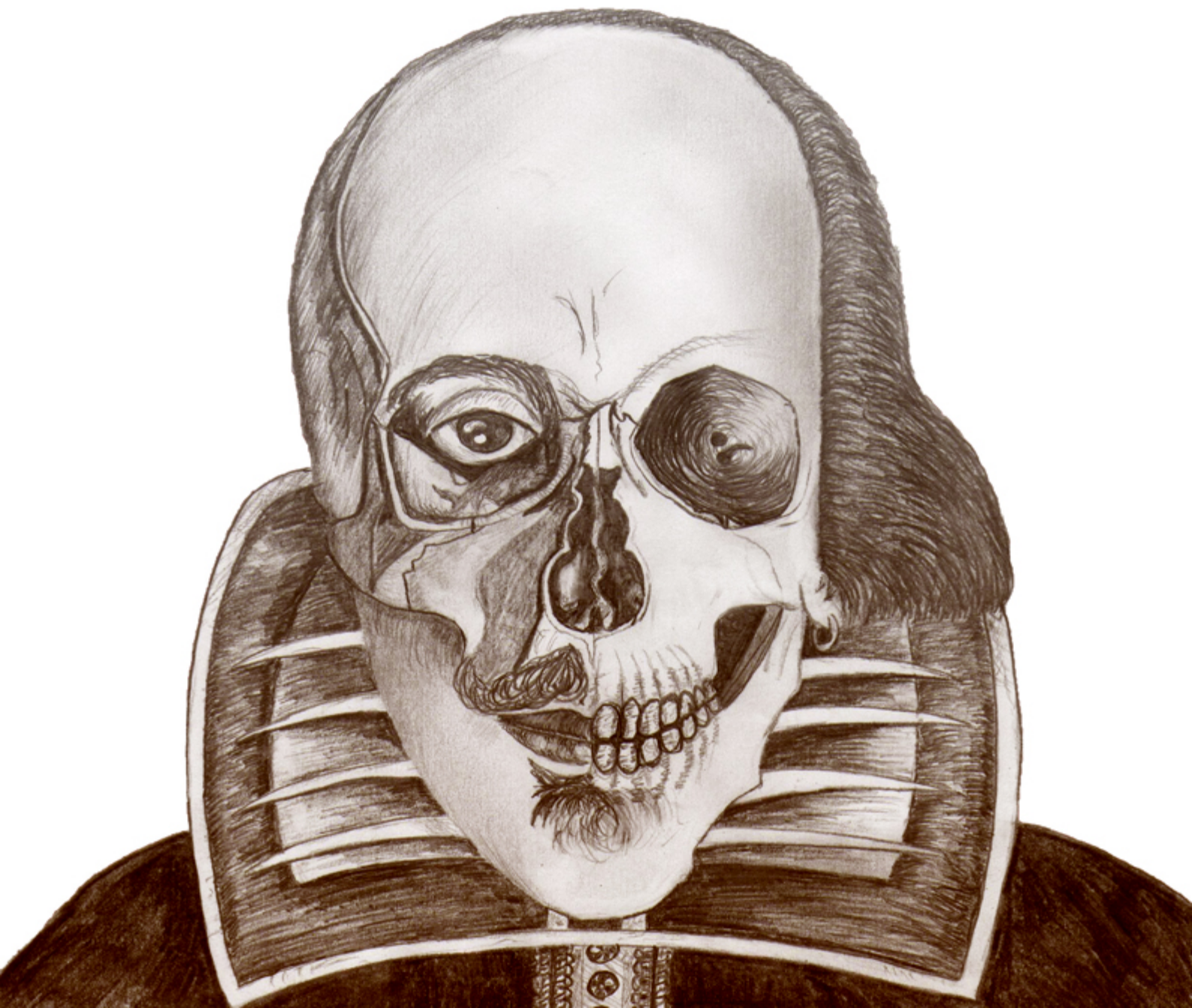


The Shakespeare Institute Review

Shakespeare, Death & Mortality

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## Introduction

We – Thea Buckley, Paul Hamilton, Dave Paxton and Giulia I. Sandelewski – are pleased and proud to present the first issue of our new online academic journal, *The Shakespeare Institute Review*.

When we put out our call for papers, a few months back, we were not sure how much attention our project would attract, let alone how many submissions it would actually receive.

So it was to our utter astonishment that floods of emails poured in – from students wanting to know about submission guidelines, from academics who wanted to be added to our mailing list and who wanted to pass on future calls for papers to their research students, even from a published author offering us a copy of his book (reviewed in this issue).

