpted and painted bodies breathe and the homes of mortals made equal to those in heaven through the skill of Giulio Romano. Thus angered he summoned a council of all the gods, and he removed that man from the earth, less he be exposed, conquered, or equalled by an earth-born man.) (trans. Barkan 1981, 656)

Leonard Barkan concludes that "To a reader of Vasari – especially one who had never seen any of the artist's work – Giulio Romano would appear as a great and godlike creator, master of many arts and worthy opponent of Nature herself" (1981, 657); one who could make sculpted bodies breathe, but only metaphorically[15]. Shakespeare's

15 Vasari's monumental work had not been translated into English; Talvacchia suggests that this Latin epitaph might also have circulated independently (1992, 167).

Giulio Romano is praised, conventionally enough, for the verisimilitude of his work: "He so near to Hermione hath done Hermione that they say one would speak to her and stand in hope of answer" (98). The doubling of "Hermione" which occurs linguistically stands in for the doubling effected by the sculpture; on the one hand, it threatens to collapse difference into identity, as the created Hermione replaces the natural Hermione that came before it, but at the same time it holds them apart – as Nagel and Wood note, "repetition proposes difference, an altering interval" (2010, 11).

In choosing the 'statue' as the means through which to bring Hermione back, Paulina (or Shakespeare) appears to recognise the artwork as a "device" which "effectively generates the effect of a doubling or bending of time" – indeed, Nagel and Wood's description of this effect of "time folding over on itself, the doubling of the fabric of experience that creates continuity and flow; creates meaning where there was none; creates and encourages the desire to start over, to renew, to reform, to recover", precisely captures the mood of the final scene (2010, 9). When the statue itself is revealed, the authorial model seems constantly on the verge of tipping over into that of substitution. Paulina's careful staging of the scene in her chapel (V.iii.86) is designed to produce exactly the kind of "magical reasoning" necessary to the hypothesis of substitutability (Nagel and Wood 2010, 11), even as she pretends to discourage it. Nagel and Wood suggest that religious or devotional artefacts (such as icons, whose "copies [were] understood as effective surrogates for lost originals"),

> were understood whenever possible to have a double historicity: that is, one might know that they were fabricated in the present or in the recent past, but at the same time value them and use them as if they were very old things. This was not a matter of collective naiveté or indolence, but rather a systematic self-delusion, a semidelusion, designed to extract from the artifact the maximum possible referential reach. (2010, 29)

Leontes willingly participates in this self-delusion or semi-delusion and makes the leap of magical reasoning necessary for the devotional artwork to achieve its substitutional purpose. He speaks directly to the statue, telling it: "There's magic in thy majesty, which has / My evils conjured to remembrance, and / From thy admiring daughter took the spirits" (V.iii.39-41). The possessive pronouns which he as-

signs it imbue it with personhood, and indeed with motherhood – the statue, though, does not gain life from this, but instead claims Perdita as a daughter by making her statue-like too, as Leontes sees her "Standing like stone with thee" (42).

The religious upheavals of the sixteenth century were an important contributing factor to what Nagel and Wood call the distinctive apprehensiveness of the European Renaissance about the temporal instability of the artwork, and in the post-Reformation context this kind of self-delusion could easily be interpreted as idolatry. Perdita takes her cue from her father, but goes further, picking up the end of his line to ask permission to kneel before the statue: "And give me leave, / And do not say 'tis superstition, that / I kneel and then implore her blessing'" (42-44). She, too, then addresses it directly, as "Lady, / Dear queen, that ended when I but began", and asks it to "Give me that hand of yours to kiss" (44-46). Paulina forestalls this by an appeal to the material qualities of the statue – "O patience!" she cries, "The statue is but newly fixed; the colour's / Not dry" (46-47) – just as she does when Leontes wishes to kiss it (80-83). She appears instinctively to understand that the "hypothesis of substitutability" can come under threat "when too much is learned about how works are actually fabricated" (Nagel and Wood 2010, 11).

For all the emphasis on Hermione's statue as fabricated, however, it is notable that Giulio Romano is not mentioned again by name. In V.iii this time-bound author recedes, first becoming "our carver" (30), until Leontes begins to wonder "What was he that did make it?" (63), and asks "What fine chisel / Could ever yet cut breath?" (78-79). His question may well call to mind Pygmalion, the mythological paradigm for the sculptor whose skill was such that, through divine intervention, his female statue came to life to take her place as his wife. Jakub Stejskal, indeed, has related it directly to the substitution model: "This myth about a sculpture coming to life effectively describes the dissolution of representation, the *terminus ad quem* of substitution by image" (2019, 61). Jonathan Bate has eloquently illustrated the technique Shakespeare learnt from Ovid of evoking the transformation of stony statue to living woman through "pinpricks of sensation":

> The progression is both precise and sensuous: blood pulses through the veins, the lips respond, the ivory face flushes. Correspondingly, Leontes con-

> trasts the warm life his queen once had with the coldness of the statue, but then he seems to see blood in the veins and warmth upon the lip. And when she descends and embraces him, she *is* warm. (1993, 236)

Hermione's statue was initially presented to us as a real artwork by Giulio Romano, anchored in chronological time at the point of performance. The stirring of Pygmalion's statue beneath the surface of Shakespeare's scene begins to introduce an alternative interpretative framework through which we can release Hermione from her stony posture. Shakespeare manoeuvres us from the initial premise – this is a statue authored by Giulio Romano – to the final assertion that Hermione has 'preserved' herself in secret for sixteen years, via the intermediary patterning of the Pygmalion myth.

But the scene does not represent a triumph of the substitution model over that of authorial performance. There is a significant and revealing difference between Pygmalion's idealized sculpture and Shakespeare's statue of Hermione. On examining it closely, Leontes complains: "But yet, Paulina, / Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing / So aged as this seems" (27-29). These wrinkles, in betraying the passage of chronological time, serve to fix Hermione in time; as Nagel and Wood comment, "[t]o fix an image […] in time is to reduce it to human proportions" (2010, 8). Hermione's wrinkles preclude her being a timeless object, as the principle of substitution demands, reduce her to human proportions and thus enable the reunion of husband and real, living wife. This is the triumph of time, under which both models for understanding the statue prove to be unnecessary, since it was never a statue in the first place, and Nature emerges unchallenged. At the same time, the boy actor playing Hermione cannot literally have acquired wrinkles over the course of a few hours, and so what appears to uphold the supremacy of nature in fact points back once more to Shakespeare's own art. We might read Paulina's references to the statue as painted in a similar way – within the fiction of the play, they turn out to be false, since (we are told) the statue is in fact the real Hermione after all, which is why Paulina's "spell is lawful" (104). At the same time, they refer us to the painted face of the boy actor, which might indeed "stain" someone who kisses it "[w]ith oily painting" (82-83), signs not of visual but of theatrical art.

The anachronic work of art is emblematised in the 'statue' of the final scene, which holds both the internal and external audiences in a

state of intense epistemological uncertainty focused on the body of the boy actor as it 'hesitates' between art and life. This generates the scene's specific power in performance; as Brett Gamboa notes, "[w]atching the statue and processing the ontological revisions it undergoes is electrifying" (2018, 86). On the one hand, "the scene creates great anticipation due to the inevitability of any live body showing signs of life" (Gamboa 2018, 86); on the other, Shakespeare has created a situation in which the audience is unable to interpret conclusively any signs of life which they might perceive, since there is nothing that can empirically distinguish a scenario in which the actor who played Hermione is now playing a statue of her, from one in which the actor who played Hermione is playing Hermione pretending to be a statue. This prolonged hesitation reaches its climax at last at Paulina's command:

> Paulina
> Music, awake her; strike!
> 'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach.
> Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come,
> I'll fill your grave up. Stir – nay, come away;
> Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him
> Dear life redeems you. You perceive she stirs.
> (*The Winter's Tale*, V.iii.98-103)

Paulina's repeated imperatives make it clear that during the course of this speech, Hermione continues to hesitate, somewhere between statue and woman, as though for a moment she is unsure of which one to become, or remain. With her, the actor playing Hermione hesitates, prolonging our uncertainty as to how to read his body – as statue, or woman? – both equally fictional. It is Shakespeare's departure from Greene's plot, and evocation instead of temporally and epistemologically dissonant models for interpreting the innovative statue, which makes this effect possible.

Hermione's statue has been proposed to the audience both as a 'real' statue by Giulio Romano, anchored in time at the point of performance, and as a reworking of the paradigmatic myth of artistic creation inherited from classical antiquity[16]. Neither of these have

16 Charles and Michelle Martindale point out that "Shakespeare's sense of the story, as one about nature and art, is unusual for his time" (1994, 79).

proven to be fully adequate frameworks for interpretation, however. At this point, they are joined by a third model, this time a theatrical one, in which a (projected) statue and a real woman are bound up in a chain of substitutions which resolves with a wife being returned to her husband from the dead. The play is Euripides' *Alcestis*, which critics are becoming more willing to accept that Shakespeare might have encountered in some form or other, possibly in George Buchanan's Latin translation, which I will use here[17]. Sarah Dewar-Watson (2009, 78) has noted the importance of "the theme of substitution" in this play, which might be summarized as follows: 1) Alcestis substitutes herself for her husband Admetus by agreeing to die in his place; 2) Admetus promises never to remarry, but instead to have a statue made of her and placed in his bed; 3) Heracles presents Admetus with a veiled woman, insisting that he receive her, before revealing that she is actually Alcestis whom he has brought back from the underworld. Admetus' imagined statue is figured as an imperfect substitution, a "cold delight" (*voluptas frigida*, 364), in which the knowledge of the authorial performance intrudes: "your image, moulded by the hand of a skilled craftsman, will be laid in the bed" (*periti dextera artificis tua / in lecto imago ficta collocabitur*, 359-60)[18]. Euripides' "skilled craftsman", no less than Shakespeare's "rare Italian master", disrupts the functioning of a substitutional model of art, while preparing the way for the final theatrical substitution which restores the wife thought lost to life.

The vocabulary of the anachronic as proposed by Nagel and Wood, with its strong resonances for classical reception studies, offers a rich conceptual framework for approaching *The Winter's Tale*. The 'statue' and the oracle can productively be viewed as anachronic artefacts, both of which activate (textual) memories of the Graeco-Roman past. Barkan connects the two together in their mode of operation: "the appearance of the statue forms part of the same mysterious level in the play as the oracle: both are hidden from the audience (though in different ways), and both are connected to

17 In Sharratt and Walsh's edition (Buchanan 1983). Translations are mine.

18 Euripides has the plural "craftsmen" here (τεκτόνων; Euripides 1994, 348); Buchanan also transposes the adjective "skilled" to apply to the "craftsman", rather than the "hand" (σοφῇ […] χειρὶ, 348).

resolutions in the affairs of men that seem beyond their individual action" (1981, 658). The oracle, even as it speaks with the voice of Shakespeare's deceased contemporary Robert Greene, also opens up space for a certain 'Greek music'; Cleomenes and Dion, in going to fetch the oracle, at the same time 'fetch' an idea of an ancient Greek past. In the final scene, the wrinkles which Hermione has gained but which the boy actor must lack represent an attempt to align the different temporalities at work within and outside of the play itself. The statue is again at once self-consciously classical in its 'repetition' of the Pygmalion story, and insistently contemporary in the claim that it has been created by Giulio Romano. The anachronic statue, then, constitutes a site where memories of the classical past come into contact with the present, in a productive form of hesitation which creates or figures what Nagel and Wood call a "fold" – or perhaps a wrinkle – in time.

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Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 117-146 (2024)

From Greece to Stratford, and Back. Teatro dell'Elfo: Half a Century with Shakespeare and the Classics[1]

Martina Treu

Adaptations from classical texts have constantly intertwined with Shakespeare's plays, for the past fifty years, in the history of an Italian theatre company: since 1973 the group of Teatro dell'Elfo (Milan) has always combined a rigorous and coherent scenic practice, a preliminary study of the original texts, a free attitude in adapting and directing ancient and modern plays. The members of the company share a collective approach to theatre, and they work together to this day, alongside their personal projects. This study focuses on Ferdinando Bruni (as a playwright, director, actor, translator, performer and painter, costume and set designer) and on Ida Marinelli, who has shared the stage with him since 1973. The paper explores a few productions among those based on classical and Shakespeare plays, with special attention to the different roles and functions which Bruni takes on simultaneously: in particular, as a director – or co-director, with other members of the company (Gabriele Salvatores, Elio de Capitani and Francesco Frongia) – of many productions where he and Marinelli share the stage with fellow actors (Corinna Agustoni, Cristina Crippa, Elena Russo Arman, Luca Toracca). Rather than aiming to identify causal links between the classical and Shakespearean adaptations, this essay focuses on the unifying aesthestic and theoretical premises of the theatre collective that have allowed it to breathe new life into its adaptations, by discussing the different phases of its activity.

Keywords: adaptation, myth, tragedy, comedy, Teatro dell'Elfo

Teatro dell'Elfo: a collective history

The subject of the present paper involves literature and theatre, but also the complex work of an Italian company, from the study of a

1 I thank the theatre company Teatro dell'Elfo (in particular Ferdinando Bruni, Francesco Frongia, Ida Marinelli, Barbara Caldarini), Agnese Grieco, Iolanda Plescia, Massimo Stella and Wendy Lloyd.

text to the final phase of its performance: our case-study is the Teatro dell'Elfo (Milan), whose constant practice has alternated, for the past fifty years, Shakespeare's plays and adaptations from classical texts. In my opinion, the coexistence and continuity of these sources of inspiration create exceptional conditions: the productions emphasize, on stage, possible connections and affinities between the ancient authors and the Bard. Rather than aiming to identify causal links between the classical and Shakespearean adaptations, this essay focuses on the unifying aesthestic and theoretical premises of the theatre collective that have allowed it to breathe new life into its adaptations, by discussing the different phases of its activity.

Since 1973, all the members of the company (who call themselves, in short, "Elfi", i.e. 'Elfs') have shared a common, collective approach to theatre. In this regard, they are almost an exception among Italian theatre companies: since 1973, the first historical core of founders has remained the same, although younger members have since joined the project[2]. Today, the founding members still work together, although they have also developed personal projects. They all combine a rigorous and coherent scenic practice, conducting a preliminary study of the original texts, and exhibit a free attitude in adapting and directing ancient and modern plays. This study focuses on Ferdinando Bruni (as a playwright, director, actor, translator, set designer, costume designer) and on Ida Marinelli, who have shared many projects since 1973. They have acted as a couple on stage, both in female and male roles: Clytemestra and Electra in *Electra*, Orestes and his mother in *Oresteia*, Oberon and Titania in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hamlet and Gertrude in *Hamlet*, Admetus and Alcestis in *Alcestis*. Notable *solo* performances include *SdisOré* and *The Tempest* (Bruni) and *Cassandra* by Christa Wolf (Marinelli).

These productions, in my opinion, testify to a coherent approach to the classics and to Shakespeare, respectful and yet modern, based on a deep study of the texts, aimed at staging them with a personal, innovative touch, without restraint, so that they are revitalized,

2 In the seventies, many theatre groups formed and disbanded in Italy: very few are still active today. Two remarkable examples are Teatro delle Albe (Ravenna) and Ensemble Teatro Due in Parma. About the former see Treu 2013a; 2013c; 2024a; about the latter Treu 2013b; 2014: one of their founders and members, the director and actor Gigi dall'Aglio, worked in several productions by Teatro dell'Elfo. Unfortunately, he passed away in 2020.

and made accessible to a contemporary audience. In this regard, it is important to stress that the dominant attitude in Italian theatre companies and audiences (especially towards Greek and Roman drama) has been rather conservative until recently, with few exceptions (see Treu 2024a). Strict control, if not censorship, on texts and translations has been the general rule, with limited access to new texts, or to any author suspected of 'unfaithfulness' to the classical heritage[3]. The major festivals (for instance at the Greek theatre of Syracuse) have only recently, and slowly, opened their doors to adaptations.

In this context it is remarkable that the 'Elfs' have always distinguished themselves for their unconventional attitude towards the classics, which is one of the main reasons for their long-lasting success: over 50 years, they have been able to conquer an increasingly wide, heterogeneous audience of many thousands. In the seventies, their spectators were on average very young – they literally grew up with the actors – but new ones have joined the audience every year, especially after the pandemic halt, from the urban and suburban area of Milan, from Northern Italy and further, as the company regularly performs on national and international tours. Affinity, acquaintance and 'continuity' between the Elfs and their audience have created a tight relationship, which has been strengthened over the years. Spectators, as the Elfs have repeatedly claimed, are not 'consumers', but 'citizens'[4]. Those who have followed the company throughout the years have been able to perceive links between the productions, and appreciate changes and innovations with respect to the previous ones (for instance, by watching different versions of *Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Hamlet* alternating with adaptations of classics such as *Oresteia* or *Oedipus Rex*).

For their part, the Elfs have always enjoyed involving their audience directly. Well before the contemporary social media age, spec-

3 For instance, in 1957, an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Assemblywomen*, directed by Luigi Squarzina, was banned from the Roman theatre of Benevento: see Treu 2013c, 951-952; in the early eighties, the Sicilian trilogy *L'Orestea di Gibellina*, by Emilio Isgrò, based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, was not allowed to be performed in the Greek theatre of Segesta (Treu 2024b).

4 The artistic directors claim: "I primi 'portatori d'interesse' a cui facciamo riferimento sono gli autori di teatro (viventi e non) e gli immediati fruitori sono i cittadini – non semplici consumatori e neppure solo spettatori – ma interlocutori fondanti del nostro Teatro" (Bentoglio *et al.* 2013, 28).

tators have often been called upon to provide their point of view, in many ways – through public conversations and debates, surveys and polls – and occasionally admitted to rehearsals, so that they could see a production "under construction". The most competent members of the audience have been able to appreciate the Elfs' meticulous work on texts, on stage, on costumes and set design, but also compare roles, interpretations, and the metamorphoses of actors – a crucial aspect taken into account in this study.

Memory, body and voice

I have been following the Elfs for the past three decades, and since 1999 I have also worked as a *Dramaturg*, i.e. adapting texts for the stage[5]. My paper is largely based on direct experience: I shall examine a few selected case-studies, with a focus on practical issues – actors' practices, audience perception – to discuss how texts are translated, studied, rehearsed, and staged, and the ways in which they talk to each other. This continuous dialogue is affirmed by the most important productions, based on the classics and Shakespeare plays, in the past 50 years. I aim at showing how each of them implies the work on the previous ones, with regard to the actors' memory, bodies and voices: each actor 'wears' his/her roles, one after the other, without ever taking them off, but adding each new one to the previous one. The spectators are not only witnesses of this metamorphosis, but they take part in the whole process.

It is also important to stress that most of the Elfs started their careers as amateurs, rather than professionals. Bruni was the only member to have already studied arts and drama in the Accademia di Belle Arti (Brera, Milan) and he used his skills in many productions (see below, p. 122), while Marinelli attended a drama school in Verona (see below, p. 138). Other members had different degrees of education, but they were not trained as actors or were self-taught. Later, they gradually specialized, and grew as a company. They were

5 *Dramaturg* is the German word currently used (in Italy as well) to define an assistant in charge of translating and adapting texts for the stage. Since the nineties, I have been working with Italian companies in many classical productions, translating and adapting ancient texts, attending the rehearsals, watching the performances and writing about them.

inspired by the idea of an *ensemble*, where each personality has its own distinctive skills, and features, but they all discuss the choices of the company, and contribute to the projects of the group as a whole. Their having forged a path together is precisely their strength. Among their models they cite Pina Bausch, the Schaubühne company in Berlin and the Théâtre du Soleil directed by Ariane Mnouchkine.

As a result of this organic process, their adaptations from ancient texts and Shakespeare's plays are strongly interconnected, with continuous echoes and correspondences: we may compare the company's work to a vessel, or portal, which allows us to travel in space and time, to go back and forth, from Greece to Stratford. In this regard, an outstanding case is Bruni's work as a *playwright* in the widest, most complete sense of the word: like the ancient Greek term *poietès* (from *poi*èo, 'to make') this is a complex category which fits authors such as Aeschylus and Shakespeare. We may recall, on this subject, Nadia Fusini's editorial in the first issue of *Memoria di Shakespeare*, and it is worth reporting her words in full (Colombo and Fusini 2014, 11-12):

> *Playwright* is the most appropriate definition for Shakespeare. It translates into a more common, vulgar linguistic register, the time-honored profession of the dramaturg, or dramatist – the creator of dramatic texts, be they comedies or tragedies. The playwright produces stage-plays: produces, not writes; because *wright* does not allude to the act of writing, has nothing to do with *writer*, despite the similar sound, which is pure coincidence. The word *wright* refers us instead to the verb *to work*, and thus to the action of the person intent on forging some kind of matter; it alludes to a craftsman or builder, so that we say *wheelwright* or *cartwright*, for example, to refer to the person who makes wheels or carts. In short, the term *wright*, like the more archaic *wrytha*, is used to refer to someone who makes things, objects which exist in the world because man has made them. In this minimal, microcosmic way, yes, man is a creator and Shakespeare one who makes plays. Shakespeare is not Milton. He is not Dante. He is one who works for the theatre. He is a poet in the same sense in which are *poietes* the very first playwrights in Western literature whose works survive: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. For them too the term *poietes* was used with a connotation that put the accent on *making*. And so it is with the term *playwright*, that in fact translates *poietes*, as referring to the person who performs that special act of *poiesis* – that consists of producing a spectacle, which in a broader sense may include forms of entertainment, such as acrobatic games, leaps and somersaults, flawless exhibitions […]
>
> The word *play* is an interesting one. Reflecting on Old English, Huizinga notes that within the semantic area of *play*, alongside *lâc* and *plega*, there is the word

> *spelian*, which has the precise meaning of 'doing something for another', 'to be in the place of another'; thus, to represent someone, to act on his behalf – and here the semantic field of ritual and acting opens up. Someone 'playing' another. The crossdresser, someone in disguise, 'plays' another being. He is actually another being. And what is being represented is a drama – that is, an action performed as representation. At its most ancient stage, the mood of drama is Dionysian ecstasy, festive excitement, dithyrambic enthusiasm, in which the actor is transported into the extraneous I, which he does not represent but embodies, drawing the spectators along with him into the metamorphosis. Which is just what happened at the end of the sixteenth century to those who went to 'see' Shakespeare. Huizinga explains that ancient tragedy and comedy were born within the spheres of play and competition. The ancient poets indeed created their works for the Dionysian contests. In the broad sense of the original word, *poiesis*, poetry arises within the domain of play and this consciousness of its playful nature is preserved especially in the theatre, where the drama, the action, is *play*. And there is weeping and laughing, just as with Shakespeare, because the true poet – we have Socrates' word for it – is at once comic and tragic.

Premises such as these play a crucial part in evaluating the work of the Elfs, specifically their adaptations of classical texts, and Shakespeare's plays. Bruni, in fact, is a true *playwright*, as he literally *makes* theatre. Besides being a talented director and versatile actor, he has translated for the stage six Shakespeare plays (Bruni 2023): *Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, Othello, King Lear, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest*. He has also written, adapted and translated other plays and poetic texts (https://www.elfo.org/artisti/ferdinando-bruni.htm). Throughout his career he has also designed and made costumes, often by recycling and assembling parts of old garments and fabrics gathered and collected over the years. He has personally designed and created sets and scenes for many productions: for example *Alice underground*, *Rosso* (where he played Mark Rothko and painted live on stage during the whole show), *Re Lear* (2024), where a mountain of broken furniture, chairs, objects, formed a bizarre, disturbing base for the king's throne; in *The Tempest* (a splendid solo version where he played Prospero) wooden branches, wrecks and relics not only made up the set, but inspired the concept of the whole show (see below and Rondelli 2024, 72-73).

These are only a few examples of their work, which I have had the opportunity to examine closely, working with the Elfs and interviewing them on many occasions. In what follows, I summarize the most relevant features of their theatrical journey.

The Seventies

In their first shows, the Elfs used a number of ingredients which are still their trademarks today: their textual adaptations respect different styles and languages, often by stressing humorous, grotesque, ironical and sarcastic aspects, in an effective balance with tragic and sad moments; they produce a mixture of the old and the new, high and low registers, through stage directions, music (especially pop and rock), exaggerated and anachronistic make-up, non-naturalistic acting, unconventional scenes and costumes. A strong common thread is woven through all of their productions: some texts were revisited several times, like *Midsummer's Night Dream* and *Hamlet*, and a few key emotions have regularly been explored for decades – such as suspicion and jealousy, wrath, despair.

Until 1979, the Elfs did not own nor rented any theatre: they only played in temporary spaces, or as guests of other companies. Their first 'home' was a former cinema (in via Ciro Menotti, Milan), which hosted their first 'classical' adaptation: Petronius' *Satyricon*. Not a drama, but a novel, not Greek but Latin (later they preferred the Greeks, with the exception of Seneca's *Oedipus,* in *Verso Tebe* and *Edipo Re. Una favola nera*: see below, p. 141). This choice at first surprised their audience. Ten years before, Fellini's movie (1969) made the *Satyricon* famous, as a future LGBT+ *manifesto*. The Elfs adapted the queer world depicted in the novel to their own, contemporary poetics, creating a bizarre mixture of old and new characters, dark, grotesque, gloomy tones (see Bentoglio *et al.* 2013, 96; https://www.elfo.org/spettacoli/1978-1979/satyricon.htm). The set designer Thalia Istikopoulou 'razed' the theatre hall to the ground, removed the seats, built an arena with stands on three sides. Once inside, the spectators could not leave: they were literally part of the show.

Another important asset was the music, composed by Demetrio Stratos (a talented Greek-born singer, with a unique voice, the former frontman of the Area musical group: see Demetriostratos.org). Corinna Agustoni and Ida Marinelli were taught to sing and vocalize, by Stratos himself, over several months, in order to personalize and enrich their characters. Bruni was the young Encolpius, Elio De Capitani was Trimalchio, Cristina Crippa was an old hag in search of men for her nymphomaniac daughter. The original characters were transformed into 'freaks'

of our times, in a timeless present where the fulfilment of life pleasures – sex and food, above all – was presented as a mystery to be explored. The characters were treated with humour, if not sarcasm, though tempered by a sort of inner melancholy, a sense of loss and imminent death. Such a mixture of tones and feelings – joy and pain, sadness and the grotesque – made the audience think. Audience members were moved and surprise, might even have felt uncomfortable, but alive. It is upon this foundation that the company proceeded to build all their future productions, including the classics, and Shakespeare's plays.

Critics and spectators were generally shocked. Those who liked the previous, more joyful productions, were at least surprised, if not disappointed, by such disturbing, unprecedented choices. On the other hand, the Elfs had captured a wider, heterogeneous audience, including the LGBT+ community. Most of them were new spectators, who did not attend theatre shows regularly: they were curious and ready to accept new challenges. A great number of these "new converts" elected the Elfs as their favourite company and followed them faithfully for many decades (Bentoglio *et al.* 2013, 44)[6].

The Eighties

After *Satyricon*, the company experimented with a Greek 'divertissement', *Il gioco degli Dei* ("The Game of Gods"). The text, by Bruni and Salvatores, was loosely inspired (in Bruni's words) by "Homer's *Odyssey*, science fiction novels, and comics", and set and costumes were also designed by Bruni[7]. In the same years, the company wrote a collective adaptation of Ben Jonson's comedy *Volpone*, based on Bruni's translation, with a pop music score by The Doors. In the production, directed by Salvatores, Agustoni, Crippa and Marinelli wore strange

6 In order to allow an increasingly large audience, the Elfs hired first the Teatro Portaromana, and finally moved to the Teatro Elfo Puccini, formerly an opera theatre. The large space, with a substantial restoration, was divided in three theatre halls, of different sizes, which were named by the Elfs after their 'mentors': Shakespeare (the largest hall, 500 seats) Fassbinder (medium, 300 seats) and Bausch (small, 100 seats).

7 Première: 19 July 1980, Castello Sforzesco, Milan. In June 1984, the production was reprised with a new title, inspired by the critic Ugo Volli: *Sognando una sirena coi tacchi a spillo* ("Dreaming of a mermaid in stiletto heels"): Bentoglio *et al*. 2013, 146.

masks – as if in a grotesque carnival – while Bruni and De Capitani took turns in playing the protagonist (Bruni and Cheli 2004, 26).

The following production, in 1981, was a musical based on Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (the play most frequently staged by the Elfs, which became their trademark)[8]. The first version was titled *Sogno di una notte d'estate* – "Summer Night's Dream", but the Elfs called it in brief "Il Sogno" ("The Dream"). The production was a rock opera: Salvatores translated and adapted the original text, which (as he himself highlighted) is rich in rhythm, sound and musical effects, and therefore perfectly suitable to being transposed into song (see also Bentoglio *et al.* 2013, 44-46). The cast did not include professional singers or dancers, only the members of the company. Salvatores – a musician and a guitar player himself – asked musician and composer Mauro Pagani to write an original soundtrack, so that the songs were 'tailor made' for each actor, considering their particular skills and training. Choreographers Elisabeth Boecke and Titta Facchini helped the actors find the right moves and dances, in keeping with their peculiar acting style. They worked day and night for months, and the result – a musical with a shocking, provocative touch – was a huge success. The overall approach was faithful to the original text, but still contemporary, and the three 'plots' of the play (respectively the storylines involving Oberon and Titania, the two young couples, Bottom and the artisans) perfectly intertwined, without confusion, and successfully mixing tragic and comic elements (they emphasized the ironical aspects of the love affair, and of the artisans' show).

The production attracted 200.000 spectators: it soon became a cult show, a hymn, a manifesto for an entire generation[9]. Bruni captured the audience with his mobile, irreverent and sarcastic Puck: a sexy, androgynous creature, in a black *guepière* and boots. His voice alternated high and low tones, his magnetic presence made him a *deus ex machina*. Crippa was an alcoholic, half-naked Titania (Bruni and Cheli 2004, 18); Marinelli played an ironical, clever, sophisticated Helen.

8 Though the name 'Elfo' was chosen well before the staging of this play, it is no coincidence that elves, fairies, goblins, and other mischievous creatures with their concrete actions, and physical presence, played a crucial role on stage.

9 See Quinque 1981 and Bruni- Cheli 2004, 6-7. Salvatores later directed a movie (*Il Sogno d'una notte d'estate*, 1983) with Dante Spinotti as director of photography (Bruni-Cheli 2004, 18-19).

Fig. 1 *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1981. Ferdinando Bruni and Ida Marinelli (photo by Andra Strigelli).

Music and dance dominated the stage, and joyful, energetic aspects prevailed. However, Salvatores also introduced a 'bittersweet' tone,

especially in the final scenes: the 'traditional' happy ending did not satisfy him. Rather, he followed an invisible thread embedded in Shakespeare's plays: men and women are often not able to fulfil their true desires but accept their destinies (for example conventional marriage). Without altering the text, the company stressed its hidden meaning through non-verbal signs, movements and expressions of actors.

Later productions of the same play, directed by Elio De Capitani (1988, 1997) further strengthened its most ambiguous and darkest implications. De Capitani's interpretation was based on the scene in which King Theseus recalls his own love story: he fought the Amazons, he won the war, he tamed and conquered their Queen. Following these premises, the Amazons' submission was strongly underlined on stage, where a splendid Marinelli – in the role of Queen Hippolyta – became a crucial character. The prologue also recalls the fight between Achilles and Penthesilea, a prototype of the violent and deadly love made immortal by Von Kleist[10].

The director De Capitani has commented on this dynamic during a course he taught at Iulm University (2023/2024), as well as in previous interviews and other writings (see Bentoglio *et al.* 2013), tracing his inspiration back to the German theorist and dancer Pina Bausch, who publicly denounced the hidden violence against women as the 'other side' of war, inside and outside homes, also in times of peace. Thus the opening scene literally shocked the audience: an aggressive group of males in uniform chased and attacked a small group of breast-naked women, barely covered by military coats. The soldiers shot and killed them all on stage, except one – Marinelli – who was undressed with violence, then swathed with ribbons and ropes, and forced into an elegant, feminine gown, and high heels. These were clearly meant as a sign of sexual submission, and a token of violence against women. Over the years, this production acquired the status of an exposé, premonitory of contemporary civil wars, with their mass rapes and massacres, such as those in Rwanda and Yugoslavia.

10 In the same years, significantly, Marinelli was also the protagonist of a huge success of the company – Fassbinder's (*Le amare lacrime di Petra von Kant – Petra von Kant's bitter tears*) where she played a strong, proud woman, who revealed onstage her fear of being abandoned and humiliated (Bentoglio *et al.* 2013, 49-50).

Fig. 2 *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1988. Ida Marinelli (photo by Armin Linke).

Subsequently, the entire production appeared as "a Dream which becomes a Nightmare", as De Capitani told me in a private conversation. He focused on Shakespeare's black humour – which he emphasized as much as possible – and on the most ambiguous features of the original text (such as the fights between lovers, or the Puck's deceitful trick). However, this 'dark side' was effectively balanced by the humorous 'third plot', i.e. the story of Pyramus and Thisbe performed by Bottom and the craftsmen. Especially in the third version of the play (1997), De Capitani/ Bottom /Pyramus dominated the scene with his comic inventions and explosive physicality[11].

In the same years, these adaptations of *"The Dream"* were alternated with 'different takes' of *Hamlet* (first staged with its original, complete title *The Tragedy of Hamlet-Prince of Denmark*). The company aimed at removing from the text the layers and stereotypes which had previously influenced the reception of Shakespeare's tragedy – as they claimed

11 In his career, De Capitani has always alternated comic and tragic roles, including Claudius in *Hamlet* and the main roles of *Othello* (2016) and *King Lear* (2024): see https://www.elfo.org/artisti/elio-de-capitani.htm.

– in order to get back to its core. To do so, in 1984 and 1985 they chose two poetic translations, respectively by Cesare Garboli and Patrizia Cavalli: both texts were cut to the bone, reduced to the essential, brought towards a contemporary interpretation. 'Rarefaction' became the Elfs' trademark: the actors played as if moving in a void, their voices resonated thanks to microphones, their words acquired greater sense and power. Accordingly, the director De Capitani created an innovative scenography with set designer Carlo Sala, devoid of decoration: the labyrinth of the Danish palace was merely evoked by a mechanical system of moving decks and rotating platforms. In the final version, only transparent, plastic curtains and basic furniture were left onstage. The focus was entirely on the actors, in a contemporary-classic *Hamlet*, dry, rigorous, increasingly spare and essential, with no frills or scenic objects.

Fig. 3 *Hamlet*, 1995. Centre, Ida Martinelli, bottom right, Ferdinando Bruni (photo by Bruna Ginammi).