We also received what seemed to us a veritable deluge of submissions... submissions from British students, but also from students in America, Canada, Australia, India... This meant that the projected size of our first issue had to double, and – to our extreme regret – we had to both turn down received submissions and turn down offers of future papers.

This issue – dealing with death (and related themes of mortality and religion) – contains a nice selection of different sorts of papers. Some are strongly historical, for example Emma Poltrack's illuminating location of *Othello* in the context of Early Modern ideas of criminality and responsibility, while others are more theoretical, for example Timo Uotinen's reading of *Macbeth* through the lens of Hegelian theory; there is also an especially wonderful, 'personal' reading of *Twelfth Night* from Erin Weinberg. We feel that the various papers complement each other well, and give a nice overview of the different sorts of academic production that come out of Early Modern studies at our historical moment.

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of the Birmingham University College of Arts and Law, and we express our deep gratitude to the people there who made the *Shakespeare Institute Review* possible. We would also like to thank Dr Martin Wiggins for his happiness to oversee the journal, as well as Professors Michael Dobson, Ewan Fernie and John Jowett for their good-natured encouragement.

We have Rachel Stewart to thank for the superb ‘deathly’ drawing that appears on our cover. The cover design is by Alessandra Vittorio.

We, finally, hope that the successful production of our first issue paves the way for many future issues, that the theme of death will, as John Langdon puts it in his beautiful paper on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ‘usher in new or renewed life.’

***The Editors***

## The Finite Jest of a 'life in excrements'

Sam Hall

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Vanity of vanity, saith the preacher; all is vanity.

(Ecclesiastes, King James Version, 12.7-8)

'It harrows me with fear and wonder' (*Hamlet*, 1.1.42): Horatio's reaction to the spectre of Hamlet's father stalking the battlements encapsulates the dominant concerns of this essay.<sup>1</sup> John Dover Wilson's insight that when Shakespeare employed a word 'all possible meanings of it were present in his mind' is apparent in Horatio's usage of the word 'harrows'.<sup>2</sup> Its primary meaning is that what he sees causes him distress,<sup>3</sup> which is compounded and complicated by the use of the uneasy hendiadys 'fear' and 'wonder.' Given the supernatural context, 'harrows' also brings to mind the harrowing of hell in which Christ frees from hell those immured there from pre-Christian times – especially since the details of Hamlet's father's 'prison-house' would, he assures the prince, 'harrow up thy soul' (1.5.16).<sup>4</sup> And finally, harrowing signifies the action of preparing, digging the earth for sowing and, therefore, growth.<sup>5</sup>

In *Hamlet*, as Derrida repeatedly muses, 'the time is out of joint' (1.5.188). In the present of the play there is a 'trace of otherness,'<sup>6</sup> which utterly disrupts or disjoints it.<sup>7</sup> While space does not permit me to do anything other than gesture to this argument, *Hamlet* could be compared to the movement of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* in so much as both start out from a remnant, something left behind, and through a dialectical play offer a

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<sup>1</sup> *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and others (New York: Norton, 1997). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, in Richard Wilson, *Shakespeare in French Theory: King of Shadows* (London: Routledge, 2007), p.52.

<sup>3</sup> OED, (definition, no.1).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., (definition, no.4).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., (definition, no.3).

<sup>6</sup> *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), p.xv.

<sup>7</sup> See *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Routledge: London, 1994).

determinate negation of the way things are without offering an all subsuming synthesis. Like this journal, *Hamlet* takes the memory of death, an end – or at least an ‘undiscovered country’ (3.1.81) – as its beginning, a beginning, which, the play repeatedly emphasizes, is paradoxically also our future – ‘to what base uses we may return, Horatio!’ (5.1.187). Through a discussion of the striking relationship between death and folly, this essay contends that the seemingly frivolous banter of the Gravediggers provides something like what Adorno would call ‘immanent critique’ of a key idea ruminated upon by the play: the strange mutual determination of being and not being; incarnation and dust. By ‘immanent critique,’ Adorno means a form of criticism that starts out from minute particulars and remains within – is ‘immanent’ to – what it speculates on.