Bruni was praised by Italian and international critics as a vigorous, magnetic, ironical Hamlet: "Standing still, he emanates energy (so do all other actors, notably Marinelli as Gertrude and Giancarlo Previati as Claudio). In Bruni's case, it is intellectual energy (As it happens, Bruni is not only an actor, but also a director, translator, designer and painter)"[12].

12 Macaulay 1999.

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THE ARTS

THEATRE IN MILAN

The Italian job on Shakespeare

Alastair Macaulay reviews new productions of 'The Merchant of Venice' and 'Hamlet'

Il vostro nome è Shylock? Milan (a name that in Shakespeare's plays is pronounced with the stress on the *first* syllable) possesses two of Italy's leading five theatre companies: both of which at present are playing Shakespeare. The Piccolo Teatro is presenting *The Merchant of Venice* (*Il Mercante di Venezia*) at the old Piccolo. Meanwhile the Teatridithalia, is giving *Hamlet* (*Amleto*) at the Teatro di Portaromana. I watched both last weekend, and with markedly different reactions.

What a difference it makes when a director puts all the focus on his actors – as in 'Amleto'

How come Stéphane Braunschweig now passes in Europe as a Shakespearian director of consequence? In recent years, Britain has seen both his francophone staging of *The Winter's Tale* and his anglophone account of *Measure for Measure*. Both were cerebral, analytical, static affairs. Alas, despite the presence of one of Italy's leading actors as Shylock, the same is true of his new italophone *Merchant of Venice* at the Piccolo. (Italian translation by Agostino Lombardo.) His spirit is especially alien to Shakespearian comedy and to the line-by-line mobility of Shakespeare's thought.

No actor makes a great impression in a Braunschweig production. The director predominates alone. His sets physically constrict his actors, and often coop them onto the apron of the stage. His Venice is modern-dress, his Belmont is period-dress. The difference between Shylock and the other modern-day Venetians is minimal – the full nature of the Christians' anti-Semitism only becomes forcibly apparent during the trial scene, visibly crushing Shylock – but Bassanio has to transform himself drastically into a Renaissance courtier to woo Portia (in Italian, Porzia). In the final scene, he is devastated to find that Porzia has taken the liberty of becoming a man, and a successful man, and in Venice. He, Bassanio, flounces out, slamming a door after him. Although Porzia soon follows him, it is unclear whether the marriage will survive. This might be revealing – England has seen reinterpretations of the play during the 1990s more radical than this (some successful), especially in terms of reinterpreting its gender politics – but the theory is more interesting than the practice.

Shylock is Roberto Herlitzka, the best actor of the cast. He catches Shylock's cunning and his wit. The way he folds to the floor at the end of the trial scene makes some impression. But neither this nor anything else about his performance exert great force, because Braunschweig will not let them.

What a difference it makes when a director puts all the focus on his actors! Much about the Teatridithalia *Amleto* might seem whacky, and certainly the expressionistic production – directed by Elio de Capitani – is wholly unlike almost every *Hamlet* seen in London in recent years. But everything here seems to frame and complement the actors' work. (The Italian translation – in the hendecasyllables that are as natural to Italian expression as the iambic pentameter is to English – is by Cesare Garboli.)

Intellectual energy: Fabiano Fantini and Ferdinando Bruni in 'Amleto'

Whereas the frequent stasis of the actors in the Piccolo *Mercante* seems contrived, here the frequent stillness of the actors is natural, riveting, wonderfully expressive. And Ferdinando Bruni – he and De Capitani are the company's artistic directors – commands the play as few Hamlets ever do; commands it by sheer force of mind. Standing still, he emanates energy. (So do all the other actors, notably Ida Marinelli as Gertrude and Giancarlo Previati as Claudio.)

In Bruni's case, it is intellectual energy. (As it happens, Bruni is not only an actor but also a director, translator, designer, and painter. He has recently translated Rimbaud's *Saison en Enfer* into Italian.) He is slight of physique, but elegant and absolutely assured; his voice is a dark, incisive, supple bass-baritone. And so we hang on Hamlet's thought; and so the whole play fall into place.

I think we would hang on his thought even more if the production had less intrusive recorded noise; if the gimmick of speaking certain speeches into a microphone were more selectively used (though it amplifies them, it reduces their effect); and if there was less nonsense with transparent plastic curtains whose rise and fall during the action is more distracting than we need. But the basic modern-dress economy of the staging works well. The Ghost, naked and given an exceptionally eloquent physical performance by Fabiano Fantini, really does seem to come from Purgatory. Polonio (Ruggero Dondi) dominates his family with unusual force; Laerte's neurotic rage and Ofelia's madness both grow, clearly and interestingly, from his repressive control. Ofelia (Paola Rota) really is a beauty; and both Luciano Scarpa (as Orazio Horatio) and Alessandro Quattro (in several roles) make very fine impressions. The tension between the essentially classical but always natural acting style of the company and the expressionistic framework of the production is remarkable. The stage world seems surreal; the actors make it real.

'Amleto' at the Teatro di Portaromana, Milan, until April 30. 'Il Mercante di Venezia' at the Piccolo Teatro, Milan, until April 18.

Fig. 4 Review of *Hamlet*, «Financial Times», 1999.

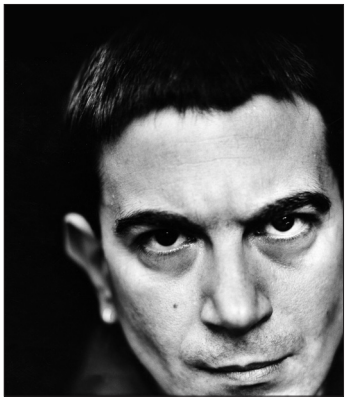

Fig. 5 *Hamlet*, 1995. A portrait of Ferdinando Bruni (photo by Armin Linke).

Bruni's interpretation was extremely modern and thoughtful. He captivated the audience and created a climax of emotions scene after scene: surprise, dark humour, authority, sorrow, and finally despair. He was disappointed by his mother's behaviour. He was sarcastic when he talked to his enemies, contemptuous and yet sympathetic when he pitied Ophelia for her unhappy destiny. Human, above all. These feelings were shared by the actors and spectators. Particularly moving was Marinelli's interpretation, as she gave Gertrude a personal touch (much appreciated by her faithful audience). She was by no means a conventional wife, and mother, but a sophisticated lady; magnetic, and fascinating in her stylish haircut (peroxide blonde, as usual) and black mourning dress. Irresistibly seductive when she kissed Claudius, she was able to morph into a melancholic, tormented woman, eager to please her beloved son. Over the years, Marinelli has always cited Gertrude amongst her most beloved characters, the ones that "stayed with her" (in her words) while she was playing in duets with Bruni and many other productions (such as Heiner Müller's *Quartet*, Steven Berkoff's *Decadences*, Pasolini's *Orestiade*: see below, p. 134)[13].

In 1985, the directors Bruni and De Capitani designed and played the Italian version of a foreign production based on Sophocles' *Antigone:* the anti-apartheid play *The Island* by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona (set in Robben Island prison, where Nelson Mandela spent 27 years of his life: delegated members of his party attended the *première*). From South Africa to Italy, the Elfs adapted the text to their own context, with clear political implications. The directors also played Antigone (Bruni) and Creonte (De Capitani)[14].

13 Marinelli, as Petra Von Kant¸ in the cited play by Fassbinder (see above, n.10) used her own memories, gestures and objects in order to make her character more effective and 'real'. In the first scene, for instance, the stage lights were intense, while she was lying on a bed, her eyes covered by a textile eye-mask (which the actress used in everyday life, due to her frequent travels). She got up without taking it off, until she stood in front of the audience. Silently, she raised it – like a curtain – and looked at the spectators, into their eyes, creating an intimate connection with them before starting her personal confession.

14 See Bruni-Cheli 2004, 52-53.

The Nineties

In the early nineties, the company was involved in *Alla Greca*, an adaptation of *Greek* (1980) by the British playwright and actor Steven Berkoff: a parodic, satirical, iconoclastic version of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* set in a dirty, poor, modern London. With this choice, the Elfs continued their research on the tragicomic and grotesque aspects of classics, which they adapted as always to the present time. They focused on the 'dark side' of family, and of love affairs, with a black humour borrowed from the original text (brimming with puns and criticism directed at British society and the Thatcher era). The protagonist is an aggressive, vulgar, East-enders Oedipus – called Eddy – who leaves home in conflict with his stepmother and stepfather; by accident, he finds and kills his real father, unbeknownst to him (he literally provokes his death in a powerful verbal fight). After the killing, Eddy falls in love with his own mother, marries her and, quite surprisingly, finds success and happiness[15]. Berkoff ironically subverts the model of a classical tragedy, by changing the original plot, to allow mother and son to love each other. In the final scene, Eddy refuses to gouge out his own eyes "Greek – style" and explodes in a glorification of incest, joyous and free of any sense of guilt or moral restraint[16]. In this respect, Berkoff anticipated future choices by British playwrights such as Sarah Kane, and Marc Ravenhill, whose work was also staged by the Elfs years later[17]. The adaptation was based on an excellent Italian translation (Manfridi and Clerici 1990)[18]. It was directed by Elio De Capitani, with a musical score composed and played live on stage by Mario Arcari. Bruni was an irreverent, seductive

15 See Macintosh 2004 and 2009, 178-179 and Gilabert Barberà 2013.

16 Berkoff's *Greek* inspired an opera with the same title by Mark-Anthony Turnage, first performed at the Munich Biennale in 1988 and Edinburgh (see Macintosh 2009, 173).

17 In 1996, the British playwright Sarah Kane 'challenged' the classics with iconoclast fury (*Phaedra's love*). On its Italian production (2011) see Treu 2011; on another *Fedra*, by Agnese Grieco, see below.

18 Manfridi also wrote another comic adaptation of *Oedipus Rex*, *Zozòs* (Manfridi 2018), staged by Teatro dell'Elfo in 1994/1995 (one year after their production of *Alla Greca*): *première* with Ida Marinelli, Alida Giardina, Danilo Nigrelli, Matteo Chioatto, directed by Andrea Taddei (set designer of the Elfo production of *Alla Greca*). In England, the play was translated into English by Colin Teevan and staged by Peter Hall (*Cuckoos*, 2000: see Macintosh 2009, 162, 188, 189).

Eddy, Crippa the waitress who was found out to be his mother. Eddy's father was played first by Gigi Dall'Aglio, then by Elio De Capitani (the same happened in the second and third version of *Sogno*). Marinelli was the feminist Sphynx who attacked Eddy and was defeated. Brought to stage first in 1993 as a 'study', and a year later in its complete form, the production was a huge success (it was reprised in 2004 and in 2020)[19].

In the early nineties, Bruni and Marinelli also worked on another Greek tragedy, *Electra* by Euripides. In a recent interview, Marinelli called it "Elettra mai nata" ("Never Born Elektra"), because unfortunately their stage rehearsals were not followed by a true production, due to a lack of funding. However, a private show was viewed by other members of the company (in a large room located in via Pietrasanta, Milan) and partly filmed by De Capitani, in an amateur video which Marinelli kindly allowed me to see: in the first scene, she sat on the floor, then started to clean it – as if washing away blood – while she waited for her brother Orestes, sadly talking to herself. Suddenly Bruni appeared as a monstrous Clytemnestra, with heavy make-up (white face, red lips). He was bundled up in an enormous wedding dress. He held a spear at the height of his genitals. Red blood poured down, at first, then Clytemnestra's costume opened up and Orestes (played by Bruni himself) came out of his mother's womb.

After a period dedicated to Fassbinder (with *Petra Von Kant*, *La bottega del caffè*, *I rifiuti, la città e la morte*), Bruni and Marinelli returned to Shakespeare (with the third version of *Sogno*, 1997: see above) and to the classics: in 1998, Bruni directed *Fedra*, a peculiar version of Euripides' *Hippolytus* mixed with Seneca, Ovid, Racine, and modern authors. Phaedra's love for her stepson was narrated from the "feminine side", with an all-female cast. The author of the adaptation was also a woman, Agnese Grieco, an Italian playwright and philosopher (Grieco 2005): Bruni saw it in Germany and asked to acquire the rights for an Italian production, where Marinelli played the goddess Aphrodite, Phaedra and the chorus (with Alessandra Antinori and Rossana Piano: see Bentoglio *et al*. 2013, 156).

Soon afterwards, in 1999-2000, the Bruni-Marinelli couple was on stage as Orestes and Clytemnestra in two major productions, *Coefore* and *Eumenidi*, based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* translated by Pasolini.

19 For the first performance see Treu 2005, 72, 86, 87 and Treu 2009a, 72-73; for the reprise in 2020 see Tentorio 2020.

The subtitle, *Appunti per un'*Orestiade *Italiana* ("Notes for an Italian *Orestiade*") quoted Pasolini's movie *Appunti per un'*Orestiade *Africana* ("Notes for an African *Orestiade"*). The director De Capitani conceived the project with Giovanna Marini (the late Italian singer, musician and composer): in 1999, they started by staging the second drama of the trilogy, *Coefore* (*Libation Bearers*), as they wanted to recreate on stage the choirs of mourning women in funeral rites of southern Italy, and they created powerful choral parts in Italian and ancient Greek. In 2000, they staged the third part of Aeschylus' trilogy, *Eumenidi*: the demonic chorus of the original text allowed Marini to compose a musical score for feminine voices in lower tones, perfectly fit for revenge goddesses (I collaborated mainly to the dramaturgy of the choral parts). In the third part, Bruni and Marinelli were again Orestes and Clytemnestra, De Capitani played Apollo and Crippa was Athena.

Unfortunately, a lack of funding prevented the company from staging *Agamennone*, in 2001: in their intentions, Aeschylus' first play was meant to be staged as third and last of the entire trilogy, surprisingly cast as a flashback, a prequel, or a new beginning. According to De Capitani, the final scene was to be a warning: if the spiral of violence is not broken once and for all, we will soon descend back into it. The feuds and killing will never end[20].

This general, 'pessimistic' view influenced both productions, where Bruni appeared as a 'prematurely aged', weary, disillusioned Orestes: in the prologue of *Coefore* he wore glasses, and a travelling coat – the signs of age, after a long exile – and he had by his side Pylades (Massimo Giovara) and later Electra (Alessandra Antinori, who has just played in *Fedra*, 1998: see above). She entered on stage with the women's chorus, in an impressive funeral march, and met with her brother on their father's tomb (Treu 2022). It is by praying with her that Orestes gathered strength and courage for his revenge: the chorus members advised him, and in the crucial scenes formed a circle, to surround and support him. Brother and sister stood still, kneeling over

20 Such a cautious, if not 'negative', interpretation of the trilogy has often prevailed over the 'happy ending' in most productions of *Oresteia* during the past decades (see Isgrò 2011, 33-34; 47-48; Bierl 2005 and 2012; Treu 2005; 2009a; 2024a; and the production database at http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/ for a list of past productions), including the recent *Oresteia* directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos at Epidaurus and Vicenza (Teatro Olimpico) in 2024: see https://www.tcvi.it/it/classici/.

the tomb – the symbolic pivot of the entire dramatic action – while the others sang and moved around them. Orestes is never alone, unlike most characters previously played by Bruni, specifically *Amleto*, where he appeared as a monad isolated in a void, even during the dialogues.

In the peak moment of *Coefore*, Marinelli as Clytemnestra faced Orestes: their most faithful spectators instinctively recalled their previous Shakespearean productions, where the couple was on stage together – in particular the latest *Sogno* and *Amleto*, which were stamped in the audience's memory. As if the audience could see through their costumes, the actors showed themselves in their flesh and bones. Their intense duet on Agamemnon's tomb was the culmination of the tragedy and of the entire trilogy. The mother asks for her axe, to kill again, but she soon understands it is too late. Like other characters played by Marinelli, she has had an infamous life, and reacts in the only way she knows how. She tries to make her son understand her, pity her. Orestes feels a hint of tenderness and compassion. He hesitates, then questiones Apollo's will – "Should I kill my mother?" – but Pylades reminds him of his mission. Orestes thus drives his mother away violently and kills her off stage. When he finally reappears with his victims, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, the women in the chorus onstage suddenly change into the Erinyes: they attack Orestes with loud cries and cause him to flee, as suggested by Aeschylus.

Fig. 6 *Coefore*, 1999. Ida Marinelli and Ferdinando Bruni (photo by Bruna Ginammi).

In the following production, *Eumenidi* (2000), the chorus of female revenge demons named Erinyes was mostly formed by the same actresses / singers in the previous one. They chase Orestes to Delphi, where they then fall asleep. In Aeschylus' prologue, the ghost of Clytemnestra appears in their dream: in this production, she literally 'comes out' of Orestes' bed (De Capitani set the prologue in a psychiatric hospital). She moved like a newborn, emerging from her mother's womb (the couple reversed the mother-son dynamics once again). Behind the actors, dark oneiric images were projected on a huge screen (Francesco Frongia had filmed and edited them). In the following scenes, Bruni was once again the pivot of the action, surrounded by the chorus in a "magic circle" of enchantment and revenge. Athena's verdict and her message to the Erinyes – ideally turned into 'benevolent' Eumenides – aimed at stopping the revenge feud and finally bringing peace (although the final scene, in the director's intentions, anticipated a new advent of blood).

The New Millennium

The decade after *Eumenidi* was extremely productive for the Elfs: in 2000, the company returned to early modern English drama and staged a queer, extravagant, provocative version of Marlowe's *Edward* II, which symbolically marked the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium. Bruni translated the text, co-directed it with De Capitani, and played the protagonist in peroxide blonde, a complete metamorphosis that made him almost unrecognizable, compared to his previous interpretations. This production was a unique experiment and a turning point; in a sense, according to the co-director De Capitani, it was also a clear dissociation, a distancing from many of the texts which Bruni had translated, directed and played before.

Another step in a new direction, for Bruni and Marinelli, were their collaborations with 'outsiders' such as Agnese Grieco (for her *Fedra,* see above, p. 133). She wrote and directed an *Alcesti* based on Euripides' *Alcestis*, staged first as a study (19/06/2001), then in complete form (3/4/2002)[21]. The author herself called her text "An

21 See Grieco 2005, Bentoglio *et al.* 2013, 161-63.

Alcestis for two": she converted the original plot – a wife who sacrifices her life for her husband's sake – into a "game of life and death" within a couple, perhaps a mental projection of imaginary characters (see Treu 2025, forthcoming). It was no chance that only two actors played all the roles: Bruni was Apollo and Admetus, Marinelli was Thanatos (the god of Death, who claims Admetus' life), Alcestis, Admetus' father and – surprisingly – Heracles (in Euripides' *Alcestis*, the hero helps his friend Admetus, bravely rescues Alcestis and brings her back from the underworld).

Bruni's Apollo wore dark sunglasses and talked with brilliant, loud, and frivolous tones; on the contrary, his Admetus was melancholic, pale, sorrowful from his first appearance. Marinelli not only played a superb Alcestis, a perfect symbol of love and sacrifice, but she constructed a different 'outfit' on her red dress which corresponded to a new character each time it changed. As Thanatos, she acted rigidly, spoke and moved in a strange and jerky manner; as Pheretes, she wore a grey, military cloak and a monocle, clearly marking distance from his son Admetus; finally, as Heracles, she wore a lion head and an armour on her chest, and characterised the hero with exaggerated and boastful gesturing, and a harsh voice.

Fig. 7 *Alcestis*, 2002. Ida Marinelli (photo by Bruna Ginammi).

This performance allowed her to show her 'comic side', which she had previously and successfully used in parodic, grotesque roles, in minor or major parts. For instance, in *La bottega del caffè* (a free adaptation by Fassbinder of Goldoni's comedy: 1991/2993) Marinelli endowed her naïve character (Victoria) with doll-like movements and a funny accent with a 'countryside' touch (she imitated the strong, typical accent of Bergamo, in Northern Italy). In a similar manner, years later she created a comical character when playing Juliet's nurse in a ground-breaking production of *Romeo and Juliet* (Roman theatre of Verona, 2008). Unlike most of the actors who had played the character in the past, she created a maternal figure for Juliet, with a 'real' personality, comic and yet tragic at times. On that occasion, in rehearsal, she recalled her native accent, the intimate memories of her childhood in the countryside of Verona, and the most amusing characters in her hometown: she borrowed from them terms in the local dialect, as well as slang and colloquial forms, and created a splendid character. The director Ferdinando Bruni had hired local actors from Verona and its surrounding area to play Juliet and her father, to add 'an authentic' touch[22]. Five years before, in the same Roman theatre of Verona, Bruni had played a magnificent Shylock in *Il mercante di Venezia* (*The Merchant of Venice*, 2003). His interpretation was provocative, human and painful, especially in Shylock's famous monologue.

In the same year (2003) Bruni was also celebrated by critics and spectators, and granted an important award, for the monologue *SdisOré* (directed by Frongia). This was a free adaptation of ancient texts regarding Orestes, written by the Italian playwright Giovanni Testori in a poetic language partly based on his own dialect (Northern area of Milan, Italy), partly on new terms which he invented with creative sensibility. Throughout his career, Testori wrote several plays inspired by historical or mythical figures such as *Cleopatràs*, *Edipus* (from *Oedipus Rex*) and *SdisOré* (a pejorative which means, basically,

22 Other members of the company staged and interpreted other classics: for instance, Cristina Crippa was a member of the chorus and Orestes' nurse in Pasolini's *Orestiade*, Deianira in *Trachinie* (*The Women of Trachis*) by Ezra Pound, based on Sophocles' tragedy (2003), Medea in the trilogy dedicated to the Argonauts by Heiner Müller (staged in 2006: http://old.elfo.org/programmi_sala/materialemedea2006.pdf), Lady Torrace in *La discesa di Orfeo* (*Orpheus Descending* by Tennessee Williams, 2012).

an "anti-Orestes"): ancient stories are recreated in the imaginative, itinerant show created by a wandering actor (named "Scarrozzante"), who plays all the roles, by changing and transforming himself under the eyes of spectators (see giovannitestori.it). This peculiar text gave Bruni the opportunity to play many characters in histrionic mode. He appeared onstage with heavy make-up: a white mask on which two red lines ran from both eyes to the corners of his red mouth, like tear drops (Bentoglio *et al.* 2013, 113-114). His face was a thousand-faced palette, his voice changed into manifold voices, in an astonishing, continuous metamorphosis.

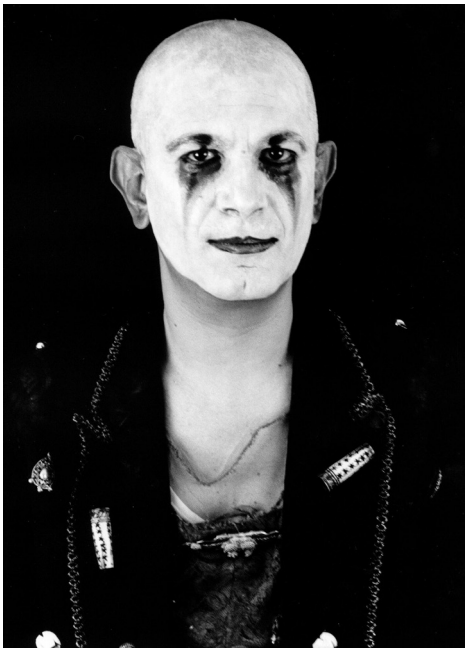

Fig. 8 *SdisOré*, 2003. Ferdinando Bruni (photo by Alessandro Genovesi).

Bruni played many other characters in the decade following this successful monologue. In a brand new, surprising version of *The Tempest* (2005), as a solo show (translated by Bruni, directed by Bruni and Frongia: Rondelli 2024, 72-73) Bruni – Prospero not only acted as a director, a magician, an illusionist on stage: he became a sort of demiurge / creator. He played all the roles, like a puppeteer engaging with his puppets and stage servants (the dynamics of power and submission are a recurrent feature of many productions).

Fig. 9 *The Tempest*, 2015. Ferdinando Bruni (photo by Luca Piva).

He later played Leonte in *Il racconto d'inverno* (*The Winter's Tale*, 2010) and again Eddy in Berkoff's *Greek* (only recently has he been replaced by a young and talented actor, Marco Bonadei). At the same time, Bruni continued to work on his own 'Oedipus'. He created an intertextual experiment which combined Sophocles' text with many authors both ancient and modern: Seneca, Dryden and Lee, Hofmannsthal and Cocteau, Mann, Dürrenmatt and Berkoff. After many years of work, the text was first staged as a 'study' with the provisional title *Verso Tebe. Variazioni su Edipo,* in February 2020, soon before the closure of Italian theatres due to Covid-19. As stated by Bruni and Frongia in their theatre programme, "The story of Oedipus through the centuries becomes the

mirror in which the anxieties of those who have read it again are reflected"[23]. The middle hall of Teatro Elfo Puccini (sala Fassbinder), like the theatre Menotti which hosted the company's *Satyricon* (see above), was transformed into a ring, surrounded by grandstands for spectators: a bare stage, with just a few stage props and four music stands where Bruni and three gifted younger actors stood still and read their parts.

After the pandemic break, Bruni and Frongia fashioned their show into a complete version, and on a wider scale, in the major hall of Teatro Elfo Puccini (Sala Shakespeare): in *Edipo Re - Una Favola Nera* (*Oedipus the King, a black fable*, 2022) the same four actors, surrounded by great scenes and screens, were dressed in gorgeous costumes by the artist and stylist Antonio Marras[24]. After this successful production, Bruni translated *King Lear* and co-directed it with Frongia in 2024. Elio De Capitani was a superb protagonist (https://www.elfo.org/spettacoli/2023-2024/re-lear.htm).

Conclusions

In this paper I have examined a few selected productions and historical phases of an Italian theatre company – Teatro dell'Elfo – whose work has created a constant dialogue between the classics and Shakespeare for the past 50 years. Since 1973, the members have mostly remained the same, so they are now able to rely on both personal and collective memory (shared with their faithful audience) when they choose and stage a new text, as well as on a fertile exchange of ideas and thoughts.

The company itself is an ensemble, conceived as a collective enterprise, open to developing individual talent and hosting external collaborators. Their motto is, "Se vuoi andare veloce vai da solo, se vuoi andare lontano vai in gruppo" ("If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together": Bentoglio *et al.* 2013, 13). Each member is different – a unique combination of peculiar skills and talents – and the actors often play multiple roles. Among them, Bruni is also a playwright, writer, translator, actor, director, set and costume

23 See https://www.elfo.org/spettacoli/2019-2020/verso-tebe.htm, Tentorio 2020; Treu 2021 and Rondelli 2024, 134-35.

24 See his gallery of photos online: https://antoniomarras.com/it/blogs/journal/edipo-re, and Tentorio 2022a.

designer. As a director he has worked with Gabriele Salvatores, Elio de Capitani, Francesco Frongia. As an actor, he is capable of modulating his voice, changing his body, and making his age unpredictable (he could look older as a young man and is now able to 'rejuvenate', if necessary): from the sensual Puck to the repulsing usurer Don Marzio (*La bottega del caffè*), he has adapted to all roles, from one production to another or even within the same performance, as in *SdisOré* (Bentoglio *et al.* 2013, 116).

The individual paths of the actors intersect, but they also follow their own inspiration. In the productions I have examined, Bruni and Marinelli played respectively mother (Bruni) and daughter (Marinelli) in *Elettra Mai Nata* (rehearsed, never actually staged), the protagonist and his mother in three versions of *Hamlet*, and in *Oresteia* (Marinelli as Clytemnestra and Gertrude, Bruni as Hamlet and Orestes). They shared the stage in three versions of *Sogno di una notte d'estate* (based on *Midsummer Night's Dream*). Bruni also played Eddy in *Greek* (by Steven Berkoff), Apollo and Admetus in *Alcesti* (by Agnese Grieco), Orestes in *Coefore* (*Libation Bearers*) and *Eumenidi (Eumenides*) from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. He was also the protagonist of Testori's monologue *SdisOré*; he translated and performed *The Tempest*, directed by Bruni and Frongia as other recent productions (*Verso Tebe, Edipo Re, Re Lear*). Marinelli was also the protagonist of *Fedra* and *Alcesti* by Agnese Grieco and of Wolf's *Cassandra* (directed by Francesco Frongia).

Over the years, they have played a wide range of characters and also exchanged roles in different productions (Marinelli, for instance, was Helen-Elena in the first *Sogno* (*Midsummer Night's Dream*), Hippolyta in the second, and Titania too in the third edition. Bruni played Puck first, then Theseus and Oberon in the latest versions. These peculiar features not only make the Elfs excellent actors, but ones that are capable of wearing new roles on their skin like new clothes, layering one new role on top of the others, without shedding any of the previous ones. All the additional roles, including new, subsequent interpretations of a same character, are never erased or weakened by the others; on the contrary, they remain in the memory of the actors, in their bodies, minds and voices. They become integral parts of their own personalities and identities.

The entire company shares a basic, strong idea of their collective, coherent, and continuous research: as a consequence, correspondences

between texts, and respective productions, are far from episodic and casual accidents. Rather they are sought, desired, pursued and maintained over time. The work of the *playwright*, together with directors and actors, lends continuity to the whole process. They have thus been able to treat the classics and Shakespeare with the same attitude: aiming at revisiting ancient and older texts with the complicity of their audience. They have made the classics their own, and ours, by transforming them without any empty veneration: literally bringing them back to life.

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Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 147-171 (2024)

Shakespeare e l'Antico tra A Midsummer Night's Dream *e* Antony and Cleopatra

Massimo Stella

My welbeloued is like a roe, or a yong hart:
loe, *he standeth behinde our wall*, looking
forth of the windowes, shewing him selfe
through the grates
Song of Solomon (Geneva Bible, 1560)

Quando mi vide star pur fermo e duro,
turbato un poco disse: «Or vedi, figlio:
tra Beatrice e te è questo muro».

Come al nome di Tisbe aperse il ciglio
Piramo in su la morte, e riguardolla,
allor che 'l gelso diventò vermiglio…
Dante, *Purgatorio* XXVII, 34-39

Tout ce qui s'écrit renforce le mur
Jacques Lacan, *…ou pire*

Questo saggio riflette intorno ad alcune parole, o meglio intorno ad alcuni elementi di linguaggio agenti in due tra le più conosciute drammaturgie shakespeariane, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* e *Antony and Cleopatra*: la parola *wall* con il suo fantasma sinonimico *mural* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*); e le parole *immortal* e *falliable* con i loro rispettivi fantasmi antonimici: *mortal* e *unfalliable* (*Antony and Cleopatra*). Queste due drammaturgie vengono scelte in quanto l'una, il *Dream*, si attesta all'inizio, e l'altra, *Antony and Cleopatra*, alla fine di una lunga esplorazione intorno a quell'enigmatica esperienza cui si dà il nome di 'amore'. È in questo quadro che si intende qui riprendere l'idea di 'antico' non tanto e non solo come memoria testuale della tradizione classica, ma come una presenza che si coglie dentro e attraverso alcuni elementi di linguaggio, nella spirale del *word-play*, del *pun* e del *lapsus*, dell'errore linguistico e quindi del comico.

Keywords: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, wordplay, errore linguistico, comico, antico

Quale memoria? Quale Antico?

Shakespeare e la memoria dell'Antico: come intendere questa 'memoria'? E come intendere questo 'Antico'?

Nel meditare sul problema, una *mia* memoria, del tutto involontaria, si è riaccesa, ripresentandomisi d'improvviso alla mente. Chi diceva: il "palinsesto del cervello"?

> What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain? Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, oh reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished. And if, in the vellum palimpsest, lying amongst the other *diplomata* of human archives or libraries, there is anything fantastic or which moves to laughter, as oftentimes there is in the grotesque collisions of those successive themes, having no natural connection, which by pure accident have consecutively occupied the roll, yet, in our own heaven-created palimpsest, the deep memorial palimpsest of the brain, there are not and cannot be such incoherencies. The fleeting accidents of a man's life, and its external shows, may indeed be irrelate and incongruous but the organising principles which fuse into harmony, and gather about fixed predetermined centres, whatever heterogeneous elements life may have accumulated from without, will not permit the grandeur of human unity greatly to be violated. (De Quincey 2013, 135-36)

Quello straordinario libro di Thomas de Quincey che è *Suspiria de profundis*, quasi un'appendice alle *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, contiene il breve saggio intitolato *The Palimpsest of the Human Brain*. Una magnifica scrittura, ironica, inquieta e, a tratti, balenante di delirio laddove il raffinato capriccio metafisico-barocco dello stile si fa ansimante, quando non angosciante: ciò che vieppiù stupisce è che le poche pagine del *Palimpsest* anticipano il *Notes magico* di Freud (1925) al punto di farne davvero sbiadire la novità – il poeta è sempre in anticipo sul teorico. È un palinsesto la mente umana, una pergamena o un papiro su cui giacciono sovrapposti numerosi strati di scrittura vergati e quindi abrasi o dilavati, per lasciar posto, di volta in volta, agli strati seguenti, senza tuttavia che quelli precedenti vengano distrutti: ché, anzi, essi restano presenti nel sostrato scrittorio come engrammi latenti, come impronte o negativo sottotraccia, se preferiamo. Ma là dove de Quincey si fa davvero veggente è nel chiamare

la nostra attenzione sull'elemento comico, ancora una volta anticipando Freud, il Freud del *Motto di spirito* (1905). Non creda il lettore – afferma de Quincey – che questa analogia tra lo psichico umano e il palinsesto tenda al diporto retorico, al divertimento (*mirth*), no: piuttosto, se mai in essa c'è qualcosa di "fantastic" ovvero qualcosa che muove al riso ("anything… which moves to laughter"), ebbene ciò è dovuto alle incongruenze, agli scarti, alle collisioni, alle sconnessioni, alle incoerenze prodottesi tra le diverse tracce sovrapposte, un disordine, insomma, un caos che, tuttavia, ha il suo principio di unità e il suo ordine, nonostante la più variegata eterogeneità. È però nel finale del saggio che de Quincey stocca il suo colpo più potente. Supponiamo – così ci invita a immaginare de Quincey nelle battute iniziali del *Palimpsest* – che sulla pergamena si siano succeduti una tragedia greca, per esempio l'*Agamennone* di Eschilo o le *Fenicie* di Euripide; quindi il testo di un'agiografia ovvero di una leggenda eroica cristiana laddove il santo prende il posto di un Eracle o di un Teseo, sovrascritto alla tragedia in epoca alto-medievale; e infine il testo di un *romance* cavalleresco, sovrascritto all'agiografia in epoca basso-medievale. Nelle ultime righe del *Palimpsest*, de Quincey riprende il motivo delle 'tre scritture', facendo di ciascuna di esse la metafora di un diverso stadio dello sviluppo psichico umano: la tragedia greca corrisponde all'infanzia, la leggenda agiografica alla fanciullezza, il *romance* cavalleresco alla prima giovinezza. Quale sarà la traccia più indelebile tra queste?

> The bewildering romance, light tarnished with darkness, the semi-fabulous legend, truth celestial mixed with human falsehoods, these fade even of themselves, as life advances. The romance has perished that the young man adored; the legend has gone that deluded the boy; but the deep, deep tragedies of infancy, as when the child's hands were unlinked for ever from his mother's neck, or his lips for ever from his sister's kisses, these remain lurking below all, and these lurk to the last. Alchemy there is none of passion or disease that can scorch away these immortal impresses. (De Quincey 2013, 137)

Quella tragica: le profonde tragedie dell'infanzia ("the deep tragedies of infancy"), quando le braccia del bambino furono per sempre strappate dal collo della madre, o le sue labbra per sempre separate da quelle della sorella… queste tragedie restano in agguato sotto le altre per sempre. Non c'è alchimia che possa dilavare tali impronte

immortali. Che è come a dire che la natura dello psichico umano, del palinsesto umano è intrinsecamente, strutturalmente traumatica e quindi inconscia. Che è, infine, l'assioma fondamentale da cui prende le mosse l'ermeneutica psicoanalitica.

È dunque di *questa* memoria che io vorrei scrivere nelle pagine che seguono: 'memoria', *mnemosyne*, che, per sineddoche, *pars pro toto*, designa lo psichico e i suoi movimenti. Ma lo psichico, oltre che esperienzialmente traumatico, è anche strutturalmente e intrinsecamente linguistico: nell'analogia giocata da Thomas de Quincey la scrittura è *avatar* del linguaggio. Prima che Lacan enunciasse la celebre formula secondo cui *l'incoscient est structuré comme un langage*, Freud ci ha mostrato, con la sua *Traumdeutung*, che il più tipico prodotto dell'inconscio, il sogno, è un dispositivo linguistico, un oggetto verbo-visivo, come lo è il rebus, in cui i pensieri onirici latenti, "die unbewussten Traumgedanken" (Freud [1900] 1961, 234) sono presi dentro il linguaggio. Il che rivela come il linguaggio non sia un'attività volontaria, almeno per la sua maggior parte. Lacan andrà oltre, affermando che il Soggetto si fa strada nel Linguaggio sostenendosi sul Desiderio.

Ebbene, è proprio intorno ad alcune parole, o meglio intorno ad alcuni elementi di linguaggio agenti in due tra le più conosciute drammaturgie shakespeariane, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* e *Antony and Cleopatra*, che io vorrei riflettere qui insieme ai lettori: la parola *wall* con il suo fantasma sinonimico *mural* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*); e le parole *immortal* e *falliable* con i loro rispettivi fantasmi antonimici: *mortal* e *unfalliable* (*Antony and Cleopatra*). E se poi scelgo queste due drammaturgie è perché, come credo di mostrare, l'una, il *Dream*, si attesta all'inizio, e l'altra, *Antony and Cleopatra*, alla fine di una lunga esplorazione intorno a quell'enigmatica esperienza cui si dà il nome di 'amore'.

E l'Antico? Come intendere l''Antico' in questo quadro? Non certo come memoria testuale della tradizione classica. Beninteso, non che questo tipo di 'memoria' non vi sia o che l'Antico non possa essere designato e compreso anche così. È notissimo, d'altra parte, come *A Midsummer Night's Dream* sia un *patchwork* di numerose tessere estrapolate dalle *belles lettres* greche e romane; così come sappiamo, quanto a *Antony and Cleopatra*, che, nel delineare il suo ritratto della coppia impareggiabile, Shakespeare segue molto da vicino, spesso alla lettera, il testo della *Vita Antonii* di Plutarco secondo la traduzio-

ne di Thomas North, per non parlare delle molte altre incastonature che rimandano ad un amplissimo arco di scritture, dalle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio, al *Corpus Hermeticum* al *De rerum natura*. E, forse, a questo proposito, non c'è più nulla da aggiungere: voglio dire che se l'Antico è inteso nella prospettiva della ricezione, della riscrittura, della citazione, della risemantizzazione, credo che il lavoro filologico abbia ormai esaurito tutte – o quasi – le questioni. L'Antico di cui intendo parlare è tutt'altro: è preso dentro e attraverso alcuni elementi di linguaggio, nella spirale del *word-play*, del *pun* e del *lapsus*, dell'errore linguistico e quindi del comico, che più sopra evocavamo: le parole intorno a cui rifletteremo vengono infatti dalla bocca d'una combriccola di artigiani ignoranti e pasticcioni e di un altrettanto ignorante contadino egiziano, un *rural fellow*, veri e propri *intrusi* nel mondo del linguaggio inteso come Legge e codice letterario. Per dirla con un'espressione molto efficace del Roland Barthes di *S/Z* (1970), l'Antico che mi interessa osservare è dunque catturato in quel gioco di 'circolazione di linguaggio', *circulation de langage*, in cui consiste ciò che chiamiamo testo: non il testo come 'forma' e 'ordine' e codificazione retorica, bensì e tutt'affatto diversamente come materia-in-movimento, come potenziale: come luogo non dello 'scritto' e della 'lettura', ma – direbbe ancora il Barthes di *S/Z* – dello scrivibile (*scriptible*) e del leggibile (*lisible*).

Wall/Mural

Vorrei indurre il lettore ad un esercizio di immaginazione, e non per una mia trovata peregrina: *imagination* è parola-chiave nel mondo di *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "And as imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen / Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name" (V.i.14-17)[1]: ricordiamo tutti questi versi di Teseo in cui troviamo già formulata l'analogia freudiana tra linguaggio poetico e lavoro onirico.

Immaginiamo, dunque: in che modo la storia di Piramo e Tisbe è mai potuta entrare e rimanere impigliata nelle reti di quella straordinaria creazione cui diamo il nome di *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Immaginiamo… L'amore è un gioco a mancarsi: non è forse questo che ci

1 Si cita secondo l'edizione Arden (Shakespeare 1979).

suggeriscono le avventure notturne e boscherecce delle due coppie di amanti, presi a loro volta nelle baruffe tra il re e la regina delle fate? E tutto ciò nella più completa incoscienza, della quale il *pharmakon* ottenuto dalla spremitura del fiore incantato è figura. Il discorso amoroso, *le discours amoureux*, dice Roland Barthes, è un *dis-currere*, un correre di qua e di là, etimologicamente, senza meta – come gli amanti del *Dream* fanno nel bosco di Atene, ma potrebbe anche trattarsi della foresta di Arden o di quella del *Furioso* – all'inseguimento di un oggetto che ci si nega perché è la proiezione della nostra mancanza ovvero un *fantasma immaginario*. Il soggetto della recita che gli artieri mettono in scena per omaggiare le nozze di Teseo e Ippolita è una duplicazione ecoica di questa situazione. I due amanti dell'antica storia babilonese sono infatti separati dal divieto delle rispettive famiglie; e quando poi, ribellandosi – proprio come Ermia e Lisandro – cercano quindi di ricongiungersi, non riescono né a godere, né a morire insieme. Semmai, possiamo dire che la *mise en abîme* della recita inscenata dagli artigiani volge in tragedia – con la morte degli amanti – l'*happy end* – ovvero le triplici nozze – del *plot* principale: questa torsione al tragico ha un senso preciso di cui parleremo tra poco. Gli amanti infelici del mito potrebbero essere chiunque; potrebbero essere, per esempio, due ragazzi tra i quattrodici e i sedici anni del tempo d'oggi – dico "oggi" intendendo l'*hic et nunc* acronico e strutturalmente contemporaneo della rappresentazione. Potrebbero essere dunque Giulietta e Romeo, *quella* Giulietta e *quel* Romeo che vediamo parlare e agire sulla scena di *Romeo and Juliet*, non gli archetipi novellistici della tradizione italiana e francese (da Bandello a Pierre Boaistuau). E, sì, potrebbero essere anche Piramo e Tisbe, la coppia d'invenzione ovidiana, che conobbe un vastissimo successo nelle letterature medievali e primo-moderne. Sta di fatto, tuttavia, che il Piramo e la Tisbe di Shakespeare sono due attori maschi: l'uno recita la parte di un tessitore che, dato il suo nome, Bottom, saremmo indotti a immaginare come un ragazzone di campagna bello robusto e magari anche un po' tozzo, cervello un po' corto e tutto vanagloria viriloide, anche se il suo nome, Bottom, rimanda più al deretano che al fallo – *bottom of thread*, come chiosa il dotto Samuel Johnson nelle sue note di commento al *Dream* per la celebre edizione settecentesca dell'opera completa di Shakespeare da lui co-diretta, significa "rocchetto di filo", cioè qualcosa di compatto, tendenzialmente cilindrico e duro, consistente: ambiguità voluta tra il

fallico e l'anale? –; l'altro attore, che impersona Tisbe, si chiama Flute, e, *nomen-omen*, fa il mestiere del *bellows-mender*, l'aggiusta-mantici. Il mantice è, di fatto, un budello attraverso cui passa dell'aria, un budello che si gonfia e si sgonfia d'un *flatus*: siamo qui completamente immersi nell'universo del ventre, nell'universo del gastroenterico che, mi sembra, esclude l'insorgenza di qualsivoglia fantasma fallico: è tutto mollezza, Flute, a cominciare dall'esilissima voce simil-femminile. A dire il vero, mentre sto scrivendo queste righe, mi viene alla mente il celeberrimo duo Laurel & Hardy, ovvero Stanlio e Ollio: non sarebbero perfetti Ollio nella parte di Bottom e Stanlio in quella di Tisbe? Soprattutto se ce li immaginiamo nel doppiaggio italiano (uno dei rarissimi casi di doppiaggio arricchente): "Ooooo Tisbe, b*o*ciami attraverso il b*i*uco del mu*r*o" – *(frignando)* "Ollio, b*o*cio solo il b*i*uco!". Sicché, che mai avrà a che fare la memoria dell'Antico con quest'uso shakespeariano del racconto di Ovidio ed eventualmente di tutte le numerose altre riscritture che, da Ovidio, giungono fino alla modernità matura del drammaturgo? È in qualche modo significativo che Shakespeare rispolveri quei due nomi, Piramo e Tisbe, e la vicenda che è loro legata? Oppure no? E, se sì, in che senso? Oppure ancora, che si tratti di una tradizione antica è del tutto indifferente ai fini del dramma shakespeariano?

Io penso che la memoria dell'antico scatti, nella mente del drammaturgo al lavoro, in ragione d'un 'clic' linguistico, una mera scintilla in sé, quel tipico insidiarsi nell'orecchio d'una parola ronzante come un assillo, una parola-tormento, eppure portatrice non solo del gioco ilaro-tragico, ma anche di molteplici, imprevedibili effetti immaginari, quasi si trattasse del meraviglioso teatro d'ombre proiettato da una lanterna magica. Al centro una sola parola: *muro*. *Muro*: è per quella parola, per quell'immagine dei due amanti sussurranti nella fessura nel muro, che Shakespeare ripesca l'antica storia. Per averla letta nella magnifica traduzione di Arthur Golding, certamente, ma altrettanto nella lingua originale, anche a spizzichi. E chissà… che l'abbia pure vista riproporre in qualche spettacolo popolare più o meno improvvisato e abborracciato da un'improbabile compagnia di artigiani, in qualche villaggio della campagna o piuttosto a Londra stessa, un po' come avviene in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? O forse si trattava di un teatro di marionette per i miserabili ignoranti della piazza?

Dicevamo: ciò che cattura l'orecchio di Shakespeare è la parola *muro*. Babilonia è la città dalle alte mura di mattoni, *coctilibus muris*:

> Pyramus et Thisbe, iuvenum pulcherrimus alter,
> altera, quas Oriens habuit, praelata puellis,
> contiguas tenuere domos, *ubi dicitur altam*
> *coctilibus muris cinxisse Semiramis urbem*
> (IV, 55-58)

che così suona nella lingua di Golding (2000):

> Within the towne (*of whose huge walles so monstrous high and thicke*
> *The fame is given Semyramis for making them of bricke*)
> Dwelt hard together two yong folke in houses joynde so nere
> That under all one roofe well nie both twaine conveyed were
> (IV, 67-70)

e si sarà notato quanto l'inglese enfatizzi: *huge walles so monstrous high and thicke*, gigantesche e spesse mura… Il termine cui Ovidio ricorre per indicare il muro al quale Piramo e Tisbe si "incollano" per sussurrarvi attraverso la sottile fessura (*tenui rima*), è *paries*:

> Fissus erat *tenui rima*, quam duxerat olim,
> cum fieret, *paries* domui communis utrique;
> id vitium nulli per saecula longa notatum
> (quid non sentit amor?) primi vidistis amantes
> et vocis fecistis iter
> (65-69)

reso da Golding:

> *The wall that parted house from house* had riven therein *a crany*
> Which shronke at making of the wall. This fault not markt of any
> Of many hundred yeares before (what doth not love espie)
> These lovers first of all found out, and made a way whereby
> To talke togither secretly
> (IV, 83-88).

Sia in Ovidio che in Golding si istituisce così un gioco paraetimologico-paraonomastico tra *paries*/*the wall that parted*, da un lato, e, dall'altro, *patres* (i genitori degli amanti), reso in inglese con *parentes*/*parents* (l'oscillazione grafica non è casuale in questo caso): come

se *patres/parentes/parents* fossero la *paries* che *se-para* gli amanti: vuol forse dire tutto ciò che il gioco del desiderio non può avvenire se non in relazione a, e attraverso, un ostacolo, qualcosa che *ob-stat*, che sta davanti e in mezzo, impedendo la vista e il contatto? Il *paries/wall that par-ted* assolve mai quella che il Lacan del seminario IV sulla *Relation d'objet* chiamerebbe la "funzione-velo"?

> Il velo (*voile*), il sipario (*rideau*) davanti a qualcosa, è ciò che meglio permette di dare un'immagine della situazione fondamentale dell'amore. Si può persino dire che con la presenza del sipario, ciò che è al di là come mancanza, tende a realizzarsi come immagine. Sul velo si dipinge l'assenza. Non è altro che la funzione del sipario come tale. Il sipario acquista il suo valore, il suo essere e la sua consistenza nell'essere appunto ciò su cui si proietta e si immagina l'assenza. (Lacan 1994, 153)

Il velo, il sipario-muro separa, sì, ma al contempo fa legame: gli amanti fanno legame proprio in virtù di quell'assenza che sta al di là. La barriera è la condizione stessa del suo oltrepassamento: Piramo e Tisbe trasgrediscono nel tentativo di incontrarsi.

Eppure: che cosa ci attende *dall'altra parte*? Che cosa pensiamo di trovare *dall'altra parte*? L'oggetto? Il bene-amato? L'altra metà di noi, come vorrebbe il mito dell'androgino e degli uomini rotondi raccontato da Aristofane nel *Simposio*? Che cosa pensano di trovare Piramo-Romeo e Tisbe-Giulietta, dopo aver tra(n)s-gredito (*transgredior*)? Sappiamo bene che al di là della *paries* ci sono una leonessa (leonessa in Ovidio, leone in Shakespeare) assetata dopo il pasto cruento: un animale vorace, feroce… e un *segno* frainteso: il *velo* di Tisbe – *velamen* dice Ovidio, *mantle* Golding – squarciato e sporcato di sangue, che innescherà una ricaduta di fraintendimenti mortali. Ma andiamo per ordine.

Dicevamo che il velo-sipario ostacola, ma non impedisce: d'altra parte, quella parete è *fessa*! nel muro c'è una fessura, *rima/crany/chink*, quasi impercettibile, tant'è vero che non fu notata per secoli, se non dai due amanti… e tuttavia c'è, e si estende per l'intera altezza della parete.

> *Fissus erat tenui rima*, quam duxerat olim,
> cum fieret, *paries* domui communis utrique;
> *id vitium nulli per saecula longa notatum*
> (quid non sentit amor?) primi vidistis amantes
> et vocis fecistis iter
> (65-69).

> The *wall that parted* house from house had riven therein a *crany*
> Which shronke at making of the wall. This *fault* not markt of any
> Of many hundred yeares before (what doth not love espie?)
> These lovers first of all found out.
> (IV, 83-86)

Il muro è *fallato*, *vitium/fault*: reca su di sé la crepa del *manque*, che lascia penetrare il *flatus vocis* degli amanti.

> id vitium […] primi vidistis amantes
> et *vocis fecistis iter*; tutaeque per illud
> *murmure* blanditiae minimo transire solebant.
> Saepe, ubi constiterant hinc Thisbe, Pyramus illinc,
> inque vices fuerat captatus *anhelitus oris*,
> «invide» dicebant «paries, quid amantibus obstas?
> (IV, 68-73)

> This fault not markt of any […]
> Of many hundred yeares before (what doth not love espie?)
> These lovers first of all found out, and made a way whereby
> *To talke togither* secretly, and *through the same did goe*
> *Their loving whisprings* verie light and safely to and fro.
> (IV, 85-88)

Tra l'assurdo e il surreale, la fessura diventa così un *ori-fizio* ovvero un buco, un foro, un'apertura che, letteralmente, *fa da bocca*: *ori-ficium* (da *os, oris* e *facio*). E allora si aggiunge un ulteriore elemento di gioco linguistico: le pareti, i muri mormorano e hanno orecchi, vuole la metafora! *Murus* e il *murmur* della mormorazione amorosa, ("tutaeque per illud *murmure* blanditiae minimo transire solebant") si legano e sovrappongono in un vero e proprio cortocircuito fonico, che risemantizza eroticamente la metafora aurale-orale dell'espressione idiomatica: *walls have ears*; *if walls could talk*… e d'altra parte non è la bocca la prima zona erogena? La bocca che succhia il latte della madre? – ricordiamocene quando arriveremo alla morte di Cleopatra.

Ma quale inclinazione prende, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, questa filiera di giochi linguistici che si palleggiano tra Ovidio e Golding? Il *word-play* ovidiano travasato quindi in inglese, diventa *lazzo*, verbale e gestuale, nella scrittura shakespeariana. Il potenziale comico intrinseco alla storia ovidiana di Piramo e Tisbe risiede tutto nel capriccio della lingua. E il drammaturgo, del quale gli artigiani

attori-allestitori sono l'*avatar*, lo rende esplicito, effettuale. Nel suo seminario VIII dedicato, tra l'altro, alla lettura ravvicinata del *Simposio* platonico, Lacan affermava: "l'amour est un sentiment comique" (Lacan 1991, 12). Gli amanti sono irrimediabilmente figure comiche. E ciò non ha a che fare con il cosiddetto 'genere' dell'espressione poetica, ciò che chiamiamo 'commedia'. Tant'è vero che chi conosce un poco Shakespeare sa bene che una commedia può essere perfettamente tragica e una tragedia può essere perfettamente comica. Ciò ha piuttosto a che fare con la struttura del desiderio. Comici sono gli amanti perché presi in una *comedy of errors*, per dirla con una formula shakespeariana, che fatalmente li intrappola: l'*error* fondamentale essendo quello di chiedere all'altro ciò che non ha, ovvero quella mancanza, quell'assenza, quel vuoto, che riguarda solo me e che io poi idolatro nell'altro come *agalma*, ovvero come *fallo*, senza sapere che il fallo è la significazione (il significante) della mia mancanza. Non è tutto questo una vera *clownerie*, dove il fallo equivale un po' al naso del pagliaccio? Il fallo mi rappresenta, per metonimia, ma soprattutto per metafora – "l'amour comme signifiant… est une métaphore", dice Lacan ancora nel seminario VIII (14) – come il naso rosso di gomma rappresenta il clown. Il fallo è figura tipicamente comica – come tutta la ritualità antica ci insegna, d'altra parte. E gli amanti sono dei clowns, a loro insaputa, naturalmente. Non a caso Aristofane, nel suo discorso simposiaco sugli uomini rotondi delle origini, evocava i saltimbanchi, gli acrobati, *hoi kybistontes* (Platone 1992, 190a) – avremo modo di riparlare più tardi della metafora circense.

Piramo e Tisbe sono due clowns involontari, come tutti gli amanti. Ecco perché nel *Dream* li vediamo impersonati da buffoni, inconsapevoli di esserlo, come Bottom e Flute: vorrebbero, loro, gli artigiani, fare le cose per bene ed essere degni del nobile *parterre* che li attende, ma sbagliano tutto per ignoranza. E tuttavia, quella loro ignoranza riguarda tutti noi. Non a caso Teseo sceglie proprio questo spettacolo per allietare la veglia delle proprie nozze, tra le molte proposte che il cerimoniere gli sottopone. L'ignoranza di Bottom e di Flute, e di Quince e di Snut e di Starveling, è la *nostra* ignoranza del desiderio: e quand'anche, come Teseo e Ippolita – che, infatti, *non* sono amanti – sapessimo, per esperienza, che l'amore, cioè il gioco del desiderio, è un'illusione, restiamo nondimeno ignoranti su ciò che ci manca. Sicché, proprio in virtù della loro *epistemica*

ignoranza – possiamo definirla così? –, accumulando errori, strafalcioni, doppi sensi non intenzionali, versi maldestri e pessimi, gli artigiani illuminano la vera natura dell'amore. Ma non solo: illuminano altresì qualcosa di fondamentale ed essenziale sul gioco del teatro e della lingua poetica. Tutti ricorderemo che quando Quince recita il prologo fallisce tutte le pause e, fallendo le pause, sposta e sovverte il senso di ciò che vorrebbe dire: 'noi siamo venuti qui per offendervi di proposito e non per dilettarvi, ma per farvi pentire di assistere a questa recita!' Ecco, in estrema sintesi, il messaggio-*lapsus* del prologo, che è poi quella torsione al tragico cui accennavamo più sopra. Come a dire che la dislocazione, lo spostamento, la trasposizione, la trasformazione, la traduzione intesa come trasporto (*trans-ducere*) trasformativo – *translate* è termine chiave nel dramma e designa infatti la metamorfosi magica di Bottom: "you are translated!" (III.i.114), dicono i suoi compagni quando lo vedono ricomparire con la testa d'asino – e infine la *metamorfosi* ovvero *translatio*, appunto, per nominare con un solo nome tutti i processi che ho appena designato, descrive *tout court* lo statuto del *linguaggio*; il poeta, dal canto suo, lavora proprio con questa essenza del linguaggio che è l'*error*, facendola continuamente scintillare sotto *l'illusione del senso* – dal momento che il senso non appartiene al campo del linguaggio, ma è piuttosto una proiezione, un'allucinazione del nostro delirio immaginario. È così che il linguaggio fa di noi parlanti degli attori comici a nostra insaputa.

Dicevo che nel *Dream* il *word-play* ovidiano diventa *lazzo*: e fa parte del lazzo assegnare al *muro/parete*, così come al chiaro di luna e al leone, un ruolo da agire sul palcoscenico:

> Snout
> In this same interlude it doth befall
> That I, one Snout by name, present a wall;
> And such a wall, as I would have you think,
> That had in it a crannied hole or chink,
> Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisby,
> Did whisper often very secretly.
> This loam, this rough-cast and this stone doth show
> That I am that same wall; the truth is so:
> And this the cranny is, right and sinister,
> Through which the fearful lovers are to whisper
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.i.154-63)

Immaginiamo che *Muro/Wall*, mentre parla, rappresenti la fessura, *chink*, divaricando indice e medio della mano alzata, sicché quel muro diventa un vero e proprio *paysage vaginal*: immaginiamo le risate quando Piramo-Bottom chiede a Muro: "Oh muro, mostrami la tua fessura":

> Bottom
> Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall,
> Show me thy chink, to blink through with mine eyne!
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream,* V.i.174-75).

Diventa il muro un *tableau*, un *tableau*-sipario, un *tableau-voile* su cui, come in un'epifania, appare l'immagine del sesso femminile, perché è esattamente questo che avviene tra i nostri scoppi di risa: siamo forse di fronte a un *tableau* antesignano di quell'altro ben più celebre, e ben più avanti nei secoli, che è *L'origine du monde* di Gustave Courbet? Lacan – che dell'*Origine du monde* fu l'ultimo proprietario anche se non ne scrisse mai, e non ne fece mai menzione esplicita – affermava, nel passo del seminario IV sulla *Relation d'objet* già evocato poco sopra, che sul *tableau-voile* intorno al quale ruota il movimento del desiderio si dipinge l'immagine dell'altro (cioè la nostra) come assenza, istillando in noi la domanda: ma dov'è mai l'*oggetto*? Che c'è al di là del velo, del muro, al di là di quella fessura che ci lascia immaginare il Fantasma? Ho già introdotto questa domanda e adesso è il momento di affrontarla. Al di là del muro non c'è niente: non c'è l'oggetto sacro, l'*agalma*, il fallo. O meglio: c'è la mancanza – e non è poco! – che la parola fallo designa. Ma non solo…

Al di là del muro c'è una tomba, una *morus alba* destinata a diventare *nigra*, e un leone *quaerens quem devoret*. Gli amanti si danno appuntamento alla tomba del re Nino nei cui pressi si trovano una fonte e un albero di gelso. Scenario infero e sacrificale-lustrale: espiatorio, potremmo dire – l'altare, la sorgente, l'albero. *Muro/Wall* viene oltrepassato, caduta è la sua funzione:

> Snout
> Thus have I, Wall, my part discharged so;
> And, being done, thus Wall away doth go
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream,* V.i.202-03).

Teseo e Demetrio commentano:

> Theseus
> Now is the *mural* down between the two neighbours.
> Demetrius
> No remedy, my lord, when walls are so wilful to hear
> without warning.
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream,* V.i.204-06)

Il commento salace di Teseo – "ora il muro tra i due vicini è caduto" allude al crollo del sipario che impedisce il sesso – introduce una nuova parola che rilancia tutto il gioco linguistico: *mural*. Questa parola non si trova né nei *quarto* né nel *Folio*. I *quarto* riportano tutt'altra lezione (*Moon used*), che infatti è sospetta d'essere interpolazione d'un'indicazione di scena, mentre il *Folio* legge *morall*. *Mural* è pertanto un emendamento che dipende dalla lezione del *Folio*. Sono gli editori settecenteschi, Theobald e Pope, a proporre: *mure all down* (Theobald) e *mural down* (Pope): *mure* e *mural* sono di fatto equivalenti nel senso. E, a mio avviso, si tratta di un emendamento molto verosimile: *mure* e/o *mural* fanno *pun* con *morall* (la "morale", nel senso soprattutto di "morale della storia"), in particolare se pensiamo che probabilmente, nella *original pronunciation*, *mural* era scandito (e quindi pronunciato) *moo-ral*.[2] Ciò che però non si osserva è che se il drammaturgo è ricorso alla parola di origine latina per designare il muro, *mural* (o *mure*), lo fa per memoria del *ludus* ovidiano: *mural*/*mure* gioca con *morus*, l'albero del gelso, e con *mora*, la bacca del gelso, ma altresì con *mora* nel senso di 'indugio' e, infine, con *mors*. Riandiamo al testo latino, là dove Piramo decide di uccidersi quando, vedendo a terra il *velamen* insanguinato e lacerato di Tisbe, pensa che l'oggetto del suo desiderio sia stato divorato da una belva feroce:

> […] Desmisit in ilia ferrum
> nec *mora*, ferventi *moriens* e vulnere traxit
> et iacuit resupinus humo: cruor emicat alte,
> non aliter, quam cum vitiato fistula plumbo

2 Si veda *n. ad loc*. dell'edizione Arden (Shakespeare 1979). È da ricordare al lettore che Shakesepare ricorre alla parola *mure* e non *wall* per "muro", una sola altra volta, in *Henry IV, part II,* IV.iii.117-20: "No, no; he cannot long hold out these pangs. / Th'incessant care and labour of his mind / Hath wrought the *mure* that should confine it in / So thin that life looks through, and will break out" (Shakespeare 2016).

scinditur et tenui stridente foramine longas
eiaculatur aquas atque ictibus aëra rumpit.
Arborei fetus adspergine caedis in atram
vertuntur faciem, madefactaque sanguine radix
purpureo tingit pendentia *mora* colore
(IV, 120-27).

Piramo si immerge il pugnale che aveva al fianco nel ventre e, senza indugiare, *nec mora*, morendo, *moriens*, lo estrae dalla ferita gorgogliante… un getto di sangue ne schizza, *eiaculatur*, tanto in alto come fa lo zampillo d'acqua da un tubo forato, e il fanciullo cade a terra esanime, mentre quel suo sangue, penetrando nelle radici del gelso, *morus*, ne tinge di rosso scuro le bacche, *mora*, che fino ad allora erano bianche. Ecco la *metamorfosi*: dell'acqua in sangue, del bianco in rosso, metamorfosi sessuale ben evidente: non credo che sia il caso di insistere sul fatto che tale morte mima il movimento dell'atto sessuale.

Mure/mural morus mora mors: per via di *metafora*, che è sempre una *metamorfosi*, per via di spostamento, trasporto, dislocazione, traslazione-traduzione, *translatio*, il linguaggio congiura a nostra insaputa e ci significa, ci assegna un posto *non nostro*, proprio come fa *la formula magica*, lo *spell*: non è forse la scena del *Dream* infestata dalla presenza degli spiriti, le fate? Il *mambo jambo* della lingua poetica: che funziona come il succo stregato del fiore chiamato *love-in-idleness*, la *viola tricolor*, la viola del pensiero, fiore incantato, anch'esso divenuto color del sangue perché – così dice Oberon – ferito un tempo dalla freccia di Amore, al pari delle more bianche del gelso imporporate dal sangue di un amante.

Muro moro mora mor-te: ma qual è la parola-fantasma, la parola nascosta, che anima tutta questa catena? AMOR, l'amore: come sappiamo, è proprio Ovidio (insieme a Properzio e Tibullo) ad aver canonizzato il *wordplay* palindromo e anagrammatico: AMOR-MORS-MORA. Le *Heroides* (10, 82), ad esempio, ci consegnano questo modello di vero ipogramma, come il Saussure studioso del linguaggio poetico l'avrebbe chiamato: "Morsque minus poenae quam mora mortis" da leggere: "**Mors**que minus poenae qu-**am mor-a mor-tis**". Le sillabe scivolano l'una sull'altra e scorrono al di sopra delle parole travalicandone la segmentazione, e fluiscono avanti e indietro, creando altri e alternativi movimenti e cortocircuiti di senso, in una masticazione magica. D'altra parte il *mot-tître* del poema di Ovidio,

Met-amor-phoseon libri, contiene la parola "amor". L'amore, o meglio, il desiderio è un'energia metamorfica, trasformatrice: la sua *poussée* spinge l'amante a desiderare di trasformarsi nell'altro per trovare in lui quell'oggetto che non c'è o meglio che c'è (solo) come assenza, il fallo/*fault*. Per questo *amor* è *mora*: è ritardo, è discronia. Gli amanti non sono mai insieme nello stesso tempo, non possono fare uno. Così è per Romeo e Giulietta: come Romeo giunge al sepolcro *prima* che Giulietta si svegli dall'effetto del filtro non sapendo che si tratta di morte apparente perché la missiva inviatagli è andata perduta nelle *more* della consegna, Flute-Tisbe arriva *prima* di Piramo-Bottom, che è invece *in ritardo* sul luogo dell'appuntamento, e così lei, anziché Piramo, incontra il leone. Tra gli amanti c'è sempre una *mora*: tra Piramo e Tisbe il *muro*, tra Giulietta e Romeo l'*avatar* di quel muro che è il balcone, e tra Antonio e Cleopatra, che si rincorrono come l'Atalanta e l'Ippomene del mito (ognora ovidiano), per tutto il corso dell'azione, non riuscendo mai ad essere insieme nello stesso tempo e nello stesso luogo, c'è il muro del *monument*, ovvero del mausoleo, del sepolcro in cui la regina si rinchiude, quel muro che l'ormai esanime Antonio, per ricevere l'ultimo bacio, è costretto da Cleopatra a scalare, facendosi 'tirare su' da lei e dalle sue donne, come in un numero circense – gli amanti sono dei comici acrobati: *kybistontes*, diceva Aristofane nel *Simposio* – un numero circense che trasforma l'apice tragico in assurda commedia.

Dicevo che, *nel ritardo* – *mora* – *amor* può imbattersi nel leone: Tisbe incontra la crudele belva. Scrive l'apostolo Pietro (o chi per lui) ai fedeli delle province centrali dell'Asia minore: "Sobrii estote, vigilate. Adversarius vester Diabolus tamquam leo rugiens circuit quaerens quem devoret" (*Pietro 1,* 5, 8). "Be sober and watch: for your adversarie the devil as a roaring lyon walketh about, seking whom he may devour", così traduce *Geneva Bible* (1560). Chissà se questa memoria evangelica, interferendo con quella del mito (accade spesso agli elisabettiani), ha scintillato nella mente del drammaturgo al lavoro… il leone divoratore, Satana, immagine dei desideri della carne. E d'altra parte, che il leone vorace rappresenti il sesso è piuttosto evidente: il *velamen*/*mantle* di Tisbe lacerato e insanguinato dalla belva è patentemente figura della verginità violata. Un altro esilarante *lapsus* di Piramo/Bottom ce lo fa intendere, se mai noi non lo cogliessimo:

> Bottom
> O wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions frame?
> Since lion vile hath here *deflower'd* my dear
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream,* V.i.280-81)

Vorrebbe dire, Piramo-Bottom, *devoured*, "divorare", ma dice *deflower'd,* "deflorare": la caduta linguistica parla da sola. Ma la paura di essere divorati, l'immagine fobica delle fauci spalancate a inghiottire, evoca qualcosa di più essenziale – e forse di terribile – intorno alla natura del desiderio, ovvero il fatto che il desiderio è insaziabile: il desiderio è onnipotenza inappagata e inappagabile che si nutre all'infinito del proprio vuoto e, come ogni creatura inappagata e inappagabile, è sempre in agguato, sempre in cerca di ciò che divorerà, sconfinando nel mortifero: *amor/mors*. Come non ricordare la Penthesilea del *Trauerspiel* kleistiano che sbrana come un feroce veltro da caccia l'effimero oggetto, Achille, del proprio sconfinato, inesaudibile desiderio?