Marx’s famous misquotation of ‘Well said, Old Mole’ (1.5.164), ‘Well grubbed [*gewühlt*], Old Mole,’ which he uses as a dynamic metonym for the ‘subterranean processes of social transformation that will eventually lead to capitalism’s demise,’<sup>8</sup> is an instructive slip-up: harrowing, ‘Grubbing,’ ‘work[ing] i’th’ earth’ (Ibid., 164), is, the trade of ‘Goodman delver’ (5.1.13). Like the ‘grubb[ing]’ ghost, which Marx tellingly misremembered, this clown undermines the status quo. In the course of his mock catechism of the Second Clown, this ‘delver’ is quite literally in the ‘dust’ of dead generations, the dust with which the play’s imagery is obsessed, and concludes with a boast: ‘There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers, and gravemakers; they hold up Adam’s profession’ (5.1.28-29). This makes reference to the utopian popular rhyme ‘When Adam delved and Eve span/Who was then the gentlemen?’ from the Lollard priest John Ball’s incendiary sermon, which was to be adopted by the brave republicans of the Revolution to come, most notably the Diggers, who, even in the gory twilight of Edgehill, dreamt of common ownership, a non-instrumental relationship with nature and a state without a figurehead.<sup>9</sup>

A ‘pocky corpse,’ the Gravedigger assures Hamlet in a bawdy gag,

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Shakespeare and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 203.

<sup>9</sup> For a brilliant discussion of the politics of the English revolution and their cultural sources, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside-down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

‘will scarce hold the laying in’ (5.1.153). Life in the play is often represented as a process of continual decomposition, a sallying of flesh from hostile elements. This idea receives one of its most vibrant iterations in Hamlet’s antic pastiche of formal logic: ‘We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but a variable service – two dishes, but to one table’ (4.3.23-5), where he puts forward a *memento mori* and echoes the Rabelaisian view of ‘social experience as an unending circle of mutual consumption.’<sup>10</sup> This gestures to a radical materialism in which death, as so cogently illustrated in the graveyard scene, is the great ‘Leveller’: lawyers, politicians and jesters all ‘return’ to indistinct ‘dust,’ consumed by worms, which are bait for fish, which are consumed and excreted by a beggar and so on *ad nauseam*. However, without an illusion of permanence, which Erasmus notices is a ‘branche of folie [that] buildeth cities, foundeth states and helps rulers,’ man is left in a world drained of meaning, ‘a sterile promontory’ (2.2.289), in which for all his conceptual systems, material structures and instrumental domination of the other (or as Erasmus puts it in a heavily ironic vein ‘worthy conquerours actes’), man is but a ‘quintessence of dust’ (Ibid.,298).<sup>11</sup> And yet, this soliloquy adroitly illustrates one of Cusanus’ favorite paradoxes: that it is precisely man’s godlike, ‘infinite faculty’ (Ibid., 295), that enables him to penetrate the eventual futility of his acts of self-determination—great plays can be written about inaction and death. Such plays can continue to delve into the problems of representing the vanishing point of the present: the making of a disjointed, evanescent present ‘for all time’ (*To The Reader*, 47).

Like Rabelais’s ‘foolesophical’<sup>12</sup> hero Gargantua, who unforgettably crawls out of mother after she has suffered chronic diarrhoea from eating tripe, ‘bowel pipes,’<sup>13</sup> breeding and birth are associated with the abject and death throughout *Hamlet*. This is playfully registered in Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmachine* in which his Hamlet observes that we are ‘maggot’s fodder stumbling from hole to hole towards the final hole.’<sup>14</sup> ‘Pocky corpses’, after

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>11</sup> *The Praise of Folie*, trans. by Sir Thomas Chaloner, ed. by Clarence H. Miller, Early English Text Society, 257 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Gargantua and Pantergruel*, trans. by Burton Raffel (New York: Norton, 1990), p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> *Hamlet Machine and Other Texts for the Stage*, ed., trans. Carl Webber (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984), p. 57.



all, could only have caught the pox doing one thing; consider Hamlet's mock syllogism, which offers a punning deflation of man's ability to think:

HAMLET: For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion – have you a daughter?

POLONIUS: I have, my lord.

HAMLET: Let her not walk i'th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive. (2.2.182-6)

Within this 'pregnant' (2.2.206) nonsense, ideas are fused together in fractured syntax to create suggestions that could not be connected by straightforward logic. Hamlet covertly attacks the burgeoning 'cult of heterosexual marriage,' which Richard Wilson argues was perpetuated in this period by the elite for purely economic reasons and which is self-evidently critiqued in the play as a whole, by suggesting that if one should express affection for someone purely because they have the ability to breed then surely a rotting cur teaming with maggots is an appropriate object of affection since it breeds even as it decomposes. Thought, 'conception,' is fused with desire and decomposition as it is in the graveyard and Ophelia's untimely 'return' to 'dust,' where she will breed maggots, is nauseatingly foreshadowed by this elliptical nonsense.