Im/mortal, in/falliable

Per vent'anni dal 1953 al 1973, da *Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage* (1966), attraverso il seminario XIX, *… ou pire* (1971-72, 2011), fino al seminario XX, *Encore* (1975), Jacques Lacan si è – e ci ha – intrattenuto su un *word-play* che, a suo dire, gli è arrivato all'orecchio da alcuni (pessimi) versi di Antoine Tudal, in cui *amour* è rimato con *mur* (una rima degna di Piramo-Bottom)… e da qui il celebre conio, intrinsecamente comico, l'*A-mur*. Non è certo qui il caso di ripetere e ripercorrere una questione che i lacaniani, psicoanalisti e teorici, conoscono bene, ovvero il fatto che di fronte all'*amore* si erge un *muro*, il muro del linguaggio che congiura contro di noi *to our confusion*, per dirla al modo d'un poeta elisabettiano: per perderci. Non rievocherò dunque la questione e la sua evoluzione tra il '53 e il '73, ma vorrei ricordare qui al lettore un momento specifico di quella ventennale riflessione. Al di là del *muro* che si erge davanti all'*amore*, c'è quel niente che è il fallo, per un verso, ma, per l'altro, c'è il godimento, la *jouissance*. Ed è, il godimento, qualcosa da cui indietreggiamo, cui non osiamo avvicinarci, proprio come non ci avvicineremmo a una belva feroce, perché:

> où est-ce que ça gîte, la jouissance ? Qu'est ce qu'il y faut ? Un corps ! Pour jouir, il faut un corps. Même ceux qui font promesse des béatitudes éter-

> nelles ne peuvent le faire qu'à supposer que *le corps* s'y véhicule : *glorieux* ou pas, il doit y être. Faut un corps. Pourquoi ? Parce que la dimension de la jouissance, pour le corps, c'est la dimension de la *descente vers la mort*. (Lacan 2005, 19)

Al di là del *muro*, se lo oltrepassiamo procedendo verso quel vuoto assoluto – non il vuoto parziale del fallo, ma quel vuoto assoluto, dicevo, che è dell'ordine della Cosa, il godimento, c'è la morte: *deflower'd/devoured*… sentenziava il *lapsus* di Piramo-Bottom… E questo ci porta direttamente a Cleopatra.

La Cleopatra shakespeariana è *venus*. Non dico il teonimo *Venus*, almeno non in prima istanza, ma *venus*, l'antico neutro, nome di *cosa*, significante il campo di ciò che, con altra parola, chiamiamo 'amore': l'amore naturale, fisico, sessuale, il godimento, e ciò che lo suscita, velandolo: il piacere, la bellezza. Insomma: la *cosa* dell'amore. Per rendere nel nostro idioma quel neutro latino dovremmo forse dire "il venereo". Trasposto al femminile, l'antico neutro, *venus*, diventerà poi il nome della dea. *Venus* e *venus*, la Cleopatra di Shakespeare è l'ultima e la più alta esplorazione nell'universo dell''amore' che il drammaturgo abbia condotto. E non è un caso che tale esplorazione abbia luogo nello specchio dell'Antico. Il *décor* mitologico, di sapore tutto rinascimentale e italiano, raffaellesco e manieristico al modo di Giulio Romano, in virtù del quale Cleopatra si presenta esplicitamente come Venere – ricordiamo tutti i versi: "The barge she sat in like a burnish'd throne…" (II.ii.201)[3] – mentre Antonio è un Marte in corazza, *plated Mars* (I.i.4) – il paradigma degli amori di Venere e Marte costituisce l'ordito immaginario e visivo fondamentale dell'intero dramma – è lo strato più superficiale di una risorgenza dell'Antico che, sotto le convenzioni della memoria letteraria, diventa scena e luogo di studio dell'esperienza. Per dirlo in altri termini, l'Antico shakespeariano è ognora anti-tradizionale e intellettualmente sperimentale. Attraverso questa *Venere* rediviva che è Cleopatra, il drammaturgo indaga l'enigma del godimento, il *venus*, che è dell'ordine del mangiare.

Mi mangerà? "Will it eat me?" (V.ii.270) – chiede ironicamente Cleopatra al contadino che le reca l'aspide nella cesta di fichi.

3 Si cita secondo l'edizione Arden (Shakespeare 1995).

> Clown
> You must not think I am so simple but I know the devil himself will not eat a woman: I know that a woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not. But, truly, these same whoreson devils do the gods great harm in their women; for in every ten that they make, the devils mar five.
> (*Antony and Cleopatra,* V.ii.271-75)

Il contadino – nella cui *persona* mi piace immaginare sia disceso il poeta a dialogare con la sua protagonista – si dimostra capace d'una risposta all'altezza della domanda. Nemmeno il diavolo vorrebbe mangiare una donna. Sotto la vernice sottile d'un'apparente misoginia – e solo la *naïveté* più disarmata potrebbe prenderla per tale – il *rural fellow* dice qualcosa di assai potente: la donna non si può mangiare perché è insieme paradiso e inferno, cibo per gli dèi e piatto condito dal diavolo, un cibo tabù, un cibo sacro, sacro nel bene (paradiso) e nel male (inferno), e pertanto sacro *jenseits von Gut und Böse*. Immangiabile perché sconfinato e sconfinato perché in-definibile, paradiso *e* inferno, indefinibile perché infinito. D'altra parte, non diceva Enobarbus di Cleopatra che è "infinite variety" (II.ii.246)? e che persino i preti la benedicono quando è in fregola ("when she's riggish", II.ii.250)?

Ma quando in 'amore' si parla di 'divorare', lo sappiamo, è del *godimento* che si sta parlando, non dell''amore' e nemmeno del 'sesso'. E proprio il godimento, *venus*, è ciò che a Venere-Cleopatra un Marte-Antonio bisbetico e violento rimprovera – lui sì in modo maritale e patriarcale – quando la accusa, in uno dei suoi molti scoppi d'ira e di gelosia, di essere *insaziabile*: eri un boccone sul piatto del morto Cesare, anzi no, eri un avanzo caduto dal piatto di Gneo Pompeo… per non parlare delle ore più bollenti che ti sei spillata di nascosto sottraendone la notizia alle cronache popolari… Ecco dunque il rimprovero di Marte: Venere si fa assaggiare da tutti perché assaggia tutti… il linguaggio del cibo punta chiaramente al godere. Ed è vero: Cleopatra è eternamente affamata di godimento – non erra in ciò Antonio. Dove erra, è, piuttosto, nell'identificare il godimento con il sesso. La domanda che Antonio non può farsi è: come e di che cosa gode Cleopatra? La vediamo, in effetti, godere in scena, questa antica dea dell'amore, per due volte. Come gode e di che cosa? Gode da sola. Gode del suo fantasma: un fantasma d'infinito.

"I dreamt there was an emperor Antony: / oh such another dream that I might see / such another man!" (V.ii.75): e fa seguire, Cleopatra, a questo esordio, il resto della sua visione ad occhi aperti, visione in cui Antonio – che già è morto – le appare come un Kronos, un Saturno dell'età dell'oro, un dio dell'Abbondanza che forse solo Giulio Romano avrebbe potuto dipingere in una delle sue stupefacenti megalografie: le sue gambe a cavallo dell'Oceano, il braccio levato a far da pennacchio al mondo, la voce a contendere con l'armonia delle sfere celesti e un profluvio di oro e corone a circondarlo e piovere da lui… Gode, Cleopatra, di Antonio quando lui è morto, lo gode in sua assenza: lo gode e ne gode nell'Immaginario. Al contrario, Antonio, lui, nell'Immaginario, nel luogo del fantasma, si smarrisce. Perfetto, simmetrico *pendant* al sogno ad occhi aperti di Cleopatra è la cosiddetta 'scena delle nuvole'. Ormai sconfitto su tutti i fronti, e prossimo alla morte, Antonio si siede a guardare le nuvole: oggetti ingannevoli che possono assumere le più diverse forme, d'un drago, o d'una forcuta montagna o ancora d'un azzurro promontorio ricoperto d'alberi che inclinano la loro cima verso il nostro mondo… e poi quelle forme, sorte nello spazio di un batter d'occhio, con la stessa velocità con cui hanno preso sembianza, si disciolgono come acqua nell'acqua… Così si sente Antonio, inconsistente come il vapore di una nuvola: "I cannot hold my visible shape" (IV.xiv.14), dice – "Non posso trattenere la mia forma visibile", quasi a confessare: "mi sto dissolvendo", al pari di un cirro nell'aria. Nel luogo dell'Immaginario – perché non vi è dubbio che il mondo delle nuvole sia quello dell'Immaginario – Antonio non sa esser-ci, non si ritrova, si perde.

È però sulla scena della propria morte – la morte di Venere – che Cleopatra raggiunge l'apice del godimento, là dove il Corpo, questa volta, fa tutt'uno con l'Immaginario.

> Cleopatra
> Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there,
> That kills and pains not?
> (*Antony and Cleopatra,* V.ii.241)

Il serpentello del Nilo, che "uccide e non fa male": è Cleopatra ad aprire la danza del linguaggio in cui si disegna la sua morte. Il linguaggio, abbiamo detto, è un muro che sbarra la vista, ma, come il muro di Piramo e Tisbe, fosse pur per una quasi invisibile crepa, lascia intrave-

dere un al di là. "Uccide e non fa male": il fantasma del sesso. *To die* è sì morire, ma anche attingere alla *culmination* dell'orgasmo. E il nostro *rural fellow* non manca al gioco aperto da Cleopatra: attenta a toccarlo – le dice – perché il suo morso è *immortale*: "for his biting is *immortal*" (V.ii.245). Come Piramo-Bottom, il *rural fellow* è ignorante, non è *educated*, e sbaglia: vorrebbe dire *mortal*, ma dice il suo contrario – forse *deadly*, termine non latino e meno colto, lo avrebbe confuso di meno? Eppure quel *lapsus* cade come un fulmine sul tappeto di gioco. In che senso il morso del serpentello del Nilo è *immortale*? Si tratta di una specie di serpente – prosegue il *rural fellow* – che ha fatto morire molte donne, e anche molti uomini… non più tardi di ieri una donna molto onesta, eppure dedita a sdraiarsi… ovvero a mentire, "something given to lie" (V.ii.251) (l'omofonia sferra tiri mancini), cosa che – sdraiarsi e mentire – le donne non dovrebbero fare se non per un'intenzione onesta, ne è morta e ha quindi stilato una relazione molto buona, *a very good report*, su questo serpentello, sul come ne è morta e che pena ha sentito… e conclude: ma questo, questo qui, è un serpente speciale, diverso, "the worm is an odd worm", è davvero *fallibile*, "most falliable" (V.ii.256-57)! Secondo *lapsus*: l'ignorante vorrebbe dire *infallible*, ma dice, di nuovo, il suo contrario. Questa volta il contadino ha esagerato: un latinismo davvero troppo colto per lui e lo *fallisce*, appunto. In che senso mai il serpentello del Nilo potrebbe essere *fallibile*? E se provassimo a prendere i due *lapsus* alla lettera? Ci chiedevamo: in che modo il morso dell'aspide è *immortale*? E ora: in che modo l'aspide è *fallibile*? *Immortal*: forse perché il suo morso non muore mai, perché una volta che lo si è provato è per sempre e non si può più farne a meno? *Falliable*: forse perché è inaffidabile e ingannevole? Forse perché fa cadere in fallo? Ovvero: l'errore e la sua continua ripetizione? Non dice forse ciò qualcosa di vero sull'amore? un errore ossessivamente ripetuto e aggravato dal linguaggio – come non ricordare il sonetto proemiale dei *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* petrarcheschi… "in sul mio primo giovenile errore"? Veramente insidiosi i *lapsus* del contadino. E dunque sì: l'amore è quell'ingannarsi ossessivamente ripetuto e aggravato dal linguaggio. Ma l'amore, come dicevamo, non è il sesso: primo e fondamentale fraintendimento celato nella parola 'amore'. L'ambiguità del serpente confonde amore e sesso. Cleopatra, però, non vuole né l'errore, né la ripetizione dell'errore. Vuole l'Assoluto: si è aperta la via alla mèta del desiderio radicale. I *lapsus* del contadino sono dunque

anche veri *lapsus*. E pertanto negano ciò che vogliono dire, svelando un'ulteriore ambiguità: *mortale* e *infallibile*, *mortal* e *infallible*, è ciò che Cleopatra vuole, non lo strumento per raggiungerlo. Lo strumento in sé, il serpente ovvero il *fallo* – abbiamo forse dubbi che *worm* sia qui il significante del fallo e che, per altro verso, il colto latinismo (*in*)*falliable* evochi e sovrapponga paronomasticamente il verbo *fallere* e il sostantivo *phallus*? – il fallo non è che *a poor instrument*: "What poor an instrument may do a noble deed!", giacché così commenta Cleopatra del serpente (V.ii.235-36). Il fallo *fallit*, viene a mancare, a cadere, rivelandosi per quello che *non-è*: e d'altra parte su questa scena non c'è che uno dei tanti suoi significanti, dei suoi molti *sostituti*, *worm*, e nemmeno dei più prestigiosi… Non è certo il fallo la questione.

Adagiatasi sul letto di morte *in full regalia*, nella pienezza del suo essere, Cleopatra si applica un aspide al seno, e mentre questi la succhia e Charmian si rivolge a lei come alla stella dell'Est, "O eastern star" (V.ii.307), ovvero il pianeta Venere, la regina affonda il primo passo nel godimento assoluto:

> Cleopatra
> Peace, peace!
> Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
> That sucks the nurse asleep?
> (*Antony and Cleopatra,* V.ii.307-09)

"Silenzio! Non vedi che ho il mio bimbo al seno?" Un fantasma di maternità vissuto nell'Immaginario *e* con il Corpo: "che succhia e addormenta la nutrice"… è il godimento della madre che nutre con il proprio corpo il figlio, che da lui si lascia mangiare… il seno, cibo primario di noi tutti, cibo con cui tutto ha inizio, quell'inizio che ora è convertito in fine, come nel movimento dell'ouroboros, il serpente che divora la propria coda – non la chiamava forse Antonio "My serpent of old Nile" (I.v.26)? Un brivido perturbante ci coglie a veder mescolarsi il corpo del serpente e il corpo della donna, il latte e il sangue mescolarsi al veleno… È la visione di una *metamorfosi* che si fa tanto più insostenibile quanto più vediamo goderne supremamente colei che la vive e la agisce: "As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle…" (V.ii.310) sussurra Cleopatra, mentre le si rompe la parola… godere a morirne trascendendo la morte, davvero sublimandola, in un rito di immortalità, *Immortal*, un rito infallibile, *Infallible*, nella sua

compiutezza perché lei sì raggiungerà la mèta e compirà il miraggio. Applicandosi il secondo aspide al braccio, muovendo il secondo e ultimo passo nell'Assoluto – "O Antony!--Nay, I will take thee too" (V.ii.311) – si riunisce anche ad Antonio, ricongiunge il bimbo e l'uomo, il primo e l'ultimo amante della donna e della madre che vengono dal suo corpo; e, ora che Lei è divenuta il Mondo, domanda, in Estasi, alla piccola O – the little O –, al piccolo zero che è il nostro comico mondo fatto di niente: "What should I stay" (V.ii.312)?

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MISCELLANY

Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 175-184 (2024)

Power, Royalty, Style: the Strange Case of Henry VII and Perkin Warbeck

Roberto D'Avascio

This essay offers a close reading of John Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* ("a history play about the end of history plays", Taylor 2008) which re-proposes the (hi)story of a pretender to the throne who challenges the legitimacy of Henry VII in a fully Stuart era. The essay considers issues of dramaturgy and historiography/history on stage, against the backdrop of the passage of English throne from Elizabeth I to James I, which marked an epochal dynastic transition in English history and an overall change in the cultural climate that particularly affected the theatre.

Keywords: John Ford, *Perkin Warbeck*, royal power, legitimacy, English history, historiography

John Ford, in the prologue to *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck*, deliberately announces "Nor is here / Unnecessary mirth forc'd, to endear / A multitude"[1]; thus composing a work that was, curiously, not named after the English monarch Henry VII but after the pretender to the crown, Perkin Warbeck, and yet requires a high dramatic style and a solemn sense of tragedy[2].

Perkin claims to be the last descendant of the House of York, the very same Richard who was second in line to Edward IV, who allegedly escaped the carnage in the Tower of London and is, therefore, the legitimate claimant to the English crown. This play, which bears the curious subtitle *A Strange Truth*, stages Perkin's rapid rise and ru-

1 All quotations of *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck* are taken from *Five Plays*, ed. Ellis 1960.

2 The play was first published in 1634 by Thomas Purfoote Jr. for Hugh Beeston and was staged by The Queen's Majesty's Servants al Phoenix Theatre in London.

inous downfall. The play presents the historical trajectory from 1494 and 1499 – from Perkin's triumphant arrival at the Scottish court of James IV and his marriage to Lady Katherine Gordon, to their subsequent banishment from Scotland to Cornwall and his final execution, which definitively sanctioned Henry VII's victory.

A ghost roams England. The English monarch himself is aware of it. The story opens in Westminster; Henry VII is seated on the throne, consumed with anxiety. He is surrounded by his noble advisers. His turmoil is derived from the presence of spectres which haunt his kingdom and his power: "Still to be haunted, still to be pursued, / Still to be frightened with false apparitions / Of pageant majesty and new-coined greatness" (I.i.1-3). Henry feels he is living under a threat from which he is unable to free himself. He sees himself as a ridiculous "mockery king" (4). While the prologue presented a sense of high-tragedy the King's first appearance anticipates a dramatic style that is drastically lowered.

This is how the monarch denounces his kingship before the court: that of a laughing stock, if not a buffoonish mockery. The spectre that seems to haunt him, hovering over his realm, is perhaps not only that of Perkin Warbeck, but also the eternal fear of returning pretenders to the throne from the House of York. This phantasmal presence haunts not only the security of the state, but Henry's own mind, undermining the fragile balance of a national pacification built around Tudor ideology, as the king feels the need to repeatedly narrate his victorious history. From his throne he publicly claims "our own royal birth right" (9), legitimising his reign over England and describing his royal image as "the best physician" (11), capable of healing England's bleeding wounds with the arms of peace. And yet, he must admit that his political construction around the House of Tudor has not made his state secure, as it remains in constant uncertainty.

Ford's dramaturgy seems to declare that Henry's staged ideological representation of his power produces a non-hegemonic meaning, surrounded by historical ghosts. The court intervenes in support of the king, recalling the terrible War of the Roses – the war that God himself put an end to in recognising the sacred figure of King Henry VII, bearer of peace and justice. The narrative concludes with the tale of the ferocious Richard III, murderer of his nephews (the sons of Edward IV), and the divine justice wrought by the hand of the king

in killing the usurper and crowning his victory through marriage to Elizabeth of York. Although genealogy, birthright, divine right, military victory and the divine intervention of providence seem to overflow in the rhetoric of the court, the ghost of York is ever-present, undermining the legitimacy and kingship of the first Tudor monarch.

In 1674, exactly forty years after the publication of *Perkin Warbeck*, Charles II ordered renovations to the Tower of London. The works uncovered a wooden chest containing the skeletons of two children. The royal surgeon claimed that the remains were those of Edward IV's eldest son – the deposed Edward V – and his youngest son, Richard, Duke of York. Charles II publicly proclaimed the identity of the young princes and had their remains interred in Westminster Abbey, complete with an epigraph which attributed the murder to their supplanting uncle.

Unlike the historical and theatrical anxieties of Henry VII, Charles II had never had to face the danger of pretenders to the throne from the House of York. Still, he was aware of the political utility of exploiting this discovery: the identification of the corpses of Edward and Richard guaranteed continuity and legitimacy to the dynastic line that continued from the Tudors to the Stuarts (Cozza 1995, XLVI).

John Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* re-proposes the (hi)story of a pretender to the throne, who challenges the legitimacy of Henry VII in a fully Stuart era. The passage of the English throne from Elizabeth I to James I marked an epochal dynastic transition in English history, accompanied by an overall change in the cultural climate that particularly affected the theatre. Compared to the previous Tudor era, the axis of relations between theatre, history and the image of the monarchy began to change radically: theatre was still the mirror in which the kingship of power was reflected, but in a troubling way. If, during the ideological regime of the Tudor reign, the histories dialogued with historiographical production[3], then this dramaturgy forged new historical narratives that were "intensely nationalistic in their dedication to the greater glory of England, and deliberately

3 See *Anglica Historia* (1534) by Polydore Vergil, *The Union of the two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and Yorke* (1548) by Edward Hall, *Acts and Monuments or The Book of Martyrs* (1563) by John Foxe, and *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande* (1577) by Raphael Holinshed.

propagandistic in their use of history to support the right of the Tudors to the throne" (Ribner 1957, 2).

While the Tudor dynasty "threatened from the outside and unstable from within", had found a balance of power "in the imposition of an imperial absolutism" that sustained itself through a "conception of the world that exalted order and conformity" on the one hand, and "corroborated the sacredness of the sovereigns' power" (Ferrara 1994, 10) on the other[4], this perfect symmetry between the image of monarchy, historical writing and history plays seemed to lose its political and aesthetic balance before the image of the new Stuart monarch, James I. This was a moment of profound crisis for a theatrical genre which appeared to be waning[5]. Soon, the history play would decline irreversibly in the face of a historical, cultural and ideological context characterised by the English crown on Scotsman's head, the tarnishing of the nationalist spirit, the rise of private theatres and an aesthetic reformulation of the stage that transformed the same historical subject into a more nuanced *romance*. The historiographic and theatrical production of the 'great men', who had been the driving force behind England's historical events, seemed to be overtaken by a new and different image of kingship, weak and frayed, whose mythologisation seemed too difficult a task for English playwrights. The figures of both James I and Charles I were associated with weak foreign policy, political peace with Spain, betrayal of the Protestant cause, ambiguous sexual tastes in court, the violent assertion of divine right and monarchical absolutism, culminating, finally, in the beheading of Walter Raleigh, paladin of the Tudor epic and its historical kingship.

Therefore, as the theatre displayed fatigue in the stage elaboration of a pragmatic and cautious monarchy, primarily preoccupied with financial matters and completely lacking in heroic and nationalist spirit, John Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* – "a history play about the end of history plays" (Taylor 2008, 396) – was able to interpret this crisis of historical drama. It starts from a radical change in the historiographic paradigm, since "playwrights recognised the inherent ideological dimension of history-writing, recognition which they exploited to

4 My translation.

5 See Barton 1977, 70-1; Leggatt 1986, 129-39; and Woolf 2000.

marvellous effects in their stage plays" (Kamps 1996, 3), unlike a new historiography in which the king became "a figure who is himself subject to historical necessity" (3).

Thus, the figure of the monarch who can no longer produce history and who humanises himself dramatically through the loss of his ideological heroism, is weakened. Such paradigm shifts in historiography are anticipated on the stage. Ford's historical dramaturgy is thus situated in the rift of the representation of a problematic kingship that seems to resolve itself in the exhaustion of its form. An aesthetic decline characterised, as we shall see, by an aesthetic fracture, a stylistic break.

Far from the classicist precepts of Aristotelian unity, Ford constructs an extremely dynamic drama, constantly alternating times, places, characters and points of view. The first act stages the anticipation of protagonist's arrival. Rumours about Perkin Warbeck run amok in a dense montage of scenes between the English court of Henry VII in London and the Scottish court of James IV in Edinburgh. Perkin is not yet on stage, but his presence hovers mysteriously. On the one hand, in the first act, the interpreters of the Tudor ideology try to trap Perkin's ghost in a visible form, which nevertheless remains elusive, aimed at unmasking the pretender's falsehood; on the other hand, this interpretation shows its limits in the second act, when Perkin finally arrives on stage, at James's Scottish court.

This scenic epiphany turns out to be surprising: "However low our expectations of Perkin may be – and in an English audience of the 1630s they would have been indeed – they are confounded by Perkin's actual presence", capable of extinguishing the long-awaited "transparent sham" and presenting "a figure of impressive reality" (Barish 1970, 160). It is the excited Scottish monarch himself who welcomes Perkin in the second act, recognising his kingship through a ceremony of great solemnity. James suddenly transforms himself from king to stage director, concerned with instructing the actors down to the smallest detail before the play begins. If this is the moment in which "majesty encounters majesty" (*Perkin Warbeck*, II.i.40), then he must coordinate all the elements of the performance. Perkin's welcoming ceremony takes the form of a theatrical performance in which the courtiers' gestures must fit into the overall movements of the stage space and conform to the music of the scene.

Martial music plays and Perkin Warbeck, in great pomp, finally appears on stage, surrounded by his entourage. After the formality of greetings, hugs and glances, the music stops, giving way to the host who begins his speech. The monarch/director James constructs a powerful show of royalty, in which the young pretender/actor is perceived in the eyes and minds of the theatre audience as a figure of great nobility. No longer a pretender to the crown, but already a true king: "He must be more than subject who can utter / The language of a king, and such is thine" (103-04).

The staging of this play produces a new image of kingship, characterised by King James' directorial thrust, which, mixing political instance and aesthetic dimension, affirms that any image can be transfigured if placed under the right protection of the skilful manipulation of the visible. We are witnessing the construction of a style. Thanks to James' scenic writing, Perkin can carry out his performance, characterised by poses, gestures and words that reproduce an historical tale already retold too many times, but not yet in an univocal manner[6].

Before the Scottish court, Perkin stages his compelling story, told in noble words and accompanied by melodramatic images laden with pain, suffering, flight and death. Through measured tones of voice, delicate posture, grave and magniloquent words, directing his gaze at the Scottish monarch and his court, Perkin Warbeck achieves an effective performance of royalty.

A dialectical counterpoint between the king and the pretender continues throughout the play. Until, in the finale, Ford stages a direct confrontation between the two rivals. Here, the two are in different positions: the victorious Henry has defeated a stunted Perkin, who occupies a subordinate stage space. Now, the regal actors enact their final performance of the image of the monarchy they represent, and Henry's star seems to be outshone by Perkin's. Perkin Warbeck is led as a prisoner before the king and presented with a strange epithet: "I here present you, royal sir, a shadow / of majesty […] Per-

6 *History of the Reign of King Henry VII* (1622) by Francis Bacon and *The True and Wonderfull History of Perkin Warbeck* (1618) by Thomas Gainsford were the main historical sources, stating Perkin was an impostor. However, Ivo Kamps (1996) suggested Ford could have been influenced by different historical narrations by Polydore Vergil, Edward Hall or George Buc.

kin, the Christian world's strange wonder" (V.ii.32). In seeing, and publicly exhibiting, the spectre which haunted his England, Henry is struck by a concrete stage presence, from which he attempts to defend himself: "We observe no wonder" (37). In this scene Henry becomes highly conscious of his own choked kingship. He denies seeing anything prodigious, but not only does his court perceive the vision of something shining with 'strange' beauty, but Henry himself seems to show great embarrassment in the face of Perkin's 'wonder'. He is acutely aware of the dramaturgical need to establish a difference in the spectators'/subjects' vision of him and of his rival, yet his plot continues to be weak.

Henry denies the vision before them because he cannot see it; he is so blinded by it that the ghost has become a dazzling light. Perkin's tragic portrayal asserts itself theatrically, even without words, and Henry himself must admit, in his blindness, that he perceives something remarkable. Indeed, his eyes cannot bear the sight of that 'wonder', commanding Perkin himself to "turn now thine eyes, / young man, upon thyself and thy past actions" (48-49).

The scene presents a complicated interplay of gazes: Perkin stares fixedly at Henry; Henry, dazzled, orders Perkin to direct his eyes elsewhere; the gaze of the court, which surrounds the scene, notices a kingship in Perkin that Henry desires them to recognise in him; finally, the audience's gaze observes a scene constructed entirely from the exchange of glances, whose drama flows from the clash between differing representations of kingship and style. *Perkin Warbeck* thus stands as the Stuart form of the history play which highlights the paradox of a character who, in order to assert his kingship, culminates in deconstructing the very concept and theatrical genre.

However, if, on the one hand, the play produces a meta-historical drama, on the other hand, it also elaborates a decidedly meta-theatrical reflection, discussing the complex relationships between history and historiography, identity and kingship, status and performance. On stage, an actor plays Perkin, but Perkin himself acts as an actor[7]. Henry tries to unmask the pretence of the pretender, the pretence of the play, and, with it, the pretence of the theatre: "The player's on the stage still, 'tis his part; / He does but act" (V.ii.68-69), but he fails to

7 See Robson 1983, 180-82 and Candido 1980, 306.

grasp the fact that that play can scenically contradict his opinion, proving far more convincing precisely because it is effectively theatrical.

Henry, whose "lack of theatricality is at the heart of the dramatic conflict, so that, if possible, we could say he is theatrically untheatrical" (Taylor 2008, 402), errs in not mirroring himself in Perkin's meta-theatricality, failing to acknowledge his royalty. The phantom evoked in Act I, and the royal body of Act II, eventually becomes light in the final confrontation with a king who is ultimately blinded by it.

Ford's play has a curious subtitle, *A Strange Truth*. In the same way that Henry is unable to decipher the 'strange wonder' that Perkin represents, so too he fails to grasp the 'strange truth' of that theatrical kingship. Just as he fails to stage his historical narrative with a weak and clumsy performance, so he struggles to understand that it is the theatrical dimension of the performance that shapes the historical identity of the character of the monarch. Henry is a terrible actor, unable to learn from Perkin's lessons in acting. Henry once again denounces Perkin's imposture, articulating his historical falsification developed through lessons and rehearsals, which Perkin himself does not deny, but vindicates in a kind of aesthetic statement, oscillating between Aristotelian treatises and Renaissance courtier manuals:

> Truth in her pure simplicity, wants art
> To put a feigned blush on: scorn wears only
> Such fashion as commends to gazers' eyes
> Sad ulcerated novelty, far beneath
> The sphere of majesty: in such a court,
> Wisdom and gravity are proper robes,
> By which the sovereign is best distinguished
> From zanies to his greatness.
> (*Perkin Warbeck,* V.ii.80-87)

Perkin, thus, explains to the audience, the court, and primarily to Henry that, in its simplicity, purity and candour, tragic truth cannot be sufficient to represent itself, on the contrary it needs artifice. His performance as an actor is artifice of truth, it is a truth that has become, indeed, 'strange'. It is, therefore, theatrical artifice that creates the character. If Henry, in his pragmatism, holds Machiavelli as his *maestro*, "Perkin's is Castiglione, whose *Courtier* is recognizably a denizen of the *Prince*'s court" (Neill 1976, 119). The art of the courtier

is, in fact, defined according to theatrical codes. His defining characteristic is *grazia*, a gift of nature developed through study and discipline, just like the player's art. Henry discerns only the simulation of kingship elaborated by Perkin "so, / the lesson prompted and well conned, was moulded / into familiar dialogue, oft rehearsed, / till, learnt by heart, 'tis now received for truth" (*Perkin Warbeck*, V.ii.76-79) – losing sight of the 'wisdom and gravity' which define the greatness of a king. Such characteristics are attainable through that artifice represented by the actor's performance, which "cultivate[s] an artificial following of nature, always taking care, however, to conceal his artifice with an appearance of negligent ease" (Neill 1976, 119-20). Such performance – "a simultaneous appreciation of the delicate artifice which improves on nature, and of the further artifice which is used to conceal the first" (119-20) is based on a concept of *grazia* that cannot be separated from that of *sprezzatura* (Castiglione 2007)[8]. Perkin represents this nonchalance, whereby his identity "*becomes* his style" (120), showing the continuous transition between *kingship* and *(ma)king-ship*.

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8 As is well known, the first English translation, by Thomas Hoby in 1561, deeply influenced aristocratic culture in the Elizabethan period.

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Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 185-204 (2024)

Shakespeare's Now[1]

Margaret Tudeau-Clayton

This paper argues that the word *now* was for Shakespeare and fellow playwrights a precise as well as polyvalent linguistic tool which they used not only as a temporal adverb, but as what linguists call a pragmatic discourse marker to structure the spatio-temporal dramatic design as well as to represent the dynamics of interpersonal exchanges among characters, especially power relations. This is first illustrated by the work of two of Shakespeare's contemporaries from whom he arguably learned much about the craft: Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Christopher Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. Close analysis follows of two early Shakesperean play texts: the comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and the history *3 Henry 6*, the Folio play text with the highest number of instances of *now*. Both plays are shown to anticipate the direction Shakespeare's use of *now* will take. Specifically, the structuring function of *now* is withdrawn from male figures of authority who are thus denied the hold over history to which they aspire.

Keywords: Shakespeare's language, *now*, pragmatic discourse markers, temporal adverb

The value of now *to early modern playwrights*

Shakespeare's frequent use of the word *now* has been pointed out by Sharon Beehler who suggests that he thereby "calls attention to the present moment", which she connects to the classically derived notion of *kairos* as decisive or opportune moment (Beehler 2003, 74). The frequent occurrence of *now* is not, however, confined to the plays of Shakespeare; it is found in the plays of his contemporaries too (Culpeper *et al.* 2023, "now"). Drawing on historical linguistics as well as

1 My thanks for their encouragement and input to: Jonathan Hope, Martin Hilpert, Andreas Jucker and the members of the research seminar in medieval and early modern literature at the University of Geneva who listened to a draft of this paper on 28 February 2024.

digital resources[2], this paper adopts Ludwig Wittgenstein's familiar analogy between words and tools (Coeckelbergh and Funk 2018, 167; 169) to argue that *now* was for Shakespeare and fellow playwrights a precise as well as polyvalent linguistic tool which they used not only as temporal adverb, but also as what linguists call a pragmatic discourse marker to structure the spatio-temporal dramatic design as well as to represent the dynamics of interpersonal exchanges among characters, especially power relations.

Both Beehler and the recently published Arden *Encyclopedia of Shakespeare's Language* consider only the use of *now* as temporal adverb: "As now, at this time, at the present time" (*Encyclopedia* entry, Culpeper *et al.* 2023). No account is taken of the uses of *now* "with temporal sense weakened or lost" (*Oxford English Dictionary* sense II) which serve primarily expressive and rhetorical purposes (*OED*). As thus used, *now* is described by linguists as a pragmatic discourse marker that helps to structure discourse, especially speech, and that inflects the dynamics of interpersonal exchanges (Schourup 2011, 2115)[3]. That such uses of *now* were available to Shakespeare and his contemporaries is evident from instances in the *OED* and from the work done by historical linguists who have trawled the available historical corpora "which contain genres that represent 'spoken interaction'", including "dramatic constructions of speech such as plays" (Defour 2008, 63). These scholars point out that "the evolution of *now* as text-structuring marker starts early on" in the middle English period (Defour 2008, 74; Aijmer 2002, 52-63). Plays are not specifically discussed, though Karin Aijmer points out that one of the examples given in the *OED* from *As You Like It* – "Now, if thou wert a poet, I might have some hope thou didst feign" (III.iii.219-20)[4] – illustrates that the pragmatic use occurs "[i]n Shakespeare's English" (Aijmer 2002, 63), while Claudia Claridge notes in passing the

2 Jonathan Culpeper *et al.*, "ESC: First Folio Plus", accessed 5 March 2024, https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/shakfinco06/. Cross-checking with other resources has required some minor adjustments to the numbers. My warmest thanks to Emily Louisa Smith for helping me navigate these resources.

3 The term "discourse particle" is preferred by Karin Aijmer but "discourse marker" is more common. Aijmer 2002, 57-95.

4 Unless otherwise indicated, references to Shakespearean texts will be to Shakespeare 2016.

relative high frequency of *now* in comedies which later declines (Claridge 2018, 229; 230).

Comparable, I suggest, to the hinge – a time honoured object-tool – *now* is used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, especially at the beginning of a sentence and/or verse line, to mark turns between actor-speakers and locales as well as between a (thereby closed) past and new possible trajectories towards the anticipated fulfillment of the design[5]. Connected etymologically to the word *new* (*OED*) with which it is syntagmatically associated by Shakespeare, as we shall see, *now* "[t]he topic changer"[6], thus operates at the metadramatic level directing attention precisely to the new – speaker or addressee, locale, or situation, as when, in an example taken up below, Cupid opens Act III of Christopher Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*: "Now, Cupid, cause the Carthaginian queen, / To be enamoured of thy brother's looks" (Marlowe 2023, III.i.1-2). For Aristotle the new – change – is, with mind, the precondition for a sense of time (Langer 2016, 95-97; 98-100) and playwrights' structuring use of pragmatic *now* has a temporal affordance insofar as it permits spectators to register the passage of time in the play world. Indeed, the "division between *now* as a temporal adverb and as pragmatic marker cannot always be easily made" (Defour 2008, 71) and, as instances will illustrate, playwrights may use *now* to do double work as both[7].

Even as it performs this metadramatic function, *now* does work in interpersonal exchanges. This may be between characters for whom it serves "the purpose of interactional control" (Claridge 2018, 224) as when, in *3 Henry VI*, King Edward declares, "Now, perjured Henry, wilt thou kneel for grace" (vi.8); or an "affective or evaluative function" (Aijmer 2002, 62) – the expression of opinions and judgements as

5 My thanks to Devani Singh for suggesting the importance of the position of *now* in the sentence and/or verse line. Defour observes: "Pragmatic markers […] typically although not exclusively occur in sentence-initial position." (2008, 64).

6 Running title to chapter 2 in Aijmer 2002, 57-95, which, quoting Bolinger (1989, 291) reprises: "*Now* is a discourse marker basically for change of topic". See too Defour 2008, 71-72. And compare *OED* "now" sense II.6: "Introducing an important or noteworthy point".

7 Andreas Jucker has suggested to me that punctuation may be significant. More work needs to be done, but where *now* is primarily pragmatic it is usually followed by a comma, as the temporal deictic is not.

well as of emotions and desires – as in the recurrent phrase "Now, trust me" in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (I.ii.24; see below). This expressive use of *now* may also occur between characters and spectators, who are thereby drawn into an immediate intimate relation with the speaker and action, as in "Now sir" addressed by Lance to a member of the audience in *Two Gentlemen* (II.iii.14; see below). This interpersonal expressive function of *now* contributes to "subjectification" (Aijmer 2002, 62), the effect of a feeling, thinking subject which might be heightened in performance by intonation, notably "accents of power" which, as Dwight Bolinger points out, "may strike an initial *now*" (Bolinger 1989, 292), as, for instance, in performances of the inaugural utterances with initial *now* by male figures of authority which open *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd and three early plays by Shakespeare.

In what follows I look briefly at the use of *now* by two playwrights from whom Shakespeare arguably learned much: Christopher Marlowe as well as Thomas Kyd[8]. I then examine two early Shakespearean play texts: first, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* possibly his first attempt at dramatic writing, which showcases the value of this linguistic tool to the playwright's craft even as it makes prominent use of it to structure the action; second, the history play, titled in the Folio *The Third part of King Henry the Sixt*, the play text in the Shakesperean canon which has the most instances of *now* (119) and in which Marlowe and/or Kyd may have had a hand (Burrows and Craig 2017, 194-217)[9]. In the history play, as in the comedy, utterances with *now*, usually in initial sentence and/or verse-line position, serve to structure the spatio-temporal design by marking turns to the new – speaker, addressee, locale or situation. In both plays, but especially the history, these utterances are largely spoken by male protagonists who enjoy positions of institutional authority or power. The metadramatic structuring function of *now* thus coincides with its use by such figures to seize the turn in interpersonal exchanges and to assert control over the action and other characters[10].

8 Their importance for Shakespeare has most recently been explored in Freebury-Jones 2024, 40-68; 72-109.

9 These attributions have been vigorously, if not conclusively, challenged, in Freebury-Jones 2024, 52-60.

10 That Shakespeare as actor was reputed to have "often played kingly parts" bears interestingly on this coincidence; see Freebury-Jones 2024, 17. Bolinger ob-

Now is also used in its "affective or evaluative function", but more prominently in the comedy and by a female figure which suggests a gender as well as generic inflection to the use of the word in these early plays. In addition, this affective function is intensified in both plays in instances where *now* is repeated at very close intervals, heightening the emotional charge and tending to arrest the action rather than marking a new turn that takes it forward. Finally, the two plays signal the direction that Shakespeare's use of *now* will take as he develops his craft, the history play specifically in revisions made to the Octavo version. Most importantly, the close relation we find in the two early plays between this metadramatic structuring and assertions of control by male figures of authority will weaken and eventually disappear. The undergirding of institutional authority by the spatio-temporal design is thus withdrawn and the hold exercised by male figures of authority on the new(s) – on history – is denied.

The use of now *by Shakespeare's immediate forerunners: Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe*

The value of *now* as a tool for the playwright is illustrated by the work of two of Shakespeare's contemporaries who were particularly important at the outset of his career: *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd (?1587, first published in 1592) and *Dido, Queen of Carthage* by Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe (?1584-85, first published 1594). The action proper of the 1592 Quarto of *The Spanish Tragedy* (after the framing exchange between Revenge and the ghost of Andrea) opens with "Now" uttered by the Spanish king: "Now say, Lord General, how fares our camp?" (Kyd 2013, I.ii.1). This inaugural *now* that might be marked in performance by an "accent of power" (Bolinger 1989, 292; see above) declares at once the authority of the king, the identity of his addressee and the topic of their exchange.

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serves that the function of "change of topic" is at "a slight remove" from the (male) speaker's seizing of the turn: "Since he is the one who says *now*, he puts himself in command of the situation" (1989, 291). For a brilliant analysis of how turn taking is used by Shakespeare to individuate characters and to represent social relations between them, see Morgan 2019.

An *EEBO*[11] search in this edition yields 17 instances of *now* uttered by this figure of political authority, 7 in initial sentence and verse-line position, who is surpassed only – but tellingly – by Hieronimo, principal agent of the authorial design, with almost no institutional authority, who utters 20 of the total 84 instances (excluding the idiom "how now?", discussed below), 7 of which are likewise in initial sentence and verse-line position. The metadramatic structuring value of *now* as well as its value for the protagonist's assertion of control is, moreover, highlighted in the last of the "additions" to the 1602 edition (possibly by Shakespeare and /or Heywood; Taylor 2017, 246-260) in which three meta-dramatically inflected *now*s (one in Latin) structure Hieronimo's triumphal announcement of closure: "Now do I applaud what I have acted. / *Nunc iners cadat manus.* / Now to express the rupture of my part, / First take my tongue and afterwards my heart" (*The Spanish Tragedy*, IV.iv.46-49).

Marlowe's *Dido* does not open with inaugural *now*, but the word is used throughout – an EEBO search in the 1594 edition yields 60 instances – not only as a temporal deictic, but also to mark turns in the action as when Venus declares, "Now is the time for me to play my part" (*Dido, Queen of Carthage*, I.i.182); (of Ascanius) "Now is he fast asleep" (II.i.316) and to Cupid, "Now, Cupid, turn thee to Ascanius' shape / And go to Dido, who instead of him / Will set thee on her lap and play with thee" (II.i.323-25), a stratagem adopted by Cupid in a self-addressed speech that opens Act III: "Now, Cupid, cause the Carthaginian queen, / To be enamoured of thy brother's looks" (III.i.1-2). The closing turn is similarly announced by the eponymous protagonist: "Now, Dido, with these relics burn thyself" (V.i.292). She is immediately followed by her sister Anna who declares to the (dead) Iarbas, "But Anna now shall honour thee in death" (324), and who ends the play with, "Now, sweet Iarbas, stay! I come to thee!" (328). Taking control of the action with *now* even as she centres attention on herself, Anna inaugurates the final new action that closes the play in the same way that the Spanish king inaugurates the opening action of *The Spanish Tragedy*.

11 *Early English Books Online*, https://proquest.libguides.com/eebopqp.

Inaugural and closing now *in early Shakespeare*

Inaugural *now* uttered by a male figure of authority opens three early plays in the Shakespearean canon: the eponymous aspiring Duke of Gloucester, in *Richard III* (mid to late 1592[12]): "Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer"; Theseus, Duke of Athens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (early 1596): "Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour / Draws on apace"; and the eponymous English monarch in *King John* (mid-1596), a play text that shares other stylistic features with *Dream* (Taylor and Loughnane 2017, 521-22): "Now say Châtillon, what would France with us?". In all three too, closure, or the closing action, is announced by an utterance with initial *now* spoken by a second male figure who (as in *The Spanish Tragedy*) is the antagonist (or perhaps alter ego) of the first: Richmond (Henry VII): "Now civil wounds are stopped, peace lives again" (V.vii.40); Oberon: "Now until the break of day / Through this house each fairy stray" (V.ii.31-32); Bastard (Philip Falconbridge): "Now these her princes are come home again, […] Naught shall make us rue, / If England to itself do rest but true" (V.vii.115; 117-18). If imperceptible to spectators, the arc of the spatio-temporal design is thus drawn between opening and closing hinge utterances with initial *now* spoken by (opposed) male figures of power as, within this arc, turns are marked. The structuring value of *now* for early Shakespeare as for his contemporaries and forerunners Kyd and Marlowe could hardly be more evident.

The value of now *advertised:* The Two Gentlemen of Verona

In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, dismissed by Park Honan as "apprentice work" (Honan 1998, 55), the value of *now* to the playwright's craft is showcased through what might be described as an apprentice's master class in dramatic construction, staged through a servant-clown Lance whose name suggests an authorial proxy (Tudeau-Clayton 2020, 179). On his first entrance in II.iii, alone on stage, Lance tells the audience the story of his leave-taking from his family, the tears shed and the indifference of his dog Crab. Seemingly dissatisfied with the (in) effectiveness of telling, Lance announces a switch to showing: "Nay,

12 Dates given in parentheses are taken from Shakespeare 2016.

I'll show you the manner of it" (II.iii.10). In what Keir Elam calls "a metadramatic exposition" Lance "discovers that the sign-vehicles" on stage "are perfectly interchangeable" (Elam 1980, 14), that inanimate objects – shoes, staff and hat – may stand for human agents – father, mother, sister and Nan the maid. But Lance's show – strictly, a hybrid of telling and showing – not only shows that in theatre "there are no absolutely fixed representational relations" (13), but also that the word *now* is key to the construction of the dramatic design. Having resolved the vexatious question of which shoe stands for his mother, which for his father – "there 'tis" (14) – Lance turns to a new object-signifier and a new human signified, marking the turn with an expressively charged *now* addressed to a member of the audience, collectively drawn via this representative figure, into the immediate, intimate creative work of identifying the inhabitants of his play world: "Now sir, this staff is my sister" (14). Lance dithers some more as to who is what, but once settled – "Ay, so, so" (17) – he comes to the action. Taking up ten lines plus one word in the Folio this action is marked by no less than seven *now*s, each marking a turn to a new figure – father, mother, sister, dog – or a new action that either blocks a prior action – the request for blessing and the son's kiss are both prevented by the father's weeping – or exists only as wished for – that his mother would speak like a mad (or, as Oxford glosses, in Shakespeare 2017, "country") woman. The final *now* marks not only the turn to a new figure – the dog – but also the climactic sharp contrast illustrated by its lack of (human) affect and language for which Lance (comically) reproaches it.

> *Now* come I to my father: 'Father, your blessing.' *Now* should not the shoe speak a word for weeping. *Now* should I kiss my father – Well, he weeps on. *Now* come I to my mother. O, that she could speak *now,* like a wold-woman! Well, I kiss her – why, there 'tis. Here's my mother's breath up and down. *Now* come I to my sister – mark the moan she makes! *Now* the dog all this while sheds not a tear, nor speaks a word. But see how I lay the dust with my tears. (II.iii.7-24, emphasis mine)

In the Folio the first two *now*s stand at the end of a line, the remaining five at the beginning, a positioning that the uneven spacing of the surrounding words suggests may have been deliberate. Particularly prominent are the two sentences/lines that begin "Now come I to", which have capital *n* while other instances preceded by the same

punctuation – a colon – do not. Whether authorial or (more likely) scribal this organisation of Lance's prose in print highlights for readers the structuring function of *now* which in performance might be highlighted by an actor's intonation and gestures.

With this proliferation of *now*s in his staged show Lance shares the highest total number (12) with the principal male protagonists Valentine (12) and Proteus (12), who are closely followed by the Duke of Milan (9) and one of the female protagonists Julia (7). Together these instances make up over 80% of the total number (63) excluding the 13 that occur in the today obsolete idiom, "how now?"[13]. While Lance uses *now* chiefly in this passage to structure the staging of his play, the use of *now* by the three principal male protagonists serves to mark turns in the larger authorial design. Particularly telling – as he speaks relatively fewer lines – is the main figure of institutional and political authority, the father of Silvia, Duke of Milan, whose first word on his first entrance is, like Kyd's Spanish king, "Now". Asserting his authority on his entrance he puts a stop to the bickering between Silvia's rival lovers Valentine and Thurio – "Now, daughter Silvia, you are hard beset" (II.iv.41) – then turns to Valentine to announce a letter of "much good news" (44), namely that Proteus is to join him in Milan. Within the play world the figure of authority uses *now* to seize the turn and as a strategy of control. At the same time his *now* directs the action away from a more or less futile exchange towards the new(s) which breaks the deadlock and opens up fresh possibilities in the trajectory of the action. Tellingly, however, the duke also has a plot of his own which deviates from the end of the authorial design and which, specifically, seeks to impose his choice of spouse (Thurio) on his daughter Silvia, as another duke, Theseus, will seek to impose the father's choice on a daughter in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. To unmask his daughter's plot to elope with her chosen partner Valentine, the Duke invents a fiction, using *now* (like Lance) as a structuring, but also an expressive tool to draw in his addressee, Valentine: "I now am full resolved to take

13 "How now" (with or without question or exclamation mark) is consistently used throughout the Shakespearean corpus by speakers who thereby seek to draw attention to themselves as well as to their addressee and the information that they seek to obtain or give.

a wife" (III.i.76), "Now, therefore, would I have thee to my tutor" (84) and, after getting Valentine to propose the (his) plan of a ladder, "Now as thou art a gentleman of blood, / Advise me where I may have such a ladder" (121-22). Having successfully tricked Valentine, the Duke confidently asserts his control over events, opening the next scene with inaugural *now* – here temporal deictic as well as discourse marker – to assure Thurio that Silvia will love him, "Now Valentine is banished from her sight" (III.ii.1-2). Subsequently obliged, like Theseus, to abandon his plot, the duke is realigned with the authorial design when he spurns Thurio as "degenerate and base" (V.iv.134) and turns to Valentine: "Now, by the honour of my ancestry, / I do applaud thy spirit, Valentine" (137-38). Proceeding to cancel "all former griefs" (140) he then "plead[s] a new state in thy unrivaled merit" (142), the "new" following again closely on the "Now", marking a turn in the dramatic design as well as the conversion of the figure of institutional authority, who is now realigned with this design.

The play text's final *now* is, however, uttered not by the duke, but by the newly exonerated Valentine who, in his "new state", initiates the general amnesty of the outlaws with which the play closes: "I now beseech you for your daughter's sake, / To grant one boon", "Forgive" "[t]hese banished men" (147-48; 152; 150). It is Valentine too that marks with *now* the separation from his friend Proteus which is the play's inaugural action. Putting a stop to Proteus's proposal to accompany him – "Sweet Proteus, no" – he declares, "Now let us take our leave" (I.i.56). He proceeds to announce a future trajectory in an exchange of "news" by means of letters between them (57-58). This trajectory will be halted by the arrival of Proteus in Milan, the new "news" heralded by the *now* of the Duke's first utterance (see above). An expressive as well as temporal *now* then marks the turn to the first intimate exchange between Valentine and Proteus alone, on a stage cleared of other characters. "Now tell me", says Valentine, "how do all from whence you came?" (II.iv.114). The news Valentine has for Proteus is that his "life is altered now" (120), the *now* marking the contrast between a past from which he has definitively turned, as his servant Speed has already remarked: "now you are metamorphosed" (II.i.26). The absolute character of the change is underscored by a repetition of *now* in the closing lines of Valentine's description to Proteus of his present state.

> Now, no discourse except it be of love.
> Now can I break my fast, dine, sup and sleep,
> Upon the very naked name of love.
> (II.iv.132-34)

Here, however, the repeated *now*s in initial position not only emphasise the contrast between past and present, but structure Valentine's speech as an example of anaphora, the first of George Puttenham's rhetorical figures that work "by iteration or repetition of one word or clause" and that "much alter and affect the ear and also the mind" (Puttenham [1589] 2007, 282). This suggests Valentine's repetition of *now* carries an effect not at the level of the action, which is arrested, but rather in the response of spectators/readers, who are thus invited to feel the intense emotional charge as well as the paralysis of will suffered by Valentine as a captive of love.

Like Valentine, Proteus marks with *now* – as structuring marker as well as temporal deictic – an inaugural act of separation, here from Julia: "The tide is now" (II.ii.14). He marks likewise his change(s) of affective state(s), which again emphasize a contrast between past and present: "She is fair, and so is Julia that I love – / That I did love, for now my love is thaw'd" (II.iv.191-92); "At first I did adore a twinkling star, / But now I worship a celestial sun" (II.vi.9-10). The next step in the betrayal of Valentine is marked in the same way – "I cannot now prove constant to myself" (31) – as is the plot to get rid of his rival: "Now presently I'll give her father notice" (36). Act IV, scene ii opens with an announcement of what he will do next: "Already have I been false to Valentine, / And now I must be as unjust to Thurio" (IV.ii.1-2). The devastating consequences of these betrayals are denounced by Silvia: "Thou hast no faith left now" (V.iv.50) and then by Valentine who hammers the point home with a repetition of *now*:

> Thou common friend, that's without faith or love,
> For such is a friend *now.* Treacherous man,
> That has beguiled my hopes
> […]
> *Now* I dare not say
> I have one friend alive – thou wouldst disprove me.
> (V.iv.63-64; 66-67 emphasis mine)

Here again the repeated *now*s mark less a new turn than an arrest in the heightened emotional charge of the present, brought about by the traumatic discovery of Proteus's infidelities. However, spread throughout at more and less regular intervals, the *now*s uttered by the three principal male protagonists furnish a skeletal frame for the spatio-temporal design, marking turns to new actions, locales or situations, especially breaks with the past. These marked turns allow the audience to register the passage of time in the world of the play[14].

If these turns are primarily marked by male figures the first change of scene is marked by the principal female protagonist Julia who, on her first entrance, addresses her maid Lucetta: "But say, Lucetta, now we are alone –" (I.ii.1). The Folio has brackets around "now we are alone" which, though one of Ralph Crane's "scribal habits" (Shakespeare 2004, 122), may indicate the function of the phrase as metadramatic signal that the stage has been cleared for a new locale and new configuration of characters. That Julia is given this turn indicates the importance and agency she will have in the design. This is highlighted by her use of *now* when disguised as Sebastian to mark a contrast between past and present, in parallel with the male protagonists. Alone on stage, she recalls that she gave to Proteus the ring that he has given her to offer to Silvia, "And now am I, unhappy messenger, / To plead for that which I would not obtain" (IV.iv.86-87), and later, in her account to Silvia of the physical symptoms of the suffering caused by Proteus's infidelity, she remarks (of herself), "She hath been fairer, madam, than she is", "now she is become as black as I" (IV.iv.135; 142). Like Lance she also stages a scene with inanimate objects addressing the pages of Proteus's letter and bidding them, "Now kiss, embrace, contend, do what you will" (I.ii.130). "Now" here introduces a series of options for material pages briefly attributed with agency as Lance will attribute agency to inanimate objects.

Julia is, however, distinguished by her use of *now* in its "affective or evaluative function", to express subjective feelings and opinions. In the first scene with Lucetta, she first betrays her own investment in the name of Proteus with a sharp "How now? What means this

14 The structure has been harshly judged by critics as naïve and evidence of early composition. See Taylor and Loughnane 2017, 486.

passion at his name?" (I.ii.16), then explodes on hearing that Lucetta took the letter for her from Proteus: "Now, by my modesty, a goodly broker!" (41), which she follows with "Now trust me, tis an office of great worth" (44)[15]. Both *now*s underscore the intensity of her feeling as well as the irony of her apparent praise. The affective function is illustrated again, though the emotional charge is very different, when Julia prepares to join Proteus in Milan and Lucetta expresses scepticism as to his fidelity to which Julia responds: "Now, as thou lov'st me, do him not that wrong / To bear a hard opinion of his truth" (II. vii.80-81). Though again marking a difference of "opinion", this "[n] ow", uttered by a vulnerable Julia, is conciliatory, even cajoling in the desire it expresses to win Lucetta over to Julia's (for spectators/readers poignantly erroneous) opinion of Proteus. This function is illustrated too but less prominently by male figures, notably Valentine, who echoes Julia when he angrily counters Silvia's dismissive judgement of his letter as "very clerkly done" (II.i.89): "Now trust me, madam, it came hardly off" (90). "Now" here marks again difference of opinion, even as it registers barely contained anger, again tinged with irony. Overall, however, given the difference in the number of lines allocated male and female speakers, there does appear to be a slight gender inflection to the use of *now*. While male protagonists use it primarily to seize the turn and assert control over others and events, a principal female protagonist uses it to express opinions and emotions as well.

The structuring use of *now* to mark turns in the spatio-temporal design and the coincidence with the seizing of the turn to speak by male figures of institutional authority is still more evident in *3 Henry VI*, the Folio version of which has more instances of *now* (119) than any other text in the Folio, and in which Marlowe and/or Kyd may have had a hand[16]. Unlike the comedy, this history play exists in more

15 Oxford emends here to "God's lady" on the grounds that "trust me" is used as a substitute for oaths in other Folio texts and that the repetition of "now" twice at the beginning of the line is "weak", see Shakespeare 2017, 1595. Inexplicably, the same phrase when used by Valentine is not thus emended. The case for this emendation of Julia's expressive outburst seems to me weak.

16 Burrows and Craig draw this conclusion from their stylistic analysis: "*The Spanish Tragedy* […] is the closest play to Folio Henry VI as a whole play", but "Marlowe emerges" as the most likely author of the "non-Shakespearean" "thirteen scenes". *Now* is included in the "more structural and grammatical" "func-

than one early version, notably the Octavo version of 1595, *The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of York,* as well as the Folio version of 1623, *The Third part of King Henry the Sixt*[17]. The Folio text has nearly 1,000 more lines than the Octavo version (Shakespeare 2002, 149) and there are proportionally more instances of *now* (excluding the idiom "how now")[18]. In both versions it is used equally in scenes attributed to Marlowe/Kyd and Shakespeare not only as a temporal deictic but also to mark turns in the design to new speakers, character configurations, situations or locales. It is, moreover, explicitly associated with the new or with news (as in the comedy). In scene ii (attributed to Marlowe) an SD to the right in O – "Enter a Messenger"– faces "Now, what newes?" uttered by the Duke of York (np; F: "Enter Gabriel" [possibly the name of an actor] "But stay, what news?", ii.48) In scene xiv (attributed to Shakespeare) in both O and F Richard berates Edward for his treatment of Warwick, "*now* dishonoured by this *new* marriage" (with Lady Grey) (31-32, emphasis mine); and the entry of a messenger ("post" in F) is marked by Edward's "Now, messenger, [O: Sirra] what letters, or what news […]?" (line 83) In scene xxiv in F (attributed to Marlowe) (not in O) Somerset announces that the Queen has arrived with a powerful force, "Even *now* we heard the *news*" (32, emphasis mine).

This structuring work of marking turns to the new(s) is all the more important because there are no act or scene divisions in O and none after the initial *Actus Primus. Scoena Prima* on the first page in F[19]. For instance, in scene vi (attributed to Shakespeare) the SD in O "Enter the house of *Yorke*" (np) (F: "*March. Enter Edward, Warwicke, Richard, Clarence, Norfolke, Mountague, and Soldiers*") is immediately

tion words" among "the most common words down to the 500th" that they use in the Delta test to establish authorial characteristics (2017, 194; 217; 198 and n.). Freebury-Jones draws on different digital tools to contest their case (2024, 52-60).

17 References to the Octavo version (henceforth O) are to Anon 1595; i/j u/v spellings normalised.

18 With respect to the use of *now*, the Quartos of 1600 and 1619 do not differ from O sufficiently to justify separate consideration. For full discussion of the relations between these different versions, see Shakespeare 2002, 159-76.

19 Oxford follows the "standard scene divisions by Capell" which I reproduce; see Shakespeare 2017, 2573. The attributions given are those in Burrow and Craig 2017, 195.

followed by: "Now perjured *Henrie*, wilt thou yeelde thy crowne" (F: "Now, perjured Henry, wilt thou kneel for grace", 81). This is uttered by Edward who thus marks at once the turn in the action and his newly acquired authority following the death of his father. Indeed, over 25% of the instances in F (33) – two thirds in initial sentence and verse-line position – feature in utterances by this authority figure who continues to assert control and mark the turns of the action up to and including the closing scenes (attributed to Shakespeare): scene xxvii opens with his announcement of closure, "Now here a period of tumultuous broils" (1), (O: "Lo here"), and comes to a close on his command, "Now march we hence" (86; not in O). In the final scene xxix, in both O and F, he declares satisfaction at the achieved peace, marking the close of the play: "Now am I seated as my soul delights, / Having my country's peace and brothers' love", "And now what rests, but that we spend the time / With stately triumphs" (35-36, 42-43). This achievement of closure and the authority of Edward are, however, under an ironic shadow cast by one of these brothers, Richard, signaled, as I discuss below, through a skillful placing of new *now*s in the Folio revisions to an earlier scene in O.

First, however, it is worth noting that, as in the comedy, there are instances where repetition of *now* at close intervals arrests the action in an intensification of an emotionally charged moment rather than marking a new turn that takes the action forward. In scene ix, Henry, withdrawn from the "battle" (1), reflects on the indeterminate nature of its outcome in a lyrical passage (elaborated in F) which suspends action even as it heightens the effect of indeterminacy and attendant pathos with three (O: two) carefully placed *now*s: "Now sways it this way…/…/ Now sways it that way…/…/…/ Now one the better, then another best" (5-10) In scene xxiv, the dying Earl of Warwick, the king-maker, second only to Edward in his number of *now*s (23 instances), structures a lament with four *now*s that sound the knell of the definitive arrest that is death. This is rendered still more poignant in F by the echo of the last of these – "my manors that I had / Even now forsake me" (24-25) – on the entrance of Somerset, who is the bearer of "now"/ "news" – "even now we heard the news" (32) – as Warwick no longer is.

The effect of repetitions of *now* at close intervals, intensified by the sense of the temporal deictic, is manifest too in hostile exchanges

between antagonists: scene viii (O and F) opens with Richard in confrontation with Clifford, "Now, Clifford, I have singled thee alone" (1), echoed by Clifford: "Now, Richard, I am with thee here alone" (5), before they engage in physical combat. Highly charged power struggles between antagonists will continue to be thus marked: in the opening scene of *King Lear* (Q and F) Lear's threat to Kent, "Now by Apollo" is thrown back by Kent who thus challenges Lear's authority: "Now by Apollo, King, thou swearest thy gods in vain" (I.i.143-44).

A refined use of this linguistic tool by an experienced authorial hand is evinced by revisions to scene xiv in the F version of the history play[20]. In O there are 2 instances of *now* in this scene, the first syntagmatically associated with "new", the second with "news", as I pointed out above. To these 2 instances in O the F version adds 4 further instances, 2 in the opening ten lines, 2 in the closing four lines. In O it is Edward who opens the new action in a new locale (the turn from the French to the English court) and with a new set of characters: "Brothers of *Clarence* and of *Glocester* / What think you of our marriage with the ladie *Gray*?" (D3r). In F it is Richard who opens the scene marking the turn with an ironically tinged *now* associated with the "new" event of the marriage of Edward that has crucially altered relations among the Yorkists: "Now tell me brother Clarence, what think you / Of this new marriage with the Lady Grey?" (1-2; echoed later when he berates Edward for his treatment of Warwick "now dishonoured by this new marriage", 31-32). Their grumbling is cut short by the announced arrival of Edward whose opening line has been modified in F to include an initial *now*: "Now, brother of Clarence, how like you our choice" (9). For readers and spectators alike the echo here of Richard's opening line generates an irony that drains Edward's *now* of its force as an assertion of control. Control is thus subtly transferred to Richard whose disclosure to the audience of his reason for staying with Edward when Clarence leaves to join Warwick (not in O) – "I stay not for the love of Edward, but the crown" (123) – empties his affirmation of loyalty in the final exchange with Edward. This is more prominent in F where it is moved to the close of the scene. In O Edward addresses Richard before addressing Hastings and Stafford: "What saie you brother *Richard*, will you stand to us?" (D4v), while in F he turns from Hastings and Staf-

20 On the case for F as revision of O see Shakespeare 2002, 164.

ford to Richard with "Now, brother Richard, will you stand by us?" (142). On Richard's "Ay" Edward expresses confidence in victory and declares, as their collective consequent next move: "Now therefore let us hence, and lose no hour / Till we meet Warwick with his foreign power" (145-46). The rhyme here reenforces the effect of closure, a closure to which Edward aspires as his use of *now* emphasizes. Tending to support the case of F as a conscious revision of O the added *now*s in the opening and closing lines of this scene specifically introduce dramatic irony that undercuts the aspiration to control of the principal male figure of institutional authority thwarted by another antagonistic male figure who is, we might say, the news.

Richard is indeed the protagonist of the next play in the sequence, titled in F *The Tragedy of Richard III* and in the 1597 Quarto text *The Tragedy of King Richard the third*. For John Jowett it "signals a fresh departure" since "it initiates a period of mostly solo authorship" as well as establishing "a new model" (Shakespeare 2017, 2643). This fresh departure – for the new protagonist as for the author – is marked by an inaugural *now* that, unlike the play texts discussed earlier, is addressed not to another character, but to the speaker's self (with a glance perhaps at the audience): "Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer". This "[n]ow" inaugurates the staging of tortured struggles within an isolated individual subject – the opening SD in both Q and F reads "*Enter Richard Duke of Gloucester solus*" – as the new action of the tragic genre inaugurated by Shakespeare *solus*[21]. The word *now* is repeated by Richard in lines 5 and 10, a repetition which once again produces an anaphoric structure that does not forward, but arrests action. Here this arrest mirrors the frozen present state of things that Richard aspires to shatter ("But I", 14). In what follows the instances of *now* are heavily concentrated in Richard (24 instances, 8 in initial position). The next most frequent user, Queen Margaret, one of his principal antagonists, has half his number of instances (and only 2 in initial position). It is, however, as I pointed out earlier, his nemesis, Richmond, that has the final *now* marking the last turn and asserting his takeover of events: "Now civil wounds are stopped, peace lives again" (V.vii.40).

21 For a full-blown reading of the emergence of Richard as an allegory of authorial self-discovery see Blanpied 1983, 70-72.

Shakespeare's now*: early to late*

The direction Shakespeare's use of this linguistic tool will take is anticipated, as I have indicated, by features of the two early plays studied here. In the comedy, the Duke of Milan is the principal figure of institutional authority whose use of *now* to assert control marks initial and final turns to the new(s) in the play's spatio-temporal dramatic design, but he also deviates from this design with a plot of his own structured with *now* which fails, undermining his authority. In the history play, carefully placed new *now*s in the revised version produce dramatic irony that evacuates the assertion of control through *now* by the principal male figure of authority. The discrepancy between the dramatic design and such figures is increasingly evident as is the consequent exposure of their powerlessness, whether the eponymous King Lear, or King Leontes in *The Winter's Tale,* the Folio play text with the second highest number of instances of the word *now* (96). As I hope to develop in a companion piece, *now* is associated with turns to the new(s) – "Time's news" (IV.i.36) – in the choric speech by the figure of Time, but it is used in the play rather as temporal deictic simply, and less to structure the spatio-temporal design. More importantly, where it is used to mark turns in the design, *now* is uttered not by individual male authority figures but generic (if still male) figures: unnamed Lords or gentlemen and, most importantly, an old shepherd, who announces the play's central turn: "*Now* bless thyself. Thou metst with things dying, I with things *new*-born" (III.iii.98-99, emphasis mine). No longer bearers of structuring *now*s male authority figures are no longer supported by the spatio-temporal design. No longer the focus of "Time's news", they are denied the hold over history to which they aspire.

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Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 205-231 (2024)

"I will not charm my tongue, I am bound to speak": Toni Morrison's Desdemona *as an Expansion to the Interpretation of* Othello

Maria Valentini

Toni Morrison's *Desdemona* is a sort of prequel and sequel to Shakespeare's *Othello,* a drama which includes Rokia Traoré, a Malian singer, and stage director Peter Sellars, which aims at giving voice and prominence to the women in the play with particular emphasis on the barely mentioned Barbary in Shakespeare's work. The interest lies also in this hybrid reading which mixes adaptation, appropriation and intertextuality and lends itself to postcolonial studies and feminist criticism. The aim of this paper is to try to demonstrate how Morrison's work sheds new light on Shakespeare's tragedy amplifying possibilities of interpretation.

Keywords: *Othello*, Toni Morrison, *Desdemona*, adaptation, intertextuality

Introduction

Emilia's words quoted in the title, which finally disclose her husband's plot towards the end of the play, show the final rejection of the virtues of silence and obedience displayed by the women in Shakespeare's *Othello*[1] (V.ii.185) which Toni Morrison's *Desdemona* (2023)[2] seeks to subvert. Though it has been argued that the original Desdemona does have an 'active' role in choosing to marry Othello without telling her father and then demanding to go to Cyprus with him, that Emilia presents an almost proto-feminist attitude in her words on

1 All subsequent quotations are from Shakespeare 1994 [1958] and are cited parenthetically in the text.

2 All quotations are from Morrison 2023 [2012] and are cited parenthetically in the text.

equality between men and women and that even Bianca attempts to hold her own when Cassio asks her to copy the work out of the fated handkerchief, there seems little doubt that, as Carol Thomas Neely observes, "The men's profound anxieties and murderous fantasies cannot be restrained by the women's affection, wit and shrewdness. The play ends as it began, in a world of men – political, loveless, undomesticated" (Neely 1987, 84)[3] and the female characters throughout the play are mostly told to keep quiet, to go home, to obey; an imposed silence which reaches its apotheosis with the smothering of Desdemona in the last scene.