As Claudius' metaphor, 'The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art/Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it/Then is my deed to my most painted word (3.3.52-5), suggests, throughout the play cosmetics are used as a metaphor for dissimulation, which itself is an act of vanity in that it embodies a kind of temporal tunnel-vision in which the protagonist is only interested in the present. Related to this, Erasmus uses cosmetics to expose yet another folly: namely the sexual voracity of elderly women, who attempt to defer their decomposition. He conjures the remarkable image of women, 'carcus lyke, as if they had lately come from death's court [whom] will still plaie the wantons and styll tuppyng, daube their cheeks.'<sup>15</sup> Hamlet imagines making Yorick's skull speak to his mother to deflate her mother's vanity by reminding her of her mortality: 'Now get you to my lady's table and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come [...] Make her laugh at that' (5.1.84-5). Here there is a paradoxical mixture of absurdity and

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<sup>15</sup> *The Praise of Folie*, p. 42.



wisdom. It takes the ever-dead Yorick to remind Gertrude of her vanity, which is figured through her use of cosmetics. His temporal profession as jester, consisting of deflating the pretension of his superiors, and his symbolic resonance as the epitome of a *vanitas* image, which reminds everyone that all eventually returns to ‘dust’ thereby gesturing at the ‘vaine glory’<sup>16</sup> of purely temporal self-definition, are conflated – in *Hamlet* even a skull has a dual significance.

The root of *incarnation* is from the Latin. It means the giving of body, the putting flesh on the bones. From Horatio’s resurrection of the dramatic ghost of *Julius Caesar*, in which the ‘graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead/Did squeak and gibber in Roman streets’ (Q2, 1.1.106.9-106.10), to the solution of the delver’s riddle, which is that it is the gravedigger that makes the most permanent structures because ‘the houses that he makes last till doomsday’ (5.1.54-5), images of the reincarnation at the end of time haunt the represented present of Hamlet. Thus far we have seen the prominence of dust. In the graveyard scene, Shakespeare seemingly attempts to reverse the process: moving from dust to incarnation:

FIRST CLOWN: But age with his stealing steps  
Hath caught me in his clutch,  
And hath shipped me intil the land,  
As if I had never been such.

[*He throws up a skull*]

HAMLET: That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once.  
How the knave jowls it on the ground as if ‘twere Cain’s jawbone,  
that did the first murder! This might be the plate of a politician which  
this ass o’er offices. 5.1.64-5)

Hamlet’s response to the skull possesses a characteristic opacity – disquiet at the gravedigger’s seriocomic attitude towards the dead seems incongruous since he joked after killing Polonius that the advisor was now ‘most grave’ (3.4.188). What this exchange and Hamlet’s vivid fleshing out of various skulls – most notably the dead jester Yorick’s: ‘Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft./Where be your jibes now – your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

roar' – does offer, however, is both an antic pastiche of the dramatist's profession of fleshing out historical or imaginary figures ('graves at my command/Have waked their sleepers' [*The Tempest*, 5.1.49] observes Prospero when abjures his 'potent art' [Ibid., 50]) and a *reductio ad absurdum* of a paradox that Adorno spends a considerable amount of time musing on: the irrational urge of rationality to imbue with everything with a fixed identity, which he terms 'identity-compulsion' [identitätszwang].<sup>17</sup> Incarnation in early modern parlance also meant 'the assumption of a definite form.'<sup>18</sup> Even when faced with something faceless, utterly bereft of an identity, Hamlet attempts to assign an identity and even a profession. Moreover, Hamlet's compulsion illustrates a further paradox, that both Adorno and the Renaissance theologian Cusanus muse upon: namely that any attempt to objectively determine the metaphysical cripples the principle possibility inherent in it, which is that things could utterly different – even if only by a hair's breadth – to how they are; as Adorno scathingly puts it: '[t]heologians have been unable to refrain from childishly pondering the consequences of rocket trips for their Christology'.<sup>19</sup>

What I think the interplay between decomposition and composition or incarnation in the play emphasizes is the way that 'traces of otherness,' be they ghosts or 'dust,' provide grist for the dialectical mill of the play, which generates multiplicity out of singularity – like the dead dog it brings forth teeming life. The famous philosophical ruminations of the protagonist exist as a perspective within the play as a whole, which employs a vast number of represented forms, many of which it makes a mockery of by employing ironically. No viewpoint or form offers immutable wisdom or a final word; appropriately the play ends with a deferral in which Horatio promises to reiterate the chaos of 'carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts' (5.2.325) in which the past will once again ghoulishly stalk the future.