Toni Morrison is not the first to have chosen to re-evaluate the character of Desdemona from a radical 'feminist' point of view, moving away from the more conventional interpretations which have viewed her as silent, submissive woman. For instance, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* a comedy by Anne-Marie MacDonald, first performed in Toronto in 1988 and then published in 1990, and *Desdemona: a Play about a Handkerchief* by Paula Vogel, published in 1994, aim at offering a transgressive and daring character which completely reconfigures Shakespeare's Desdemona (see Carney 2022, 21). Nadia Fusini has also dealt with Shakespeare's women, and in Desdemona's case has placed emphasis on a strongly erotically charged wife, her determination to be with her husband, and her powerful yearning to consummate the marriage (Fusini 2021, 29). This aspect is particularly evident in the resolute reply Shakespeare's Desdemona delivers to the Duke and Senators, a completely male authoritative audience, in the Council Chamber scene where Brabantio had accused Othello of having abused and corrupted his daughter with "spells and medicines":

> That I love thee More to live with him,
> My downright violence and storm of fortunes
> May trumpet to the world. My heart subdued
> Even to the very quality of my lord: […]
> Let me go with him.
> (*Othello*, I.iii.248-51; 259)

Passages such as this have induced Morrison to a reconsideration of Desdemona; in an informal interview with Jerry Brotton, she asserts:

3 Originally in Neely 1985.

> This [Desdemona] is a really extraordinary character […] not for the obvious reasons. Let's think about it. What is it? Fourteen hundreds or something Venice? She runs away from home [she should be in a convent or jail or something. I mean, nobody runs away from home from that class. And she turns down everybody that they've offered her as a husband […] she meets this one guy, he starts telling her stories, she's breathless and then they run away and get married. She goes to war with him. She meddles in his business. You know, she not this little [in a submissive voice] Desdemona. You know, I saw her stronger, more complex, more interesting than the performances I have seen and that's what I saw in the play[4].

In one of the most exhaustive studies on Toni Morrison's *Desdemona*, Jo Eldridge Carney recounts its origin; she relates an encounter between theatre director Peter Sellars and Morrison in which, whilst discussing Shakespeare's *Othello*, Sellars complained about its stereotypical main characters and considered it, all in all, a rather "thin play" (Carney 2022, 9). Morrison objected that Desdemona had more depth in her than productions generally conceded (as we have just seen from the interview with Brotton) but admitted that Othello's unfortunate wife deserved more attention and, particularly, a more complete biography. Whence, Sellars' challenge: to try to tell the 'missing story'. They decided to engage the Malian musician and singer Rokia Traoré and to produce what was to become an intermedial, hybrid, transnational and transcultural revision/adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy.

This theatre production – it would be reductive to call it just 'a play' – has received critical attention primarily as a feminist, post-colonial rewriting of *Othello*, with emphasis on race, gender and social class issues, but also for its innovative theatricality involving monologues and dialogues interspersed with songs and voices off stage, and a written backdrop with the text behind a practically bare stage, a remarkable new performative experiment which defies definition (Erickson 2013; Carney 2014; Kitts 2014; Guarracino 2015; Chamber 2016; Iyengar 2016; Cucarella-Ramón 2017; Rapetti 2022). Most of the critical essays mentioned concentrate on what is certainly central to Morrison's new version of Shakespeare's tragedy: its readjust-

4 *Toni Morrison talks to Jerry Brotton*, Hay-on-Wye Festival, 2014: https://www.hayfestival.com/p-8106-toni-morrison-talks-to-jerry-brotton.aspx?skinid=16.

ment to render it a feminist, transnational, hybrid work. Cucarella-Ramón, for instance, comparing Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet* with *Desdemona*, focuses on the study of black identity construction in the United States and in Canada, rewriting social and racial subjectivity and defining the black female self. Similarly, Rapetti's paper reflects on the transcultural and transmedial nature of the production which, by involving artists from different geographical locations, harks back to the Black diaspora coexisting with materialistic feminism. Once again, the emphasis lies in the African issue manifesting itself through the presence and voice of a black woman. Instead, Guarracino's study views the African presence through a careful analysis of music in both *Desdemona* and *Margaret Garner*, a 2005 opera, neither of which is set in Africa but which both, according to the author, enact a memory of pre-Middle Passage experience precisely through the use of music. Erickson, on the other hand, concentrates on the bond created among the female characters and particularly the further development of Desdemona beyond the Shakespearian frame. As these few examples demonstrate, the main critical focus is on the revision of gender roles and race issues. These certainly constitute the main innovations presented by Morrison and provide the necessary framework for the interpretation of the production. All these aspects are crucial and are implied in my article, but my main interest is to demonstrate how this revision functions also as a supplement to the interpretation of Shakespeare's *Othello* in its entirety. For instance, the full biographies of the two protagonists provided in *Desdemona* affect our reading of the source text, supplying new perspectives to our understanding of the play. This is also true for Othello, whose naïveté in accepting Iago's insinuations has puzzled readers; and even Cassio's minor appearance in *Desdemona* reveals aspects unseen in Shakespeare's play and invites consideration. As Carney observes, quoting Tom Stoppard's adaptation of *Hamlet*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966), if anyone revisited Shakespeare's play after having read or seen Stoppard's, they would "presumably find the absurdity and portent of the two lackeys – whom they may have previously dismissed – now difficult to ignore" (Carney 2022, 5). Reading or watching Morrison's *Desdemona*, I shall try to argue, produces a similar effect when rereading *Othello*.

With respect to the many revisions and adaptations of *Othello*[5] Morrison's play represents both a prequel and a sequel to Shakespeare's play. All the characters speak (or rather are spoken for, since the actress playing Desdemona recites all the parts, except that of Barbary) from their afterlife, commenting on their story, unfolding the details of their past, their childhood and traumas, before *Othello* begins. It also, and importantly, gives voice and presence to the females who are merely mentioned in Shakespeare and who instead, in Morrison's work, appear as significant co-protagonists of the production. This latter adaptive strategy, with its forceful reclaiming of space and voice for the female characters, best fits in with Gérard Genette's words: "The revaluation of a character consists in investing him or her – by way of pragmatic or psychological transformation – with a more significant and/or more 'attractive' role in the value system of the hypertext than was the case in the hypotext" (Genette 1997, 158). As Sellars (2012, 7) states in his brief forward:

> Toni Morrison has created fiction that imagines, evokes and honors the missing histories of generations whose courage, struggles, achievements, loves, tragedies, fulfilments and disappointments have gone unrecorded, but are still very much with us.

Adaptations, generally, shed new light on source texts and invite their reappraisal; for Adrienne Rich "Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival […] We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it" (Rich 1979, 35). This is certainly true in the case of *Desdemona*, in which female characters come to the fore, in many ways reversing the male centred universe of *Othello*, but which can also be read, as previously mentioned, as a useful expansion to the world of Shakespeare's play.

5 See for instance, Oliver Stone's film with Lawrence Fishburne casting an actor of colour as Othello (1995), Vishal Bhardway's film *Omkara* set as a contemporary crime drama (2006); or Derek Walcott's poem "Goats and Monkeys" (1965), Talib Salih's novel *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) both focussing on racial oppression; Djanet Sear's play *Harlem Duet* (1997), a sort of prequel to the story, and many others (see Carney 2022, 10).

The Performance: A Brief Synopsis

Desdemona was first performed in Vienna in 2011, then throughout Europe, to America and back to London for the World Shakespeare Festival in 2012. No full-length video or recording exists to my knowledge, but there are some brief YouTube clips which allow us to follow some of the musical components of the production and some of its scenes. The text was published in 2012 with a brief forward by director Peter Sellars, and interviews and reviews with Morrison, Traoré and Sellars himself providing interesting insights for those who have not seen the production (Sciolino 2011; Zinoman 2011; Brokaw 2012; Denselow 2012; Cornwell 2015; Dow 2015).

The performance is divided into ten scenes composed by monologues and dialogues between two people, interspersed with songs. In the first scene Desdemona introduces herself and in the second she recounts her childhood and youth; it is here that Barbary is mentioned, that same Barbary who is cited in Shakespeare's 'willow scene' as Desdemona's mother's maid who "had a song of "willow" / An old thing 'twas, but it expressed her fortune, / And she died singing it; that song to-night / Will not go from my mind" (IV.iii.28-31). Barbary's role is expanded and in Morrison's work she acts almost as a catalyst for Desdemona's subsequent passion for Othello. She is Desdemona's nanny, an affectionate surrogate mother, fundamentally responsible for her upbringing:

> […] To hear
> Barbary sing was to wonder at the mediocrity
> of flutes and pipes. She was more alive than
> anyone I knew and more loving. (18)

This is apparently Desdemona's first contact with the exoticism of otherness and induces audience or readers to believe that it strongly influenced her infatuation with the 'other' African. In the third scene she remembers her father trying to find a suitable husband for her, and in the fourth she finally meets Othello "I saw a glint of brass in his eyes identical to the light in Barbary's eyes" (23). The fourth scene tells the story of their falling in love. All the other scenes except the sixth and the seventh, in which Othello tells the story of his past, exhibit honest confrontations between two characters: Soun (Othello's moth-

er) and M. Brabantio (scene 5), Desdemona and Emilia (scene 8), and finally Desdemona and Barbary (scene 9), in which Barbary appears with her real name, Sa'ran, a sign of reappropriation of her origins. The last scene presents the two fated lovers but closes with the idea of peace, respect and communion, though not complete reconciliation.

The Heroine and the Missing Villain

One of Morrison's main objectives, possibly a controversial one, is the absence of Iago, who is only mentioned and whose actions continue to be disruptive, but who does not actually appear. The reason for this is made clear in the afore mentioned interview of the author with Jerry Brotton (2014):

> I was very dismissive of Iago. As I said, I refused to do the play unless Peter permitted me to get rid of Iago altogether. Out. Because he's everywhere, he's talking constantly, nobody's telling him the truth, he's manipulating everybody. See, he's gobbling up the play […] It was so liberating, in the writing and in the imagination, to get rid of the character who is manipulating everybody; to see what it would be like, what they would say to one another if he wasn't there[6].

The performance significantly begins with the self-presentation of Desdemona in a monologue which amplifies the meaning of a name and what being born a woman entails.

> My name is Desdemona. The word,
> Desdemona means misery. It means ill
> fated. It means doomed. Perhaps my parents
> believed or imagined or knew my fortune
> at the moment of my birth. Perhaps
> being born a girl gave them all they needed to
> know of what my life would be like. That it
> would be subject to the whims of my elders
> and control of men. Certainly that
> was the standard, no, the obligation of females
> in Venice when I was a girl. Men made the
> rules. Women followed them. A step away
> was doom, indeed and misery without relief.

6 *Toni Morrison talks to Jerry Brotton*, Hay-on-Wye Festival, 2014.

> My parents, keenly aware and approving of
> that system, could anticipate the future of a girl child accurately.
>
> They were wrong. They knew the system
> but they didn't know me.
>
> I am not the meaning of a name I did not
> choose.
> (Morrison 2023, 13)

This opening monologue can be read as supplying the missing social context in which Shakespeare's play is set, providing the historical cultural atmosphere of Venice, clearly only implied in *Othello*, and the treatment women were subjected to. In fact, Morrison expands, rather than invents, giving greater insight into a feasible 'backstory' of Desdemona's upbringing. Historians Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford in their study on *Women in Early Modern England*, describe the gender prejudices of early modern childrearing: "Most girls remained with their families, where they were educated by their mothers. They were taught to behave differently from boys. They were to be restrained, and to preserve their chastity" (Mendelson and Crawford 1998, 80). Morrison's Desdemona perceived this rearing as confinement, and restoring Desdemona's voice alerts us to the fact she is now talking as an adult and can reconsider her past rather more analytically: "I can speak, at last, words that in earth were sealed or twisted into the language of obedience" (Morrison 2023, 14); in so doing she transports the audience with her and, in my view, adds dimension to the hypotext, opening up for readers and spectators of Shakespeare an added perspective.

Barbary: the Surrogate Mother

The following sections probe deeper into Desdemona's upbringing, and particularly into the role of her mother who is virtually absent in Shakespeare's play; she informs us that her mother was "a lady of virtue whose practice and observation of manners was flawless" and who taught her how to be courteous in speech and how to drop [her] eyes, smile, courtesy", but most of all, "she did not tolerate dispute from a child, nor involve herself in what could be called [her] inner

life. There were strict rules of deportment […] And there was sensible punishment designed for each impropriety" (Morrison 2023, 17)[7]. This absence of a mother's interest in a daughter's inner life, accentuated by the anecdote Desdemona tells of being severely punished as a child for having splashed barefooted in a pond, a most 'ungirlish' thing to do, induced the young Desdemona to believe that her desires, her "imagination must remain hidden. It was as though", she says, a "dark heavy curtain enclosed me". But it was this, she claims, that served instead to strengthen her wilfulness (17). It is at this point that we are introduced, in open opposition to the neglect and constraints imposed on the young girl by her biological family, to Desdemona's surrogate yet liberating mother, whereas the father remains rather in the background and exercises his paternal duty simply by searching for an adequate husband for his daughter.

> My solace in those early days lay with my
> Nurse, Barbary. She alone conspired with
> Me to let my imagination run free. She told
> Me stories of other lives, other countries […]
> Unlike the staid, unbending women of my country, she
> Moved the fluid grace I saw only in swans and the fronds of willow trees […]
> She was more alive than
> anyone I knew and more loving, she tended
> me as though she were my birth mother:
> braided my hair, dressed me, comforted me
> when I was ill and danced with me when I recovered. I loved her.
> (Morrison 2023, 18)

As Sellars mentions in his preface, in Shakespeare's time "Barbary" meant Africa. "The Barbary pirates were hijacking British vessels off the coast of Africa, enslaving their white, British crews. In 1600, a delegation of ambassadors from the Barbary court, Africans of high degree, splendidly dressed, arrived in London to negotiate with Queen Elizabeth" (Sellars 2012, 8). The word Barbary appears once at the beginning of *Othello* when Iago cautions Brabantio he will have his daughter "cover'd with a Barbary horse" (I.i.111) after her elopement with the Moor, thus establishing the first connection with the African continent, but as a name it is mentioned in the fa-

7 On the virtual absence of Shakespeare's mothers see Rose 1991, 291-314.

mous 'unpinning scene' or 'willow scene' whilst Emilia is undressing Desdemona following Othello's command to prepare her for what will become her death-bed:

> My mother had a maid called Barbary,
> She was in love, and he she lov'd prov'd mad
> And did forsake her; she had a song of "willow"
> An old thing 'twas but it express'd her fortune,
> And she died singing it; that song tonight
> Will not go from my mind.
> (IV.iii.26-31)

This brief reference is taken up by Morrison who builds a solid, loving relationship between Desdemona and her maid, as seen in the previous quotation where Barbary represents spontaneity and generosity as opposed to Desdemona's mother's strictness and mostly to her attention to outward behaviour rather than being or feeling. This fuller characterization of Barbary implies Othello is not the first black person Desdemona meets and his seductive and exotic tales are a reminder of her childhood memories. We hear of Barbary's death as a result of her lover's betrayal and Desdemona's desperation; this leads her to seek the truth in a lover before committing her own fidelity. Whilst Brabantio's only interest is in securing his daughter into the hands of another man by inviting noble Venetians to the house, she yearns for men "living in other ways" and she longs for adventure but, significantly "Adventures in [her] mind no less than in [her] heart (Morrison 2023, 22). Once again, this functions as a reasonable explanation of what we hear in *Othello* when Brabantio exclaims that it is not possible that his daughter has purposely chosen the Moor as her husband: Desdemona "a maid, so tender, fair, and happy, / So opposed to marriage, that she shunn'd / The wealthy curled darlings of our nation" (I.ii.66-8). Finally, she meets Othello, whose eyes remind her of her lost Barbary, and in the fourth section of the play their meeting and falling in love is recounted. Probably, as Erickson observes, "Desdemona circumvents and perhaps prematurely short-circuits, her deep loss of Barbary […] The compressed overlapping of the two events maps Barbary onto Othello, making Othello almost a Barbary substitute. But Morrison's play enables Desdemona to differentiate between these two figures through her respective encounters in the afterlife" (Erickson 2013,

7). As this amplification of Desdemona's past with the invented, yet plausible, relationship with Barbary demonstrates, Morrison's play is firmly grounded in a close reading of *Othello* and what is striking is how the 'old story' gains a profitable supplement, one which adds to its interpretations even in this process of revision aimed at breaking new ground. It is in this sense that *Desdemona* is not only an adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy but also a conceivable *explanation* of what generations of critics have pondered over. Somehow when we reread "I saw Othello's visage in his mind / And to his honours, and his valiant parts / Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate" (I.iii.251-53), or earlier when we hear of Othello's wondrous tales and disastrous chances which Desdemona would devour with her "greedy ear" (see I.iii.127-70), the full story of their mutual attraction acquires new meaning. This will become clearer as the performance progresses; in Morrison's play the courting scene ends with an unambiguous "I adore you" from Desdemona to which Othello replies "I love you. Turn away old world, while my love and I create a new one" (Morrison 2023, 25), reminding us of the unlimited love between Antony and Cleopatra which needed to find "new heaven, new earth" to be embodied, such was its boundlessness (*Antony and Cleopatra*, I.i.17)[8]. This idyllic moment between the lovers, however, reveals its true nature after the fifth section where the mothers of Desdemona and Othello, both mentioned but neither present in Shakespeare's play, meet in compliance with Morrison's desire to give voice to female characters and their relationship, a scene we will return to.

Othello's Story and his Secrets

The following two sections which provide Othello with his own backstory also offer realistic details which may be interpreted as illuminating the hypotext. We must not forget that it is the same actress playing Desdemona who also channels the other characters, the only other voice being that of Rokia Traorè, as mentioned, who sings the songs which offer commentaries on the actions, which reference African traditions, and impersonates Barbary. Othello's narrative is therefore also spoken through a female voice, though the story is

8 The edition used is Shakespeare 1993 [1954].

clearly his own. We are told Othello is an orphan, adopted by a "root woman" who much like Barbary brings him up in a world of nature and love for music:

> She worshipped the natural world and
> Encouraged me to rehearse certain songs to divine its power.
> (Morrison 2023, 31)

But this maternal love ends when he is captured by Syrians and quickly learns the art of war. His words are telling: "Only as a soldier could I excel and turn the loneliness inside to exhilaration" (31). Carney observes that the "immersion into a violent military milieu challenges Shakespeare's representation of Othello as noble warrior and great general" (Carney 2014, 29). Yet his boyish enthusiasm for the military world, "I was happy, breathless and hungry for more violent encounters" (Morrison 2023, 31), as a means to escape his inner loneliness, can, once again, in my view, constitute a more comprehensive enlightenment for the Shakespearian Othello's insecurity when faced with domestic issues, such as his relationship with his wife, rather than warfare: that "loneliness" still inhabits him. He had admitted his weaknesses to the Duke and Senators of Venice himself when asked to explain his elopement with Desdemona in Shakespeare's text:

> Rude am I in my speech
> And little blest with the set phrase of peace,
> For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
> Till now some nine moons wasted, they have us'd
> Their dearest action in the tented field,
> And little of this great world can I speak
> More than pertains to feats of broil, and battle.
> (I.iii.81-87)

And his basic insecurity emerged strongly after Iago instilled in him the suspicion of his wife's infidelity:

> Haply, for I am black,
> And have not those soft parts of conversation
> That chamberers have, or for I'm declined
> Into the vale of years
> (III.iii.266-70)

The tales of his adventures in *Desdemona* reflect and possibly surpass the outlandishness of his Shakespearian counterpart but maintain the echo of the original: "the islanders have no heads and their faces are settled in their chests" (Morrison 2023, 33) almost paraphrases "men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders (I.iii.144-45). Yet, in keeping with the hypotext, Morrison adds disturbing details to what a soldier's life may have entailed and what, we may choose to surmise, the "valiant Moor" had omitted. Desdemona is enchanted by the tales and, unsurprisingly, attracted by the story of the powerful Amazon women who are stronger than men and who Desdemona would like to compete with. But the disturbing scene occurs when Morrison's Othello confesses that during these wars "rape was perfunctory" (Morrison 2023, 36) and most of all when he recounts his own experience with the complicity of Iago. All we hear in the Shakespearian text is that Othello and Iago had fought together in the past when, in the opening scene with Roderigo, we witness Iago's venomous tirade against Cassio who has been chosen over him to be the Moor's lieutenant, a man, he claims, "That never set a squadron in the field / Nor the division of a battle knows" (I.i.23-24). Othello, on the other hand, had seen Iago at work with his very eyes "At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds, / Christian and heathen" (I.i.22; 29-30) and this should have been reason enough to make the right choice, that is, to prefer Iago. But we have no details of the armed conflicts, or of Iago's or indeed Othello's actions during these battles. In *Desdemona* the tale of horror emerges: Othello confesses that "Aroused by bloodletting" he and Iago entered a stable where they found two women who were "old, so old. Fingers gnarled by years of brutal work" (Morrison 2023, 37), but despite that they raped them repeatedly: "I don't know how long it lasted. Our groans and their soft crying drape my memory of passing time" (37) says Othello who adds to this horrific act the fact that they found that a young boy had watched the whole scene. This exchange of secrecy as Othello calls it, creates a bond between the two men and when Desdemona asks whether they felt shame Othello's reply is significant:

> You don't understand. Shame, yes, but
> Worse. There was pleasure too. The look
> Between us was not to acknowledge shame,
> But mutual pleasure, Pleasure in the

> Degradation we had caused; more pleasure
> In leaving a witness to it. We were not
> Only refusing to kill our own memory, but
> Insisting on its life in another. (38)

In war zones male alliances often result "from shared atrocities, a propensity for cruelty and toxic masculinity that often carries into the civilian world" (Carney 2014, 30). This male bonding between Othello and Iago created by their shared violence is another of Morrison's expansions which may help Shakespearian readers and critics to imagine the reasons for Othello's total trust in his Ancient. In other words, we don't know what the two did when fighting at Rhodes or Cyprus, but there is no doubt, as Desdemona observes in the later play, that there was a sense of brotherhood amongst the two men, "Bright, tight, camaraderie […] The wide, wild celebrity men find with each other cannot compete with the narrow comfort of a wife" (Morrison 2023, 37). Proving that male bonding is ultimately destructive as opposed to female bonding which is, eventually, beneficial in spite of initial confrontations, is of course Toni Morrison's main objective as we shall see in the three female-to-female scenes, yet the idea of possible unspoken events, which make Shakespeare's Othello so trusting of Iago, gives us a further viewpoint in approaching the play. Much has been said about the homosocial or even homoerotic possible relation between Othello and Iago, particularly after the 'temptation scene' with its repeated expressions of mutual love and dependency: "I'm bound to thee forever" (III.iii.218) says Othello and "I am your own for ever" (III.iii.486) concludes Iago after they have both knelt in what has been interpreted as a symbolic marriage between comrades. In fact, as Melissa Sanchez observes, "the word 'love' expresses the bonds between Cassio, Iago, and Othello at least as insistently as that between Othello and Desdemona" (Sanchez 2020, 126). But whether or not there is an underlying strain of homoeroticism in Shakespeare's play, there is no doubt that Othello believes Iago's insinuations and refuses Desdemona and Emilia's objections until the end. In *Desdemona* Morrison fully embraces the interpretation of the many critics who maintain that Iago would not have found such fertile ground in Othello, in his gullibility, if it hadn't been for the fact that Othello had the idea of his wife's unfaithfulness already planted inside him. Berger, for instance, goes as far as assuming that

Iago's responsibility is exaggerated and that "If it all happens with startling rapidity, that's because it has already happened […] It is almost too late [for Iago] to do further harm. The rapidity with which they destroy their relation makes him all but belated and dispensable" (Berger 2013, 137). The assumption, in Morrison's play, is that it was this sense of brotherhood which provoked the tragedy as Desdemona herself says:

> My husband knew Iago was lying,
> Manipulating, sabotaging. So why did he
> act on obvious deceit? Brotherhood. The
> quiet approval beamed from one male
> eye to another. Bright, tight camaraderie.
> (Morrison 2023, 37)

Nevertheless after the admission of the rape, when Othello asks whether he can be forgiven, Desdemona replies she cannot, yet adds, "But I can love you and remain committed to you" (37), and then proceeds to give her description of love, a female vision where honest love is complete and remains constant even after confessions of such sinful behaviour, whereas Othello expects pity, seeks forgiveness thus avoiding self-examination (Erickson 2013, 6). The line which closes the section takes us back to *Othello* where Desdemona explains to the Duke "I saw Othello's visage in his mind" implying her indifference to outward appearance and her belief that true love springs from knowledge of interiority; here she says "My error was in believing that you were more than the visage of your mind" (Morrison 2023, 39), acknowledging her old naïveté whilst the new, mature, Desdemona has become aware – but only in her afterlife – of the true nature of her husband. But Morrison's Othello too has gained insight: the final scene which terminates the play offers clarification of the two protagonists' inner lives which also may serve as a critical evaluation of *Othello*. Othello asks Desdemona why she didn't fight back when he was strangling her, why she denied that he had murdered her and she replies she was not being killed by the man she knew, so it no longer mattered to her: "My Othello is not the man who chose to believe what you must have known was false" (50). Othello's words, which must be read in the context of Morrison's play, may seem to ring true even when thinking back to Shakespeare's play:

> You never loved me. You
> fancied the idea of me, the exotic foreigner
> who kills for the State, who will die for the
> State. […] What excited
> you was my strange story: enslaved youth
> ruined by war then redeemed by it, fantastic
> adventures, stories of freaks and miracles. […]
> And you thought that was all there was to
> me – a useful myth, a fairy's tale cut to suit
> a princess' hunger for real life, not the dull
> existence of her home. (51)

The themes of pity, the excitement of Shakespeare's Desdemona over Othello's stories can easily be summarised in Othello's recounting of his courtship in the Senate room "She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd / And I love'd her that she did pity them" (I.iii.167-68). This is, of course, a dangerously thin premise for a fully successful relationship, but through Morrison's words its true vulnerability becomes more apparent. Othello continues his version of the story expounding the difficulties and hardships he had to sustain to reach his position, his own reality which, in his view, she turned into a "spectacle".

It is at this point that we have Cassio's interjection, a voice off stage, in which he too tells his tale which offers no kind words for the protagonists. He admits to his weakness for drinking but accuses the drunkenness which led to his demotion to a trickery. He insinuates Desdemona's innocence is highly inflated and that she never refused his approaches; he acknowledges Othello's competence but found him unfit as a leader and is proud that Cyprus is now under his reign: "I am the one who decides. Othello gone from life, Iago suffering in a prison cell. A clean sweep which allows me to rule and perhaps help Venice to return to its prominence" His final assumption is that "Power is more than responsibility; it is destiny" (Morrison 2023, 53). Cassio is given an arrogant portrayal in this play compared to his Shakespearian counterpart, but the question of destiny is put forward to imply that a black man, however valiant, could never have been given full rule over a Venetian province, hence tying in with one of Morrison's major themes, the succumbing not just of women but of blacks. The theme is taken up by Othello himself who admits not to have ever liked Cassio but to have believed him loyal whereas he was deceived: "why" he asks, "Because I am African, Because I was sold to slavery? (53).

Female Encounters

The interracial question is of course central to *Desdemona*, as are the misogynistic and social class issues exposing inequalities on several levels. Before analysing the final pages of the work which reroute the individual relationship of Othello and Desdemona towards a broader vision, it is essential to see how these themes have been highlighted particularly in the three encounters which occur amongst the females, only one of which has a counterpart in *Othello*: that with Emilia.

The first, in section five, is the meeting between Soun, Othello's adoptive mother, and Madame Brabantio, Desdemona's mother, who, in Vincent Cucarella-Ramón's words "get a voice and engage in a healing debate with the purpose of bridging difference with regard to class and race" (Cucarella-Ramón 2017, 91). Their difference is marked by their clothing, "One is dressed in simple cloth, the other in a sumptuous gown. They both have white hair and carry a torch" (Morrison 2023, 26), and they may never have had the possibility to meet and talk on equal terms on earth, but in the afterlife all seems possible. The women introduce themselves and when they discover one is the murderer of the other's daughter Soun exclaims "are we enemies then?" to which M. Brabantio replies: "Of course. Our vengeance is more molten than our sorrow" (26). Morrison is careful not to rush her women into easy, sentimental empathy; they initially express their rage but slowly recognize their common sorrow: "yet we have much to share" says Soun and "Both died in and for love" (27). They kneel together but cannot pray together because they have different gods, but they choose to build an altar to the spirits who will console them. It is interesting to note that it is the African Soun who teaches the western Brabantio about gods and spirits; sharing each other's pain, learning one from the other, they overcome their differences in class and race and open up at least the possibility of a multiethnic society. What form this consolatory gesture might take is left to the subsequent encounters with the other two women, "but the prospect of female collaboration has been broached" (Erickson 2013, 8).

This breaking down of racial boundaries occurs even more vividly in Desdemona's encounter with Barbary who, as we have recalled, is only mentioned in *Othello* as Madame Brabantio's maid, was betrayed by her husband and died singing the "willow song" we hear

in Shakespeare (IV.iii.26-30). In *Desdemona* we have heard much about her, but only from the protagonist's point of view and now we finally hear her own voice and her own version of the story. Once again, the encounter begins with a confrontation which is also a cultural exchange between Africa and Europe and between different social classes. The Venetian girl is initially thrilled by this meeting, "Barbary! Barbary. Come closer. How I have missed you […] we shared so much", but is soon put straight by the African maid who, much like Desdemona, does not identify with her name:

> We shared nothing
> […]
> I mean you don't even know my name.
> Barbary? Barbary is what you call Africa.
> Barbary is the geography of the foreigner,
> the savage. Barbary? Barbary equals the
> sly, vicious enemy who must be put down
> at any price; held down at any cost for the
> conquerors pleasure. Barbary is the name of
> those without whom you could neither live
> nor prosper.
> (Morrison 2023, 45)

She says her real name is Sa'ran, which means joy, and when Desdemona tries to interject remembering they were best friends, she is once again contradicted by Sa'ran "I was your slave […] I am black-skinned. You are white-skinned. […] So you don't know me. Have never known me" (45-46). But Desdemona insists that colour is no issue, that she married a black man and when Sa'ran says he ended up slaughtering her she replies that Sa'ran had the same fate. Cucarella-Ramón observes that giving Sa'ran subjectivity and power to voice her own truth Toni Morrison is "inserting herself into history and voicing Africa for the first time in a Shakespearian story" (Cucarella-Ramón 2017, 92). The new version of the willow song which in *Othello* foreboded tragedy here functions as a restoration of black subjectivity. In spite of Desdemona's insistence on her sincere love for her surrogate mother, Sa'ran now places emphasis on the difference in their social status: "I have no rank in your world. I do what I'm told, I brought you what you wanted before you knew you wanted it" (Morrison 2023, 48). Despite these confrontations they find something to share: Sa'ran, Desde-

mona says, "We are women. I had no more control over my life than you had. My prison was unlike yours but it was prison still" (48). The section ends with the repetition of the willow song, which this time gives hope: "I will never die again" sings Sa'ran, "We will never die again" echoes Desdemona (49). They both acknowledge the injustice they have had to endure: both locked up in prisons which constrained them to social norms they did not choose; both were killed by the men they loved. Morrison is not trying here to change the past, but to transcend it in the afterlife: they will no longer just be victimized women. Mutual revelation, and then acceptance, is a prerogative of the female characters, though, as we shall see in the conclusion, something similar occurs with Desdemona and Othello. Nevertheless, this encounter allows for different interpretations; in Lenore Kitts' view "Desdemona's dialogue with Barbary […] functions to expose and transform the wounded identities at the heart of Shakespeare's play" (Kitts 2014, 259). Though it can be argued that in the utopia of the afterlife, free from racial and political constraints, peaceful mutual recognition can be reached, according to Ayanna Thompson this particular meeting is not clear in its ultimate message. Basing herself on the production in which Rokia Traoré impersonates Sa'ran she observes that Traoré does not seem much interested in Tina Benko, interpreting Desdemona, and this is possibly a hint that total reconciliation is ultimately impossible:

> Desdemona responds, "We will never die again", rendering her understanding of Sa'ran and Sa'ran's song unclear. Are we to interpret Desdemona's inclusion of her own suffering with Sa'ran as an epiphany about their conjoined future in the after world? Or is it merely a return to the unthinking collapse of all female suffering, one that implicitly whitewashes the unequal treatment of black and white bodies? "While the text is ambiguous, the performance by Traoré as Sa'ran makes the distance between Desdemona and her former slave immense. While they occupy the same tightly focused space onstage for the entirety of the production, the gulf between Sa'ran and Desdemona seems almost unsurmountable" (Thompson 2016, 503).

Thompson's view is that Desdemona must come to terms with her own privileged position as a rich white woman and she slowly grows in self-perception in her meeting with Emilia which also involves confrontation but represents female conviviality and Desdemona's final questioning of her own beliefs.

This encounter, which precedes that with Barbary, once again begins with divergencies but reaches solidarity. In *Othello*, as Carney notes, Emilia is Desdemona's lady-in-waiting, but their intimacy is made quite clear and in the hierarchy of social positions she "occupied a liminal status: she was neither a working-class servant not quite Desdemona's equal" (Carney 2022, 17). They do however seem mutually supportive as Desdemona defends Emilia from Iago's misogynistic attacks and Emilia defends Desdemona against Othello's outbursts, in fact loses her own life to speak the truth. On the other hand, although unaware of her husband's plans, she is instrumental in the tragic outcome of the story through the stealing of the handkerchief and then denying she knows anything about it. Despite her almost proto-feminist argumentations when trying to convince Desdemona that infidelity has the same value for men as it has for women, she is for most of the play largely dependent on her husband and mostly obedient: "I nothing know, but for his fantasy" she says before handing over the fated handkerchief (III.iii.303).

The most extended portrayal of the Desdemona/Emilia relationship, the so called 'un-pinning scene' or 'willow scene', is where the arguments of gender inequities emerge. Emilia declares:

> Let husbands know,
> Their wives have sense like them: they see, and smell,
> And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
> As husbands have. What is it they do,
> When they change us for others? Is it sport? […]
> Then let them use us well: else let them know,
> The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.
> (IV.iii.93-96; 112-13)

This scene, one of the few scenes of female camaraderie in Shakespearian tragedy, was for centuries eliminated in performance, precisely for the references to female sexuality which contrasted with idealized womanhood; Denise Whalen observes that "the history of this scene in performance shows an unnerving disposition to still the female voice, which makes it all the more remarkable that Shakespeare wrote the scene at all" (Whalen 2007, 508). In *Desdemona* the scene opens with a rather sarcastic remark on the part of Emilia:

> Well, well. If it isn't the martyr of Venice.
> Remember me? We died together.
> How do you do?
> (Morrison 2023, 42)

But after a brief exchange the divergencies begin to surface; Desdemona accuses Emilia:

> Your deception, your dangerous
> murderous silence led to my death. And
> it led to yours. (42)

Emilia replies she resents Desdemona's statement that collapse of virtue is not survival but cowardice "coming from one who had no defence against lies or her husband's strangling fingers" (42). The argument continues with Desdemona recurring to the theme of friendship:

> You and I were friends,
> But didn't the man you knelt to protect run
> A gleaming sword through your survival strategies? (43)

The argument gets heated and, as in the case with Barbary, Emilia reminds her mistress of their respective roles. She was murdered because she supported her lady, she exposed her husband's lies, she calls Desdemona an ingrate and insists on their difference:

> That is your appreciation for my devotion to
> You? "My cloak Emilia", My gown,
> Emilia"
> "Unpin me Emilia", "Arrange my bed sheets,
> Emilia" That is not how you treat a friend;
> That's how you treat a servant. Someone beneath you, beneath your class which takes
> Devotion for granted. (43)

But the tone of the scene soon changes. Emilia reveals she was an orphan, that she believed marriage was a salvation, but she was motherless and childless and had to work, unlike Desdemona, a Senator's daughter. This modifies Desdemona's attitude; it creates a new bond between the women.

> Emilia, I wish I had known you when we
> Were children. You had no family. I had too
> Much. You had no mother. I had no mother's love. (44)

Emilia points out the difference, "an orphan knows how quickly love can be withdrawn" a statement which leads Desdemona to self-scrutiny: "You are right to correct me, she replies, instead of judging I should have been understanding" (44) The lack of parental love, albeit different, seems to unite the two women, although Desdemona is now aware of their discrepancy. The scene closes with Emilia remembering having seen a small lizard shedding its "dull outer skin" and exposing "her jeweled self" (44) with no help. What struck Emilia, apart from the brilliance of the new skin, was that she did not leave the old one behind, "As though the camouflage would still be needed to disguise her true dazzle". That little lizard changed her life, she concludes, implying her own resilience and resourcefulness. This image signals the hope of transformation, of a new self-awareness, and as Erickson remarks "This visionary model belongs not only to Emilia but also implicitly serves as inspiration for Desdemona" (Erickson 2013, 9). If we wanted to stretch the metaphor a step further, we could think of Morrison's *Desdemona* as somehow shedding the original story, the hypotext *Othello*, but inevitably carrying it with her, not as a camouflage to disguise a new dazzle, but as a necessary and integral part of her story.

Conclusion

The last two sections stress the motif of change, Emilia's life being changed by the image of the lizard and Sa'ran's statement that "with time is change" (Morrison 2023, 48). Erickson argues that these changes can be seen also on the authorial level in Morrison's relationship to Shakespeare, *Othello* being the old song and *Desdemona* the new one that brings change.

These routes from contrast to reconciliation, or at least acknowledgment, occur in the final pages which conclude Desdemona's meeting with Othello. After their mutual accusations and Cassio's interjection, again we find the emergence of a change in attitude. Desdemona apologizes to her husband "for a profound error in judgement" and Othello replies he is "beyond sorry; it is shame that strafes

[him]. And shame too for diminishing our life together as spectacle. It was never that" (Morrison 2023, 54). Self-awareness once again replaces strife; Desdemona advances her pacifist vision of life: "I am sick of killing. It solves nothing. Questions nothing, produces nothing, nothing but more of itself. […] You believed I loved Othello the warrior. I did not" (54). She thus reverses Othello's accusations of having fallen for him for his martial abilities.

This last interchange, after which Othello will speak no more, implies that he has not developed from his earthly life whilst the heroine of Morrison's play is now aware of the possibility of wisdom, which never comes too late. An optimistic interpretation of this ending may see it as a valid alternative to the tragedy of *Othello*: in Ayanna Thomson's view, "Morrison's re-vision invites the audience to imagine an alternative conclusion that enables expansion through true understanding instead of contraction through death and destruction" (Thompson 2016, 501). The two lovers finally come to acknowledge they have been victims of a given set of standards, one as a woman, the other as a black man; both are in their own way outcasts having to conquer respect from society.

Yet the differences between them are still great, one still linked to the world of war, as it was in the hypotext in Othello's presuicidal speech:

> And say besides that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and turban's Turk
> Beat a Venetian, and traduc's the state,
> I took by the throat the circumcised dog
> And smote him thus.
> (V.ii.352-56)

where he states that this is what he wishes to be remembered for, as one who loved too well if not wisely, but most of all as one who has done the state good service, an outstanding general. Desdemona instead has gained full consciousness, has matured from the Shakespearian text and now takes front line for the remaining part of the performance as Othello fades from view, or rather from the text since no prefixes introduce him anymore. From this point of view Othello has not been able to gain the full understanding granted to Desdemona. Morrison is not after the classic happy ending but rather a wider

understanding of the world, of love, of war, of friendship, of equality. From dialogue to monologue Desdemona declares:

> The world is alive and even if we kill it, it
> returns fresh, full throated and hungry for
> time and space in which to thrive. And if
> we haven't secured the passionate peace we
> yearn for, it is because we haven't imagined
> it. Is it still available, this human peace?
> (Morrison 2023, 56)

The "we" has become a universal "we", mankind, an interracial world of gender equality imagining universal peace (Wouldn't John Lennon have loved this?); Desdemona closes the story exclaiming "We will be judged by how well we love" (56) after a song which advocates communion amongst all human beings:

> It's a question
> Of working together
> On the task,
> I would be happy to take part.
> Whether we are from the same place or not.
> Whether we are from the same culture or not.
> Should we celebrate this moment?
> It would fill me with joy. (56)

When trying to define Morrison's *Desdemona* we can talk both of adaptation and appropriation. Julie Sanders considers adaptation as signalling a "relationship with an informing source text or original" which can be easily recognizable, whereas appropriation "frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural domain" (Sanders 2016, 26). According to this definition, it seems that adaptation suits Morrison's work more fittingly, though there certainly are 'journeys away' from Shakespeare which highlight questions of feminist and transnational subjectivities for blacks and a reversal of the manly ethos commonly attributed to Shakespeare's play, with the role of women coming to the fore. Adaptations such as this certainly involve an ideological critique of the source text, but in Carney's words "they are not unidirectional [and can] invite a return to and a re-evaluation of the source text" (Carney

2022, 3). As our title suggests, Morrison's *Desdemona* is, amongst all else, a useful tool precisely for a re-evaluation of Shakespeare's *Othello* since it widens possibilities of interpretation, and clarifications, of some of the darker aspects of the tragedy.

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REVIEWS

Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 235-254 (2024)

Selected Publications in Shakespeare Studies

Compagnoni, Michela, *I mostri di Shakespeare. Figure del deforme e dell'informe*, Roma, Carocci (Serie AIA Book Prize / 8), 2022, 171 pp.

The "monstrous" is a trope that runs through the most diverse fields of knowledge – aesthetics, philosophy, law, psychoanalysis, medicine – and has always been an integral part of literature and the figurative arts. The "monster", etymologically a supernatural manifestation that disrupts a pre-established order, but also something that performs the function of divine warning and revelation of the afterlife (Cicero, *De divinatione*, 1, 93), has been identified since ancient times with lawless, irregular, anomalous, subversive bodies, often a hybrid with anthropozoomorphic traits (as in the Sphinx), increasingly manifested in visual and, hence, physical but also moral terms. Oedipus himself, who appears in the famous painting by the French symbolist painter Gustave Moreau, *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1864), is a monster because, albeit unknowingly, he kills his own father and procreates children with his own mother: a parricide and an incest, two of the capital taboos that human civilisation has established for the sake of progress (Williams 1999, 249-51).

One of the greatest scholars of monstrosity, Jeffrey Cohen, in his "Seven Theses" in *Monster Theory. Reading Culture* (1996) states that monsters are a complex phenomenon, "a cultural construct", a material that originates as horror and yet attracts like a magnet, an entity that we yearn to normalise and confine in reassuring scientific terms but that never ceases to escape our inquisitorial eye and especially our control.

The contrasting emotional-cognitive complexities that monsters arouse (beautiful/ugly, pleasure/disgust, amusement/fear, love/hate) and the numerous existential and normative-procedural dilemmas that they ignite with their presence (what to do with the creature – how to treat it – does it have a soul – does it have rights and duties?) are treated in a vast bibliography that has been flourishing at a rapid pace, especially since the second half of the twentieth century, both in the Anglo-American area (Friedman 1981; Daston and Park 1981 and 1998; Bates 2005; Crawford 2005; Mittman and Dendle eds. 2012; Calzoni and Perletti 2015) and in Italy (Mazzocut-Mis 1992; Ettorre, Gasparro and Micks 2002; Chialant 2002; Di Michele 2002; Marchetti 2004; Pagetti and Palusci 2007; Baratta 2016, 2017 and 2018).

Michela Compagnoni's brilliant monograph, *I mostri di Shakespeare. Figure del deforme e dell'informe*, reviewed here, is part of the large group of publications that have appeared on the subject in recent decades, setting itself the objective of surveying the great Shakespearean canon in search of a specific outline of monstrosity, namely its manifestation in the dichotomous binomial "deformed/formless" (12). These two sides of monstrosity are charged with polyphonic varieties of meaning and are endowed with great expressive power, which the author traces expertly in five of Shakespeare's works, all distinct from one another in genre, style and artistic maturity: *Richard III* (1593), *Othello* (1603-1604), *Macbeth* (1606), *King Lear* (1604-1605) and *The Tempest* (1610-1611). In these plays, interpreted by placing emphasis not so much on the result of the deformation as on the moment of transition from one form to another and with an emphasis on the text over performance, a monster is – as Compagnoni convincingly shows – "any individual or event that upsets, the sudden twist in paradigms and the emergence of their obscene reversal" (pp. 13-14).

Michela Compagnoni gives voice to the distinct ways in which the monsters of these famous Shakespearean dramas are the cause of reversals of the universe's codified forms, whether in terms of anatomy, hierarchies, eros, language, or visible and perceptible realities, by presenting her book to the reader with an agile, streamlined inner architecture, but critically well thought out and very effective in terms of communicative immediacy.

In her Introduction (pp. 11-28), she first summarises the copious scholarship on the theme of the monstrous, thus clarifying the theo-

retical and methodological assumptions that guide her research. Her preliminary considerations are followed by a historically oriented section, which paints a detailed picture of the various epistemic models that the monstrous embodied in early modern England. Initially a corollary of the kaleidoscopic heritage of wonder, and later divine punishment, an instrument of control of female customs, as well as an object of ridicule, a political weapon, and only in its last stages a medical pathology and methodology by which science can evolve, the monstrous undergoes a true cultural journey between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Shakespeare captures key aspects of this peregrination – which is simultaneously spatial, imaginary and replete with signifiers – and, after having absorbed them with surprising sensitivity, reworks them with new metaphorical stratifications that resonate in accordance with the climate of his age.

This short introductory section goes back to back with a much more impactful and insightful part of the book, in which Compagnoni approaches Shakespeare's texts to track down the monstrous as deformed / formless. The investigation starts with Richard III and Caliban (chapter 1, pp. 31-77), the former as a "lump of flesh" and the latter as a "mooncalf", both characterised by a dual monstrosity in that they are repeatedly said to be altered in their bodies but their monstrosity actually goes beyond bodily borders to embrace Renaissance discourses on humours, sexuality, maternal contamination, bestiality, and alterity as a whole. The deformity of these two characters is not attributable only and exclusively to their imbalance of humours or to maternal contagion but is also the result of the point of view that the other characters adopt towards the indefinite, changeable and anti-canonical bodies of Richard and Caliban, explored in the two dramas so compulsively on the physical level as to verge on dissection. This obsessive epistemological questioning does not, however, lead to any hoped-for answers, but only frustrations and uncertainties. Both Richard and Caliban resist any categorisation, thus configuring themselves for all intents and purposes as formless monsters.

While Richard's and Caliban's monstrosity is – at least initially – determined by the tangible materiality of their 'exceptional' bodies, in *Macbeth* and *Othello* (chapter 2, pp. 79-127), monsters have no concrete shape but stem from social and power structures that are abruptly upturned by delusions, distortions of objects and deceptive visions.

Here, then, the deformed/formless germinates as a result of diseased eyes, which project towards the "outside" and onto the "other" partial images contaminated by a totally warped visual organ. Faced with the obscene contemplation of Duncan's desecrated corpse, with the deception orchestrated by the elusive and indecipherable Weïrd Sisters and their equivocal, counterfeited knowledge, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth maintain a hallucinatory attitude that cannot but prevail, and an inability to discern truth from falsity, reality from illusion, the only possible way to support the weight of the many crimes that the tyrannical pair have committed. Likewise, in *Othello*, the gaze that is toxified by Iago's poisonously and instrumentally vacuous words triumphs, becoming the fundamental trigger for that deforming process that originates from the antagonist to spread towards the other *dramatis personae* and ultimately drags everything and everyone to ruin.

In the third and last chapter (pp. 129-150), Compagnoni focuses on Edgar's performance as Poor Tom in *King Lear* as emblematic of an exquisitely linguistic staging of the monstrous and, therefore, as the epitome of the deformed/formless monstrosity explored in the book. Poor Tom's monstrosity is imbued with the broad Renaissance debate on the importance of the word as a means of elevating man from his bestial state, an elevation that enables him to approach the perfection of the divine. If losing one's ability to express oneself rationally means losing one's humanity, the evident syntactic and semantic fracture, the maniacal repetitions, the stammerings, the broken lemmas, the tattered speeches, the "roaring voices" of Tom signal his descent towards an even formless monstrosity, no longer rooted solely in a disfigured exteriority.

What in the end forcefully emerges from Compagnoni's careful and meticulous examination of these five plays is how the intrinsically transversal and interdisciplinary category of the deformed/formless is useful for highlighting the stratification of meanings and valences that the monstrous gains in English Renaissance culture: "disorder", "emptiness", "contrary to form", but also "generative dynamism" and "continuous proliferation of new but never fixed forms" (153).

The excavation that Compagnoni carries out among the creases of these textually fertile plays allows us to make another no less important observation: the perception / portrayal of the monstrous, despite the multiple transformations and mutations it has undergone over the centuries, always maintains – even in the great Shakespearean theatre, in which monstrosity is deeply rooted in the culture of

its time – some distinctive elements that authorise the de-historicisation of the monstrous, elevating it to a universal symbol. Richard III, Caliban, Poor Tom and the monsters in *Othello* and *Macbeth* are undoubtedly monsters within the society and early modern culture that shaped them, but deep down, if we consider it even for a moment, in their deviant bodies, in their features overwhelmed by deformation and in their mad and frenzied language, nest fears, ghosts, expectations and dreams that are innate to human beings.

To conclude, this work by Michela Compagnoni is notable not only for the comprehensiveness of the sources she has used and the large corpus of critical material she has documented in her bibliography (pp. 155-171), but also for the reading she has made from it and the originality of her research itself (in fact, I am unaware of any works of this kind on this specific topic ever being published in Italy).

Hence, this is a fascinating book, which will stimulate scholars to propose new interpretations of the monstrous not only in early modern England and in reference to Shakespeare's theatre, but also in other eras, in different cultural and geographical contexts, and by examining authors whom critics have neglected or of whom they still have little knowledge.

Luca Baratta, *University of Siena*

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Peter Holland, *Shakespeare and Forgetting*, The Arden Shakespeare, London, 2023, 250 pp.

"Remember me", dice ad Amleto lo spettro del padre. E lui risponde:

> […] Remember thee?
> Ay thou poor gost, while memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
> That youth and observation copied there,
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmixed with baser matter. (I.v.95-104)

Eugenio Montale ha tradotto così questi versi:

> Ricordarti? Oh sì, povero spirito,
> Finché esisterà la memoria in questo globo demente!
> Ricordarti? Ma io cancellerò
> Dalla tavola della mente i ricordi sciocchi e triti,
> Le parole dei libri, tutte le forme, tutte le impressioni,
> Tutto ciò che fu scritto dalla giovinezza
> E dall'esperienza; e il tuo comando
> Solo vivrà nel libro del mio cervello,
> Sgombro da ogni altro intento!

L'impegno solenne a ricordare la tragedia del padre si intreccia così con la promessa di cancellare dalla memoria gli altri ricordi, diventati inutili, "sciocchi e triviali". La garanzia della memoria si accompagna al tentativo di creare l'oblio. Da questo nesso fra memoria e oblio, e fra memoria e vendetta da un lato, oblio e perdono dall'altro, prende le mosse il libro di Peter Holland.

È un saggio impegnativo, con una struttura labirintica, che nasce da una lunga, appassionata consuetudine con l'opera di Shakespeare e si muove tra piani diversi: il confronto ravvicinato col testo, l'accurata analisi del lessico, considerato nella sua precisa dimensione storica, mentre via via compaiono, sullo sfondo ma anche nel vivo dell'analisi, le riflessioni novecentesche e contemporanee sulla memoria e sul modo in cui i passi che si analizzano e si discutono sono stati interpre-

tati non solo dai critici ma anche a teatro o al cinema. L'autore insegna infatti Shakespeare Studies nel dipartimento Film, televisione e teatro dell'Università di Notre Dame, e uno dei meriti del suo libro è proprio questo, e cioè mostrarci dal vivo come la *performance*, il modo in cui i testi teatrali vengono rappresentati e interpretati sia parte importante della lettura critica e dei processi per cui i classici vivono nel tempo.

Il libro, si diceva, prende le mosse dai versi citati all'inizio in cui Amleto si impegna nello stesso tempo a ricordare il padre e a dimenticare tutto il resto, ma proprio la promessa del dimenticare, di compiere una operazione di "active forgetting", nota Holland, non può essere mantenuta, perché riguarda qualcosa che non è possibile realizzare. Proprio da qui nasce l'analisi, a diverse sfaccettature, della funzione della dimenticanza nei testi shakespeariani, che si fa forte anche dell'affermazione di un autorevole studioso, Stephen Orgel, per cui, "while memory has long been recognized as a basic element of artistic creativity […] forgetting or subversion of memory, is and equally essential creative principle both for Shakespeare and his audience watching his dramaturgical practice" (Orgel 2011, 101). Nello stesso tempo l'autore è ben consapevole che per un pubblico contemporaneo parlare di memoria e vendetta (o giustizia) da un lato, oblio e perdono (o indifferenza) dall'altro, vuol dire far emergere alcune delle questioni più tragiche della nostra storia, dall'olocausto all'apartheid, alle dittature, alle repressioni sanguinose. E fra gli autori discussi c'è Paul Ricoeur, la sua ricerca su ricordare, dimenticare, perdonare (Ricoeur 2004).

Le parole di Amleto hanno molto interessato la critica, anche perché ci fanno confrontare con una idea della memoria e della cancellazione dei ricordi che è ormai molto lontana da noi. Cosa vuol dire infatti che Amleto ha copiato i suoi ricordi sulla tavola della memoria e che solo il ricordo delle parole del padre resterà vivo "within the book and volume" del suo cervello? La traduzione di Montale qui non ci aiuta molto: traduce 'memory' con 'mente', forse ricordando che in Dante i due termini possono avere lo stesso significato. È inoltre interessante notare come, riprendendo una antica tradizione, Dante dica che la mente-memoria scrive i ricordi nei suoi spazi (*Inf.* II, 8 "O mente che scrivesti ciò ch'io vidi"; *Par.* XVII, 91 "E portera'ne scritto ne la mente"), per cui l'atto del ricordo e della scrittura nasce dalla lettura di ciò che è scritto nel libro della memoria: "In quella parte del libro della mia memoria dinanzi alla quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una

rubrica la quale dice *Incipit Vita Nova*. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d'asemplare in questo libello, e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenzia", leggiamo all'inizio della *Vita nova.* Solo le parole del padre, dice poi Amleto, resteranno vive "within the book and volume" del suo cervello, che Montale traduce "nel libro del mio cervello". Torna dunque l'immagine della memoria come qualcosa che si inscrive, si stampa negli spazi interiori.

Studiosi di storia del libro, come Stallybrass e Chartier (2004), hanno, ricorda Holland, ricollegato la 'tavola della memoria' di Amleto con delle tavolette che venivano usate così che vi si poteva scrivere e poi cancellare e riusare, e vi hanno individuato "a tension between the erasable and the permanent", osservando tuttavia che le tavolette si potevano cancellare in modo radicale, ma che Amleto non riesce a compiere un'operazione uguale nella sua mente e quindi nel suo comportamento.

Direi che, come spesso accade nella tradizione dell'arte della memoria, ci può essere una tensione, una ambiguità tra interno ed esterno, tra dimensione mentale e dimensione fisica. Il modello della scrittura si afferma già nel mondo classico come un esempio, una metafora efficace della possibilità di fissare nella mente un percorso ordinato di luoghi e immagini. La "tavola della memoria" e il "libro e il volume del mio cervello" sembrano piuttosto debitori a questa tradizione, anche se forse potevano in qualche modo rispecchiarsi nell'effettivo uso di tavolette riusabili, pur segnandone la differenza e la lontananza.

È interessante d'altra parte che proprio all'interno della tradizione secolare dell'arte della memoria si affacci fin dalle origini anche la questione del peso della memoria, delle difficoltà e delle pene che può portare con sé. Se Borges nel 900 in *Funes el memorioso* ci offre il ritratto perturbante di un giovane afflitto da una memoria implacabile, già nel momento in cui trasmette al mondo romano i precetti dell'arte della memoria Cicerone (*De finibus*, 2, 32.104 e *De oratore*, 2.74.299) ricorda la disavventura capitata a colui che di quell'arte era stato l'inventore, Simonide di Ceo. Questi propone a Temistocle di insegnargli l'arte, e Temistocle gli chiede di insegnargli piuttosto l'arte di dimenticare.

La questione da cui il libro di Holland prende le mosse – l'impossibilità per Amleto di mantenere la promessa di cancellare dalla sua mente i ricordi che non hanno a che fare con il 'remember me' del padre, e più in generale l'impossibilità di un "active forgetting" – ha

una presenza non secondaria nella tradizione dell'arte della memoria. Molti trattati, infatti, contengono una parte dedicata all'*ars oblivionalis* che insegna tecniche via via sempre più violente per cancellare dalla mente le *imagines agentes* che si sono costruite per affidare loro i ricordi (Bolzoni 1995, 143-47; 2002, 145-57). Ed è davvero affascinante vedere come, in un tempo e in un contesto in cui non si conosceva l'arte della memoria, queste tecniche siano del tutto simili a quelle che Sheresevski, il mnemonista, l'uomo che non dimenticava nulla, studiato dal neuropsicologo russo Aleksander Lurija, metteva in atto per liberare la sua mente dal peso eccessivo dei ricordi legati alle sue esibizioni (Lurija 1979, 54-57). Vorrei osservare che se, come nota Holland, la promessa che Amleto fa di cancellare parte dei suoi ricordi non può essere mantenuta, forse non è strano che l'idea (o l'illusione) si affacci in un mondo in cui l'arte dell'oblio faceva parte della tradizione della memoria, o meglio delle tecniche con cui si cercava di controllare e di potenziare il funzionamento della nostra mente.

I diversi capitoli del libro di Holland si confrontano, come si accennava, con le diverse sfaccettature del rapporto fra Shakespeare e la dimenticanza. Si inizia analizzando tre casi di personaggi che dimenticano in *Coriolano, Enrico V* e *Amleto* per mettere in risalto quale funzione la dimenticanza può svolgere nella creazione di un personaggio e quale rapporto può contribuire a creare col pubblico. Così ad esempio quando Amleto, davanti alla compagnia degli attori, fa un errore citando un verso e poi si corregge, Holland vi vede un tocco di realismo, "and hence of recognition: the character is like us because of the way in which he searches his memory" (p. 31).

Segue una analisi del lessico che Shakespeare usa per dimenticare e perdonare (termini che in inglese sono molto vicini) per vedere, in testi diversi come si delinei un difficile bilanciamento fra i due e come Shakespeare sia "far less concerned with forgetting events than with forgetting one's own identity, one's character, one's status, one'relationships and associated forms" (p. 59).

Tra le altre questioni affrontate c'è quella di una eventuale caratterizzazione in termini di *gender* dei modi in cui il dimenticare viene rappresentato. Dal punto di vista delle passioni, mostra Holland, è interessante vedere come permangano anche al di là dell'oblio. Tra gli esempi che dà c'è il momento in cui, in *Macbeth,* si sentono le grida delle donne e Macbeth chiede a Seyton di che rumore si tratta. "I

have almost forgot the taste of fears" (V.v.9), commenta Macbeth, che poco prima aveva chiesto al medico un rimedio capace di dare l'oblio, di estirpare dalla memoria il suo peso doloroso. Con "almost", scrive Holland (p. 115), mostra che la traccia della memoria perdura, come ha ben colto un interprete, Simon Russel Beale, che nel 2005 lascia una lunga pausa tra "I have" e "almost", una pausa, uno spazio di "intense mental self-inspection" da parte di un Macbeth che è sorpreso, quasi divertito di guardare entro di sé e di ritrovare le tracce di una emozione che pensava di aver sradicato.

Il problema della dimenticanza in questo libro attraversa per così dire le diverse componenti del teatro: investe i personaggi che dimenticano qualcosa, gli attori che magari hanno una crisi di memoria dopo una lunga carriera e una lunga familiarità col testo, riguarda il pubblico, e ancora lo stesso Shakespeare, per cui ad esempio in *Antonio e Cleopatra*, all'inizio della seconda scena, si annunciano molti personaggi di cui tre non interverranno mai. E anche i nomi possono essere dimenticati: "I have been concerned so far – confessa Holland – with names not spoken, with characters staying unnamed and hence unnameable. But the revers can also occur: characters can have multiple names" (p. 194).

Il libro si chiude con una *Coda: Bookends,* che prende in esame due testi narrativi: *Theories of Forgetting,* di Lans Olsen, del 2014 e *The Chimes* di Anna Smaill, del 2015, ambientato in un futuro post-apocalittico, in una società senza memoria, e cita il consiglio di Peter Brook a un giovane attore: dimentica Shakespeare e solo allora comincerai a trovarlo.

L'esplorazione, tendenzialmente infinita, che Holland compie del ruolo della dimenticanza nell'opera di Shakespeare e anche in chi tale opera legge, rappresenta o vede rappresentata, si apre e si chiude così sul nostro mondo, sul nostro presente, e sulle angosce che la memoria individuale e quella sociale portano con sé.

Lina Bolzoni, *Scuola Normale Superiore*

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Fabio Ciambella, *Teaching English as a Second Language with Shakespeare (Elements in Shakespeare and Pedagogy)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2024, pp. 116.

Fabio Ciambella's book is a valuable linguistic contribution to the Cambridge Core series *Elements in Shakespeare and Pedagogy* as it offers an insightful pragmatics-oriented approach to teaching English as a second language (ESL) through Shakespeare's plays. Ciambella skilfully employs Shakespeare's texts both as literary content and linguistic means in content-based language teaching (CBLT) and content-based instruction (CBI) in a foreign language classroom. Renaissance literature as content not only provides a wide range of topics for discussion but is also combined with linguistic knowledge with the aim to create ready-made lesson plans for instructors teaching ESL courses both at a secondary school and university level.

In the book's Introduction, Ciambella describes the theoretical framework (Lyster 2007, 2018) for his discussion of the most suitable CBLT approaches for teaching English as a second language using Shakespeare's works. His book offers pedagogical solutions for language teachers in English for Special Purposes (ESP) courses in secondary schools and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) programs taught by content experts at universities. The main linguistic goal is the teaching of pragmatics or "language in a meaningful context" (p. 3) whereas the principal content goals vary from English lit-

erature to the history of the English language. Ciambella sketches a short history of literature in the ESL classroom, which started almost 100 years ago. Literary texts served as source texts translated from L2 to L1 as examples of grammar rules to be applied by students, but when the Grammar-Translation Method in teaching was taken over by the Communicative Approach, literature in ESL courses started to be neglected and finally ignored because it was perceived as "old fashioned and lacking in communicative intent" (p. 5). This study reinstates literature into its "privileged central educational position" (p. 5) claiming that the teaching and learning of grammar is still possible with literature as source texts adopting the Communicative Approach in the ESL classroom (see also Atmaca and Günday 2016; Fenn and McGlynn 2018). The book follows the well-established tradition of language instruction through literature as postulated by Wellek and Warren (1956), Widdowson (1975), Carter and Long (1987) and Maley (1989).

Each of the three sections of the book tackles a different pragmatic aspect employing a single play by Shakespeare as a source text for analysis, which serves as linguistic exemplification. The structure of the lesson plans in each section is based on the proactive approach to CBLT, namely on 'pre-planned instruction designed to enable the students to notice and to use target language features that might otherwise not be used or even noticed in classroom discourse' (Lyster 2007, 44). All activities are student-centred and use new technologies (analysing techniques, memorising and producing techniques, completing, constructing and transforming techniques), which are described in more detail in the introductory section. Despite certain difficulties with original versions of the plays (outdated grammar and vocabulary), the focus of the lesson plans is on avoiding the paraphrased or reworded versions of Shakespeare as source texts for the classroom because such versions (Sparknotes.com) are often intralinguistic translations that distort the original language of Shakespeare.

Section One titled *Shakespearean Performative Speech Acts: The Case of Richard III* describes speech acts as the main rhetorical strategies adopted by Shakespeare's characters and demonstrates how performative speech acts contribute to the performativity of the dramatic dialogue. The first part is an overview of the Speech Act Theory based on Searle's (1969) taxonomy, and it introduces the basic classification into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, and felicity condi-

tions, which are crucial for the successful execution of a speech act. Importantly, this part defines *inferencing* or how speakers arrive at the pragmatic, often subtle, meaning of an utterance, which is fostered by their knowledge of the world, context and interpersonal relationships – this skill proves extremely useful while reading Shakespeare's plays. For more advanced readers, the section offers a brief discussion of speech acts from a diachronic perspective (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2008), thus laying the ground for an analysis of speech acts in the play. The next part of the section offers a pragmatic analysis of *Richard III*, focusing, among others, on the language of curses as the source of power to check if female characters have an actual (linguistic) power in the play. Ciambella examines lemmas 'curse' and 'wish' to notice that women, statistically speaking, use curses more than men and that some women's curses (Queen Margaret) are more effective than other women's unfulfilled curses (Lady Anne). The final part of this section is a lesson plan on how to teach speech acts through Shakespeare and how to sensitise students to the linguistic behaviour of female characters through their emotions expressed as behabitives. Secondary school students are encouraged to join a TV debate in which Queen Elizabeth and the Dutchess of York are the TV presenters asking questions to Anne, a future queen, who grants her first exclusive interview to national television – both presenters can have prompts and sticky notes to ask questions. The suggestion for university students is to work in small groups and prepare seminar-like presentations with slides made during guided practice, in which they would comment on the pragmalinguistic strategies employed by women in *Richard III* as their reaction to the patriarchal world of the play.

Section Two titled *Teaching Shakespearean Discourse Markers with Romeo and Juliet* acquaints readers with the discourse markers used by Shakespeare and demonstrates how they influenced modern English. Ciambella claims that discourse markers are multifunctional linguistic expressions that do not form a recognised word class and it is difficult to classify them as a strictly syntactic or pragmatic category (p. 41). Discourse markers occur frequently in speech, mostly spoken interaction, they can affect single words or entire sentences, and they perform various functions (e.g. hedging and politeness functions). The next part of the section is an overview of discourse markers in Early Modern English adopting a historical perspective and looking

at the usage of specific expressions, e.g. 'oh', 'why', 'well', 'pray' and 'prithee', 'marry'. Next, Ciambella presents linguistic analyses of discourse markers in Shakespeare (Culpeper 2009, 2014; Busse and Busse 2012; Crystal and Crystal 2002) and puts the examples into specific categories. The lesson plan in this section offers a rich scope of activities for the classroom – secondary school students get the gapped version of the text where several students read the lines of the characters and the rest of the group is invited to fill the gaps by guessing the missing DMs, which is followed by a listening comprehension (a multiple choice quiz). University students are expected to read the play by themselves and guess the pragmatic value of discourse markers highlighted by the teacher; they are introduced to the field of historical DMs and to various frameworks to classify them. Students are asked to write a(n) (in)formal letter to another character in *Romeo and Juliet* and invite her/him to the wedding – discourse markers will set the register and tone of the letter.

Section Three titled *(Im)polite Shakespeare in The Taming of the Shrew* looks into taboo language and insults in Shakespeare's play and how language contributes to characterisation. The first part presents an overview of approaches to teaching swearwords and taboo expressions (S-T words) and points at the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic significance of teaching and learning S-T words. Next, the reader is familiarised with the Impoliteness Theory and positive and negative impoliteness strategies (Culpeper 1996). Ciambella provides examples of other studies (Del Villano 2018) investigating impolite language in Shakespeare and, specifically, how gendered impolite expressions in *The Taming of the Shrew* help reflect the impolite interpersonal dynamics between Katerina and Petruchio. The final part is traditionally a lesson plan proposing teaching impoliteness through S-T words in the play, and it focuses on a scene in Petruchio's household (Act IV, scene i) in which the reader observes Petruchio's use of impolite expressions towards the servants and surface politeness towards Kate at supper as a way of taming his wife by starving her. Secondary school students are encouraged to write polite versions of the fragment (rephrasing exercise), or they are provided with a drag-and-drop exercise and asked to combine a series of adjectives and a noun to explore the lexical creativeness of insults in the play. University students are expected to classify the text's taboo language and dysphemisms after having been

introduced to the Impoliteness Theory; working in groups they set up a courtroom debate in which Katerina, Grumio and other servants bring charges against Petruchio for offending them and a judge, based on linguistic evidence provided by the students, decides whether to condemn or absolve Petruchio. This Element ends with the Author's concluding remarks and a glossary of linguistic terms.

Fabio Ciambella's study successfully demonstrates that employing Shakespeare's plays in a foreign language classroom not only turns out to be a worthwhile and entertaining activity for students learning English as a second language but also serves as an immense help for an instructor, who can teach both English grammar and vocabulary to secondary school students and introduce more advanced linguistic terms and theories at a higher university level. A clear and succinct structure of this Element serves the main aims of the Cambridge Core series, proving a useful resource for students and scholars and presenting outstanding research on Shakespeare and pedagogy. The combination of literary and linguistic analysis for pedagogical purposes is to me the most intrinsic academic value of this book.

Urszula Kizelbach, Adam Mickiewicz University

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Questo volume presenta, testo a fronte, "tutti i sonetti di Shakespeare" nella traduzione di Silvia Bigliazzi, eminente studiosa dell'opera del grande drammaturgo. È una importante novità nella serie di traduzioni in italiano già pubblicate dei *Sonnets*, poiché il testo inglese di riferimento non è una delle classiche edizioni critiche della raccolta shakespeariana, pubblicata in-quarto nel 1609 dall'editore T. Thorpe, ma è invece quella di *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare*, volume edito da Paul Edmondson e Stanley Wells appena qualche anno fa (Cambridge 2020). Il lavoro di traduzione si somma e si integra, dunque, con tutto ciò che di nuovo la edizione Cambridge presenta.

Innanzitutto la intrigante ridefinizione inclusiva di 'sonetto', implicita nel titolo sopra citato. Viene concepito infatti un nuovo corpus lirico che ai sonetti del 1609 associa quelli che sono sparsi e compresi nella produzione drammatica di Shakespeare. Tali numerosi momenti di stacco lirico nei plays, non limitati soltanto alle funzioni particolari di 'prologo' o di 'epilogo', ma volti a fondersi nel flusso drammatico, conducono poi a considerare anche le sezioni di testo più ridotte, o più estese che – caricate di particolare enfasi – risultano in qualche modo sezionabili ed estraibili dai *plays*. Una definizione elastica di sonetto pur presente all'epoca (per cui componimenti anche non strettamente aderenti alla definizione di 14 versi totali in pentapodie giambiche, svolti entro un preciso schema rimatico di tre quartine e un distico finale, potevano comunque cadere sotto quella definizione)[1], così come la presenza, all'interno della raccolta del 1609, di un nucleo di componimenti formalmente 'anomali' (quali il 99, 126, o 145), danno un fondamento a tale procedere, pur restando comunque aperto un problema di limiti: qui pragmaticamente, e plausibilmente, risolto, in quanto sono accolte nel corpus unità costituite, di norma, da almeno due quartine e un distico[2]; o unità al massimo di 4 quartine più distico, per 18 versi totali[3].

1 Cfr. p. 11. Si escludono perciò le abbondanti "sestine" (p. 46).

2 Si veda un esempio da *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, pp. 84-85.

3 Si veda un esempio dal *Cymbeline*, pp. 438-39.

Questa estensione, che include alcune varianti, o anche sonetti di incerta attribuzione, pubblicati indipendentemente (William Jaggard, *The Passionate Pilgrim,* del 1599), non è disposta tuttavia come semplice appendice ai sonetti dell'in-quarto, ma si interseca con quelli secondo un criterio cronologico di composizione, il cui effetto sta anche nella riorganizzazione per blocchi della sequenza del 1609. Abbiamo così un nuovo corpus in cui i vari componimenti si susseguono secondo un ordine che ambisce a una datazione di massima anche in base al rapporto con i drammi, palese nella significativa voce "Analogia drammatica" ricorrente nell'apparato testuale, pur se al metodo non possiamo riconoscere una attendibilità assoluta. L'intenzione è, da un lato, quella di scardinare una sequenza che è stata spesso letta in una pregiudiziale chiave autobiografica; dall'altro, quella di conferire ai brani lirici un di più di autonomia estetica che consente, piuttosto, di apprezzarne meglio la varietà tematica, o di ripercorrere la complessiva maturazione artistica dell'autore, superando barriere di *genre* in un senso nuovo e diverso anche rispetto a quell'intreccio di qualità liriche e drammatiche dei *Sonnets* già colto in passato dagli studiosi come elemento unico e vitale della raccolta del 1609.

Da ciò si capisce quanto profondamente il volume presentato de-familiarizzi, e sottragga i sonetti ad attese di lettura consolidate, con una scossa di novità al loro dettato. Nel ricco, articolato e complesso apparato critico possono, inoltre, risultare utili – specie ad un primo approccio – le "parafrasi letterali" che orientano nei punti testuali più intricati e oscuri; mentre qualche dubbio può investire quegli estremi condensati della materia poetica apposti a ciascuna lirica, di una o due righe, non sempre adeguati a individuare qualità specifiche o elementi di marcata riconoscibilità.

Per ciascun sonetto si dà poi la precisazione di un/una destinatario/a, con un quadro sintetico offerto nella apposita tabella, alle pagine 35-36 dell'apparato[4]. Tale quadro funziona per porre in dovuto rilievo tanto la numerosità di quelli che possono essere letti come rivolti all'uno o all'altro sesso (sottratti quindi alla incasellante bipartizione sancita a partire dalla edizione ottocentesca di Edmond Malone, secondo cui i primi 126 sarebbero rivolti al Fair Youth e i restanti alla Dark Lady);

4 Apparato che include un indispensabile indice numerico dei *Sonnets*, e un indice per capoversi.

quanto, e forse ancor più significativamente, i similmente numerosi che hanno un destinatario o un tema più astratto. Sezione speciale dell'apparato è comunque l'ampia nota alla traduzione (pp. 53-75), ricca di indicazioni, che espone in dettaglio i criteri adottati, quali le "scelte di compensazione" dovute alla rinuncia a riprodurre sistematicamente gli schemi rimatici (compensazioni multipiano, che vanno dal campo della fonetica fino a quello della disposizione sintattica, con accentuata "variazione dell'ordine naturale delle parole", p. 58). Punti cruciali della traduzione sono poi individuati nella resa del sistema pronominale (pp. 60-62), e nell'approccio a un lessico di marcata polivalenza e densità valoriale, come "store", "true", "increase", "churl" (pp. 62-73).

È un puro caso che relativamente a due sonetti correlati, il 147 e il 148 (ma ne viene lo spunto per sottolineare l'utilità della ricognizione delle ben "Diciannove coppie e quattordici mini-sequenze" in tabella, alle pp. 26-27), si verifichi, per il primo, il refuso "worn" in luogo di "sworn" (p. 136, v. 13); e per il secondo, a p. 64 della "Nota", un salto che interessa i vv. 5-6 del passo discusso. Infatti, nella presentazione individuale del sonetto alle pp. 138-39, sia il testo origine sia la traduzione si presentano nella loro regolarità. Ma un'altra coppia caratteristica (nn. 135 e 136) consente invece di approfondire alcuni problemi, testuali prima che traduttivi, gli ultimi affrontati puntualmente nella voce "bisticci lessicali" della "Nota" (p. 58). In entrambi i sonetti, cioè, ricorre la parola "*Will*", che sta per 'voglia', 'desiderio sessuale' ecc., ma è anche scoperta allusione al nome di Shakespeare, William. I curatori, nella loro introduzione, sottolineano come – a parte i pochi provenienti dalla tradizione letteraria e dai miti classici – sia questo il solo nome proprio che compare nella raccolta del 1609. Da ciò dovrebbe trarsi la conclusione che sia opportuno dare al corpo di parola piena enfasi e visibilità. Tuttavia, mentre la edizione critica *New Oxford* su cui si basano rispetta l'in-quarto mantenendo la iniziale maiuscola (seppure non il concomitante corsivo di *Will*), Edmondson e Wells si discostano curiosamente tanto dall'in-quarto quanto dal loro riferimento testuale diretto con una scelta duplice: dal 135 tolgono maiuscole e corsivo; dal 136 solo il corsivo, con le maiuscole rispettate. Silvia Bigliazzi si confronta brillantemente con questa disparità, nel 135 traducendo sempre "voglia" (ben 13 occorrenze su 14 versi, a insistere sul tema centrale del desiderio sessuale), mentre nel 136 accetta le tre occorrenze di Will con iniziale maiuscola e lascia

la parola non tradotta – a suggerire il nome di Shakespeare accanto, forse, a quello del marito e dell'amante della Dark Lady – salvo che nella stupenda occorrenza finale al v. 14 del 136, con quel risolutivo ed esplicativo "perché il mio nome è 'Voglia'" (p. 113) che aiuta a recuperare l'eco di doppi sensi anche nel sonetto che precede.

"Molti altri potrebbero essere gli esempi di straordinaria complessità di questi sonetti" giustamente afferma (p. 73). Ma se è già notevole di per sé il portare a conoscenza del più vasto pubblico italiano l'opera di ridefinizione del canone poetico-lirico shakespeariano condotta da Edmondson e Wells, va detto che ciò trova piena rispondenza nel lavoro di traduzione letteraria di Silvia Bigliazzi, la quale si misura peraltro con una lunga serie di prestigiosi approcci traduttivi ai sonetti da parte – tra gli altri – di Alberto Rossi e Giorgio Melchiori, Maria Antonietta Marelli, Lucia Folena e, in particolare, di Alessandro Serpieri (1975), con cui più immediatamente dialoga. Se ne apprezza, accanto alla finezza e duttilità linguistica, anche l'intensità poetica delle traduzioni (laddove quelle di Serpieri, ad esempio, hanno una disposizione più logica). A fronte della rinuncia a riprodurre una regolare misura di lunghezza del verso o dello schema rimatico del sonetto, l'effetto poetico è cercato e raggiunto sia attraverso la modulazione dei fonemi e del lessico, sia attraverso il gioco di inversioni sintattiche di stacco rispetto al linguaggio ordinario a cui si accennava sopra; sia, soprattutto, attraverso la interiorizzata e ricorrente costruzione del verso con quattro accenti principali. È forse questo il metodo più flessibile e adeguato per rendere il pentametro giambico in italiano, e che tanto più risalta se confrontato con le tecnicamente elaborate soluzioni poetiche di Ungaretti o Montale.

In tal modo *Tutti i sonetti*, per intensità, scrupolo filologico e originalità sollecita e nutre l'interesse certo di un largo pubblico e di studenti e studiosi di materie shakespeariane e traduttive.

Mario Martino, *Sapienza Università di Roma*

Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 255-263 (2024)

Abstracts

Troilus and Cressida*: Classical Past and Medieval Heritage*

Piero Boitani

Among Shakespeare's 'classical' plays, *Troilus and Cressida* occupies an especially problematic place. The play is, to sum it up in an approximate formula, suspended between Homer and Chaucer, two authors and two styles not easy to reconcile with each other. Two scenes in particular in the play are characterized by a conflict between sources which entirely changes both the classical and the medieval features of *Troilus and Cressida*. This brief essay offers a reading of Act III, scene ii and a handful of lines in Act V, scene ix, drawing on Piero Boitani's lifelong work on the Troilus and Cressida story.

Keywords: *Troilus and Cressida*, classical sources, medieval sources, modernity

Troilo e Cressida occupa un posto problematico tra i drammi 'classici' di Shakespeare. Il testo è sospeso tra Omero e Chaucer, due autori e due stili non semplici da conciliare. Due scene in particolare si caratterizzano per un conflitto tra le fonti, che modifica profondamente sia i tratti classici che quelli medievali di *Troilo e Cressida*. Questo breve articolo propone una lettura della seconda scena del terzo atto e di alcuni versi nella nona scena del quinto atto, basandosi sul lungo lavoro dell'autore del saggio sulla storia di Troilo e Cressida.

Parole chiave: *Troilo e Cressida*, fonti classiche, fonti medievali, modernità

The Gauntlet of Mars, the Glove of Venus: A Reading of William Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida

Monica Centanni

At the heart of this reading is an analysis of the ways in which Shakespeare structures the plot of *Troilus and Cressida*, and of how he treats the source material at his disposal. The omissions and additions that Shakespeare makes to the generic and confusing myths must be examined carefully: the essay newly considers the choices that the playwright made in order to select from the stories known to his time the material that would be useful for the composition of his plot.

Keywords: *Troilus and Cressida*, myth, drama, classical sources, plot structure

Il saggio propone un'analisi delle modalità con cui Shakespeare organizza la trama di *Troilo e Cressida*, e con cui fa uso delle fonti a sua disposizione. Le omissioni e le aggiunte di Shakespeare rispetto alla vaghezza e confusione del mito sono qui riesaminate in modo da illuminare criteri di selezione e costruzione della trama del dramma.

Parole chiave: *Troilo e Cressida*, mito, dramma, fonti classiche, struttura drammaturgica

Power, Royalty, Style: the Strange Case of Henry VII and Perkin Warbeck

Roberto D'Avascio

This essay offers a close reading of John Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* ("a history play about the end of history plays", Taylor 2008) which re-proposes the (hi)story of a pretender to the throne who challenges the legitimacy of Henry VII in a fully Stuart era. The essay considers issues of dramaturgy and historiography/history on stage, against the backdrop of the passage of English throne from Elizabeth I to James I, which marked an epochal dynastic transition in English history and an overall change in the cultural climate that particularly affected the theatre.

Keywords: John Ford, *Perkin Warbeck*, royal power, legitimacy, English history, historiography

Il saggio offre un'analisi di *Perkin Warbeck*, di John Ford ("un dramma storico sulla fine dei drammi storici", Taylor 2008), che ripropone in epoca pienamente Stuart la storia di un pretendente al trono che sfida la legittimità di Enrico VII. Si affrontano problematiche legate alla drammaturgia, alla messa in scena della storia e della storiografia, sullo sfondo del passaggio del trono inglese da Elisabetta I a Giacomo I, che segnò una transizione dinastica epocale nella storia inglese e un mutamento complessivo del clima culturale che influenzò in particolar modo il teatro.

Parole chiave: John Ford, *Perkin Warbeck*, potere regale, legittimità, storia inglese, storiografia

A Magnus Amator *in Illyria: Shakespeare and the Memory of Plautus*

Michael Saenger

It is well known that Shakespeare based his comedies about twins, *Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*, on Plautus's *Menaechmi*. The link between the two is often understood as structural, and there is little doubt that the comic possibilities of (re)production that so animate the Roman play form the backbone of both of Shakespeare's comedies based on the idea of twins. In this essay, however, I take a different perspective, arguing that Shakespeare was indebted to the Plautine play at a linguistic level as well as a thematic one. In particular, I suggest that the word "great" or "magnus" carries demonstrable lineage between the two plays, and that this points to an important dimension of the comedy of disorder.

Keywords: *Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, Plautus's *Menaechmi*, comedy of disorder, Shakespeare's language

È noto che Shakespeare si basò sui *Menecmi* di Plauto per le commedie sul tema dei gemelli, *La commedia degli errori* e *La dodicesima notte*. Solitamente si considera il legame tra Plauto e le due commedie dal punto di vista strutturale, ed è probabile che le potenzialità comiche giocate sulla (ri)produzione che animano il testo plautino siano da considerarsi una colonna portante per entrambe le commedie shakespeariane. In questo saggio, tuttavia, si adotta una prospettiva differente, mostrando come Shakespeare avesse nei confronti di Plauto anche un debito linguistico. In particolar modo, si suggerisce che le parole "great" e "magnus" mostrino un chiaro rapporto di discendenza tra le commedie, e che ciò riveli una dimensione importante della commedia del disordine.

Parole chiave: *La commedia degli errori*, *La dodicesima notte*, *Menecmi* di Plauto, commedia del disordine, lingua di Shakespeare

Venus and Adonis *(1593): Shakespeare's Translation Memory*

Laetitia Sansonetti

Venus and Adonis, a narrative poem adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, was Shakespeare's first work to be printed with a dedication to a patron in which he claimed authorship. Although *Venus and Adonis* is not a translation in the stricter meaning of the term, and was not marketed as such, Elizabethan translation practices as originating in schoolroom exercises designed to improve mastery of Latin and reliant on memory techniques are crucial to understand how the poem was composed and how it was received. This article will argue that in *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare alludes to schoolroom exercises, and more precisely to the method of "double translation" advocated by Roger Ascham: that he composed his poem thanks to memories of grammar-school translations of Ovid, and aimed to trigger similar memories in his readers.

Keywords: Ascham, Roger, Clapham, John, commonplacing, computer-assisted translation, Golding, Arthur, mediated translation, pedagogy, Ovid

Venere e Adone, un poema narrativo adattato dalle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio, fu la prima opera di Shakespeare stampata con una dedica ad un mecenate che rivendicava la paternità del testo. Sebbene *Venere e Adone* non sia una traduzione in senso stretto, né sia stata pubblicata come tale, le pratiche di traduzione elisabettiane, e la loro derivazione da esercizi scolastici per perfezionare la conoscenza del latino tramite tecniche di memoria, si rivelano fondamentali per comprendere le modalità di composizione e ricezione del poema. Questo articolo discute l'ipotesi che in *Venere e Adone* Shakespeare alluda a tali esercizi, e più precisamente al metodo della "doppia traduzione" sostenuto da Roger Ascham, e che Shakespeare compose il suo poema grazie ai suoi ricordi di traduzione scolastica di Ovidio, mirando a suscitare simili ricordi nei suoi lettori.

Parole chiave: Ascham, Roger, Clapham, John, *commonplacing*, traduzione assistita dal computer, Golding, Arthur, traduzione mediata, pedagogia, Ovidio

Shakespeare e l'Antico tra A Midsummer Night's Dream *e* Antony and Cleopatra

Massimo Stella

This paper offers a reflection on a few words – or rather, on a few linguistic elements – which operate in two of the best-known plays by Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Antony and Cleopatra*: the word 'wall', with its ghostly synonym 'mural' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*); and the words 'immortal' and 'falliable' with their respective ghostly antonyms: 'mortal' and 'unfalliable' (*Antony and Cleopatra*). These two plays are chosen because one, the *Dream*, belongs to the beginning, and the other, *Antony and Cleopatra*, to the end, of a long exploration of the enigmatic experience called 'love'. It is within this framework that this paper aims to reconsider the idea of 'classical antiquity', not primarily and not only as textual memory of the classical tradition, but as a presence which is found through and inside elements of language, through the spiral of word-play, pun, and lapsus, of linguistic error and of its ensuing comic effect.

Keywords: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, wordplay, linguistic error, comedy, classical antiquity

Questo saggio riflette intorno ad alcune parole, o meglio intorno ad alcuni elementi di linguaggio agenti in due tra le più conosciute drammaturgie shakespeariane, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* e *Antony and Cleopatra*: la parola *wall* con il suo fantasma sinonimico *mural* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*); e le parole *immortal* e *falliable* con i loro rispettivi fantasmi antonimici: *mortal* e *unfalliable* (*Antony and Cleopatra*). Queste due drammaturgie vengono scelte in quanto l'una, il *Dream*, si attesta all'inizio, e l'altra, *Antony and Cleopatra*, alla fine di una lunga esplorazione intorno a quell'enigmatica esperienza cui si dà il nome di 'amore'. È in questo quadro che si intende qui riprendere l'idea di 'antico' non tanto e non solo come memoria testuale della tradizione classica, ma come una presenza che si coglie dentro e attraverso alcuni elementi di linguaggio, nella spirale del *word-play*, del *pun* e del *lapsus*, dell'errore linguistico e quindi del comico.

Keywords: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, wordplay, errore linguistico, comico, antico

A Wrinkle in Time: Shakespeare's Anachronic Art

Carla Suthren

This essay proposes that the vocabulary of the anachronic might usefully be brought to bear on the complex temporality (or temporalities) involved in classical reception, which necessarily 'remembers' the classical past in one form or another. Nagel and Wood's (2010) definition of the anachronic work of art could almost have been formulated with Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* in mind, a 'late' play in which an oracle projects the conditions for an idealised resolution, Time appears as the Chorus, and a statue apparently comes to life. In particular, the essay argues that both the oracle from Apollo and the 'statue' of the final scene can be viewed as operating anachronically, in ways which "fetch" or "create" (textual) memories of the classical past, projecting it into the future.

Keywords: *The Winter's Tale*, anachronism, temporalities, classical reception

Questo saggio suggerisce che il lessico dell''anacronico' possa essere accostato produttivamente alle complesse temporalità legate alla ricezione della classicità, in cui necessariamente si 'ricorda' il passato classico in una forma o nell'altra. La definizione dell'opera d'arte 'anacronica' proposta da Nagel e Wood (2010) potrebbe quasi essere stata formulata pensando al *Racconto d'Inverno* di Shakespeare, un dramma tardo in cui un oracolo proietta nel futuro le condizioni di una risoluzione idealizzata; il Tempo compare come Coro; e una statua sembra prendere vita. In particolare, il saggio mostra come sia l'oracolo di Apollo, sia la 'statua' della scena finale, possano essere interpretati come elementi che funzionano in modo 'anacronico', secondo modalità che recuperano o creano ricordi (testuali) dell'antichità classica, proiettandole nel futuro.

Parole chiave: *Il racconto d'inverno*, anacronismo, temporalità, ricezione del classico

From Greece to Stratford, and Back. Teatro dell'Elfo: Half a Century with Shakespeare and the Classics

Martina Treu

Adaptations from classical texts have constantly intertwined with Shakespeare's plays, for the past fifty years, in the history of an Italian theatre company: since 1973 the group of Teatro dell'Elfo (Milan) has always combined a rigorous and coherent scenic practice, a preliminary study of the original texts, a free attitude in adapting and directing ancient and modern plays. The members of the company share a collective approach to theatre, and they work together to this day, alongside their personal projects. This study focuses on Ferdinando Bruni (as a playwright, director, actor, translator, performer and painter, costume and set designer) and on Ida Marinelli, who has shared the stage with him since 1973. The paper explores a few productions among those based on classical and Shakespeare plays, with special attention to the different roles and functions which Bruni takes on simultaneously: in particular, as a director – or co-director, with other members of the company (Gabriele Salvatores, Elio de Capitani and Francesco Frongia) – of many productions where he and Marinelli share the stage with fellow actors (Corinna Agustoni, Cristina Crippa, Elena Russo Arman, Luca Toracca). Rather than aiming to identify causal links between the classical and Shakespearean adaptations, this essay focuses on the unifying aesthetic and theoretical premises of the theatre collective that have allowed it to breathe new life into its adaptations, by discussing the different phases of its activity.

Keywords: adaptation, myth, tragedy, comedy, Teatro dell'Elfo

Una pratica scenica rigorosa e coerente, basata su un profondo studio dei testi, caratterizza l'*ensemble* del Teatro dell'Elfo di Milano, che da oltre cinquant'anni fa dialogare i classici e Shakespeare. Se pure il loro lavoro è profondamente collettivo il presente studio si concentra su Ferdinando Bruni (regista, attore, traduttore, scenografo, costumista) e su Ida Marinelli che ne condivide molti progetti. Oggetto d'analisi è una selezione di spettacoli (molti dei quali diretti da Bruni o co-diretti con altri membri del gruppo) in ordine cronologico: dopo il *Satyricon* (da Petronio) e *L'isola* di Athol Fugard (da *Antigone*) tre successive edizioni del *Sogno di una notte di mezza estate* si alternano ad altrettante di *Amleto*. Negli anni Novanta Bruni interpreta Edipo /Eddy in *Alla Greca* (di Steven Berkoff), Clitemnestra in *Elettra* (provato, ma mai andato in scena), Admeto in *Alcesti* di Agnese Grieco (è anche regista di *Fedra*, della stessa autrice), poi Oreste in *Coefore* ed *Eumenidi* (dall'*Orestea* di Eschilo tradotta da Pasolini);

è protagonista assoluto di *SdisOrè* (di Testori), traduce, interpreta e dirige *La tempesta*, *Il mercante di Venezia*, *Il racconto d'inverno*, co-dirige con Frongia *Verso Tebe, Edipo Re una favola nera, Re Lear*. Ida Marinelli, sempre al suo fianco - da *Elettra* a *Eumenidi* dal *Sogno* all'*Amleto* - è anche protagonista di *Fedra*, *Alcesti* e *Cassandra* (regia di Francesco Frongia).

Parole chiave: adattamento; mito; tragedia; commedia; Teatro dell'Elfo

Shakespeare's Now

Margaret Tudeau-Clayton

This paper argues that the word *now* was for Shakespeare and fellow playwrights a precise as well as polyvalent linguistic tool which they used not only as a temporal adverb, but as what linguists call a pragmatic discourse marker to structure the spatio-temporal dramatic design as well as to represent the dynamics of interpersonal exchanges among characters, especially power relations. This is first illustrated by the work of two of Shakespeare's contemporaries from whom he arguably learned much about the craft: Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Christopher Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage*. Close analysis follows of two early Shakesperean play texts: the comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and the history *3 Henry 6*, the Folio play text with the highest number of instances of *now*. Both plays are shown to anticipate the direction Shakespeare's use of *now* will take. Specifically, the structuring function of *now* is withdrawn from male figures of authority who are thus denied the hold over history to which they aspire.

Keywords: Shakespeare's language, *now*, pragmatic discourse markers, temporal adverb

Il saggio analizza l'uso che Shakespeare e i suoi contemporanei fanno della parola *now*, identificandola come uno strumento linguistico preciso e con diverse funzioni. Viene utilizzata non solo come semplice avverbio temporale, ma anche come ciò che si definisce, nell'ambito della pragmatica linguistica, un segnale discorsivo, in grado di strutturare lo spazio e il tempo del dramma e di rappresentare le dinamiche fondamentali delle conversazioni tra i personaggi, soprattutto nelle relazioni di potere. Tale interpretazione viene supportata dall'analisi di due drammi di autori contemporanei a Shakespeare, che potrebbero aver esercitato su di lui una forte influenza: *The Spanish Tragedy*, di Thomas Kyd, e *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, di Christopher Marlowe. Segue un'analisi di due opere shakespeariane degli esordi, *I due gentiluomini di Verona*, e il dramma storico *Enrico VI*

(parte terza) – il testo che presenta il più alto numero di occorrenze della parola *now* nel *First Folio*. Il saggio mostra come entrambe le opere anticipino la tendenza tipica dell'uso della parola *now* nei drammi successivi di Shakespeare: nello specifico, l'esercizio della sua funzione strutturante viene sottratto alle figure di potere maschili e viene loro negato, in questo modo, anche il dominio che aspirano ad avere sugli eventi.

Parole chiave: lingua di Shakespeare, *now*, segnali discorsivi, avverbio temporale

"I will not charm my tongue, I am bound to speak": Toni Morrison's Desdemona *as an Expansion to the Interpretation of* Othello

Maria Valentini

Toni Morrison's *Desdemona* is a sort of prequel and sequel to Shakespeare's *Othello,* a drama which includes Rokia Traoré, a Malian singer, and stage director Peter Sellars, which aims at giving voice and prominence to the women in the play with particular emphasis on the barely mentioned Barbary in Shakespeare's work. The interest lies also in this hybrid reading which mixes adaptation, appropriation and intertextuality and lends itself to postcolonial studies and feminist criticism. The aim of this paper is to try to demonstrate how Morrison's work sheds new light on Shakespeare's tragedy amplifying possibilities of interpretation.

Keywords: *Othello*, Toni Morrison, *Desdemona*, adaptation, intertextuality

Desdemona di Toni Morrison si può considerare come una sorta di prequel e sequel dell'*Otello* shakespeariano; un dramma cui partecipano Rokia Traoré, una cantante maliana, e il regista teatrale Peter Sellars, e che aspira a dare voce e visibilità alle donne della tragedia, con un'enfasi particolare su Barbary, soltanto menzionata nell'opera shakespeariana. Di particolare interesse è questa lettura ibrida, che mescola adattamento, appropriazione e intertestualità, e che si presta agli studi postcoloniali e alla critica femminista. Il saggio riflette sull'opera di Morrison come fonte di nuove prospettive sulla tragedia shakespeariana, che ne amplifica le possibili interpretazioni.

Parole chiave: *Othello*, Toni Morrison, *Desdemona*, adattamento, intertestualità

Shakespeare and the Classical Past: Memory and Renewal
ISSN 2283-8759
pp. 265-268 (2024)

Contributors

Piero Boitani was professor of Comparative Literature at La Sapienza University of Rome and the University of Italian Switzerland (USI). He has also taught at Cambridge, Berkeley, Harvard, Toronto, where he was Northrop Frye Professor of Comparative Literature, and at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana). A scholar of English literature, Bible studies, myth and its rewritings, he won the Balzan Prize in 2016. His books include *The Tragic and The Sublime in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), *The Shadow of Ulysses. Figures of a Myth* (Oxford University Press, 1994), *The Bible and its Rewritings* (Oxford University Press, 1999). In the field of Shakespeare Studies, he has published *Il Vangelo secondo Shakespeare* (il Mulino, 2009), translated *Cymbeline* (2014), edited *The Winter's Tale* (Marsilio, 2021) and has most recently brought out *In cerca di Amleto* (Il Mulino, 2022).

Monica Centanni is Professor of Greek Language and Literature at the Iuav University of Venice. She has authored several studies, essays and monographs, and has curated exhibitions and theatrical events. She is the general editor of *Engramma. La tradizione classica nella memoria occidentale* (www.engramma.it). She directs the Iuav Classical Studies Center *Architecture, Civilization and the Classical Tradition*. Her publications include *Il romanzo di Alessandro* (Einaudi, 1991); *Eschilo. Le Tragedie* (Mondadori, 2003, winner of the 2005 Monselice Prize for the best Italian translation); *Nemica a Ulisse* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2007); *Fantasmi dell'antico. La tradizione classica nel Rinascimento* (Guaraldi, 2017), and most recently *Contro Ulisse. Un eroe sotto accusa* (Salerno editrice, 2021).

Roberto D'Avascio teaches English Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and Theatre History at the University of Salerno. His major fields of research are early modern English drama and contemporary theatre. His publications in early modern theatre include *La scena crudele: performance dell'eccesso nel teatro di John Ford* (Liguori, 2011) and *Porgendo uno sguardo alla natura. Note sul teatro elisabettiano* (Dante&Decartes, 2021). He is member of the board of directors of the Teatro di Napoli-Teatro Mercadante and is director of *Perseo. La sfida del teatro*, the theatre studies review of the National Theatre of Naples. He is president of ArciMovie and has curated film festivals, school filmclubs and summer film festivals.

Nadia Fusini. A graduate of La Sapienza University in Rome, where she studied with Agostino Lombardo and Giorgio Melchiori, she taught English Literature first in Bari, then in Rome Sapienza, where she held the chair of Shakespearean Criticism and Philology, and finally Comparative Literature at the Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa. She has translated and written about a wide range of authors, including Virginia Woolf, John Keats, Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, Mary Shelley, Wallace Stevens. She is the director of the Piccola Biblioteca Shakespeariana series for Bulzoni (Rome), and the Feltrinelli Shakespeare Series (Milan), for which she has translated *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Sir Thomas More* (with Iolanda Plescia). Her major study of Shakespeare, *Di vita si muore. Lo spettacolo delle passioni nel teatro di Shakespeare*, was published by Mondadori in 2010.

Iolanda Plescia is an Associate Professor of English at Sapienza University of Rome, where she teaches Shakespeare's language and translation. She has translated Henry VIII's *Letters to Anne Boleyn* (Nutrimenti, 2013), as well as *Troilus and Cressida* (2015), *The Taming of the Shrew* (2018), *Sir Thomas More* (with Nadia Fusini, 2022), for Feltrinelli. Her co-edited book *Elizabeth I in Writing: Language, Power and Representation in Early Modern England* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2018. She is a co-editor of *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies* (editing a special issue on 'Shakespeare's Language' in 2017), and served as President of the *Italian Association of Shakespeare and Early Modern Studies* in 2021-2024. She is currently editing and translating *Henry VIII*, or *All Is True*.

Michael Saenger is Professor of English at Southwestern University, and he teaches and writes on Shakespeare from a wide varieties of perspectives, speaking internationally about Shakespeare in translation. He is the author of two books, *The Commodification of Textual Engagements in the English Renaissance* (Routledge, 2006) and *Shakespeare and the French Borders of English* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), as well as numerous articles on Renaissance and other literature. He is the editor of *Interlinguicity, Internationality, and Shakespeare* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) and co-editor with Sergio Costola of *Shakespeare in Succession: Translation and Time* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023).

Laetitia Sansonetti is Professor in English Translation Studies at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, France. Her research bears on the reception and translation of classical and continental texts in early modern England, language learning, lexicology and phonetics. Among her recent publications features the volume *Language Commonality and Literary Communities in Early Modern England*, edited with Rémi Vuillemin, Brepols, 2022, the first in the Brepols 'Polyglot Encounters' series which she co-edits with Ladan Niayesh. Her project "Translation and Polyglossia in Early Modern England" was funded by Institut Universitaire de France (2018-2023) – see https://tape1617.hypotheses.org/.

Massimo Stella is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at Ca' Foscari University in Venice. Originally a classical and philological scholar, Massimo Stella studies ancient, modern and modernist European literatures from a comparative perspective, drawing on the methodological approaches provided by semiology, semiotics, and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. He is the author of five monographs and many essays and articles in collected volumes, including *Madreparola. Risorgenze della Musa tra Modernismo europeo e Antichità classica* (Mimesis, 2018) and (with A. Torre and F. Bondi) *The Wounded Body. Memory, Language and the Self from Petrarch to Shakespeare* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

Carla Suthren teaches English at St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford. Her research focuses on classical reception and translation, as well as Greek tragedy, Shakespeare and early modern drama, the history of the book, and writing by women. She has held postdoctoral research positions on Subha Mukherji's ERC-funded project *Crossroads of Knowledge in Early Modern England: The Place of Literature* (University of Cambridge, Faculty of English and CRASSH), and Silvia Bigliazzi's PRIN-funded project *The Reception of Classical Literature in Early Modern English Drama* (University of Verona). She is currently working on her first monograph, entitled *Tyrannous Passions: Shakespeare and the Renaissance Reception of Euripides*.

Martina Treu teaches Classical Arts and Drama at IULM University, Milan. She is founding member of the Research Centre on Ancient Theatre (CRIMTA) at Pavia University (www.unipv.it/crimta), and the coordinator of the international research group Imagines Project (http://www.imagines-project.org/). For the past 30 years, she has also been writing and adapting classical texts for the stage, with several Italian directors and theatre companies. Her main research interests are in classical reception, mythology, adaptations and performances of Greek Drama (Aristophanic Comedy in particular). Her publications include ten books and numerous articles and essays, with a particular focus on the reception of classical theatre on the Italian contemporary stage.

Margaret Tudeau-Clayton holds a BA and PhD in English Literature from King's College, Cambridge. She taught at the Universities of Geneva, Lausanne and Zürich, before being appointed to the chair in Early Modern English Literature at the University of Neuchâtel in 2006, which she held until her retirement in 2018. She is author of *Jonson, Shakespeare and Early Modern Virgil* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), *Shakespeare's Englishes: Against Englishness* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), and numerous widely cited articles on early modern English literature. She is currently working on two projects: the ideological and political uses made in early modern England of the myth of a national climate and character; and Shakespeare and messianic time.

Maria Valentini is Associate Professor of English Literature at the Università degli Studi di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale. She is a co-editor of the *Memoria di Shakespeare. A Journal of Shakespearean Studies*. Her main interests lie within the field of Shakespeare studies: she has published two monographs, *Shakespeare e Pirandello* (Bulzoni, 1990) and *Marc'Antonio e la necessità del tempo* (Bulzoni, 2005), and various articles on Shakespeare's sonnets, war in Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King Lear*, Shakespeare and Keats, and Shakespeare and Shelley. She has also written on 20th century authors (Joyce and Forster) and on some aspects of American Literature, also in relation to Shakespeare (Whitman and Hawthorne).