However, even this standpoint that there is no such thing as a final word is unstable. In the midst of her nonsense mad speech, the suicidal Ophelia posits a deterministic belief: 'They say the owl was a baker's

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<sup>17</sup> *Negative Dialectics*, p.94.

<sup>18</sup> OED, (definition, c).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

daughter./Lord, we know what we are but know not what we may be' (4.5.44-5). Embedded in this equivocal comment is the idea that the future is unknowable; the idea that we 'know not what we may be' is the very doubt that Hamlet considers in his most famous lines: 'To be or not to be – that is the question/[...] To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there's the rub' (3.1.55, 64) and the crux of Hamlet's wisdom is that the future is in the hands of a (frankly pretty ambivalent) God: 'Not a whit, we defy augury. There's special providence in the fall of a sparrow' (5.2.197-8). Even the paradoxical wisdom of learned ignorance, which accepts that 'there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio/Then are dreamt of in *our* [*Q2*, '*your*'] philosophy' (*F*, 1.5.168-9, my emphasis), is playfully undermined by the fact that this wisdom is uttered by a madwoman. While Hamlet's quibbling graveside repartee with the clown, who 'lies' (5.1.112-18) in the grave subtly recalls the figure of the ghost and the revenge plot he catalyses by suggesting that it is not the first time the prince has been spoken to from the grave. Nor will it be the last. This banter foreshadows the paradoxical presence of the 'quick' (*Ibid.*, 114), incarnated, in Ophelia's 'grave' (*Ibid.*, 112) a few dozen lines later.

What the de-sublimation of the gravediggers and the madwoman embodies is what Adorno surprisingly contends is the 'essential element of playfulness' in philosophy: 'the thing that under the general spell of identity thinking reminds us of the unthinkable'.<sup>20</sup> Such views are 'essential,' even foundational, to philosophical thought because they encourage us to think beyond the given, and, as the strange echoes that the ostensibly serious action has with the riddles and patter of the gravediggers, they estrange the present. The embedded critique of the clownish diggers and the insane Ophelia turn any received opinion on its head—even if that opinion is one of scepticism at the possibility of fixed, frozen identities or meanings. In doing so it opens up the possibility that one day one may possibly be able to think about the world and its inhabitants playfully rather than instrumentally. And it is this dazzling estrangement from explicit values, from that asinine gesture of stating that 'that that is, is' (*Twelfth Night*, 4.2.11-14),<sup>21</sup> which 'harrows me.

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<sup>20</sup> *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, p. 92.

<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik (London: Methuen, 1984).

**‘My father had a mole upon his brow’: trauma, loss, and recovery in *Twelfth Night***

Erin Weinberg

Last summer, I visited the Stratford Shakespeare Festival with my family. We saw Des McAnuff’s production of *Twelfth Night*, laughing at the cross-dressing gaffes and Sir Andrew’s antics, even singing along to the play’s final song. Ultimately, I felt that *Twelfth Night* was a feel-good play. That’s how I felt before my father died this past winter. Since then, I’ve watched McAnuff’s production again.<sup>1</sup> Seeing it with new eyes, I was shocked by the play’s heaviness: how can a story containing such trauma conclude not as a tragedy, but as a comedy? I realized that a feel-good ending in Shakespeare’s comic repertoire does not constitute a feel-good play.

Before I get into the text itself, I’d like to give a more precise outline of what I mean by ‘trauma.’ The general definition of ‘trauma’ is ‘to indicate experience that [is] distressing or emotionally disturbing.’<sup>2</sup> In literary studies, we follow Cathy Caruth’s refinement of the definition to suggest that trauma arises from ‘an event that... is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivors.’<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, she writes that ‘trauma is known only at a remove through signifiers’<sup>4</sup>; in this way, it is fitting that I am working through my own trauma in a hands-off way by approaching Shakespeare’s drama with hands on. By doing so, I engage with Freud’s paradoxical yet hopeful suggestion that ‘traumatic responses entail the possibility of their own “cure.”’<sup>5</sup>

To trace *Twelfth Night*’s shift from its roots in the darkness of trauma to the lightness of comedy, I will employ Anne Barton’s argument that ‘Two contradictory kinds of time have run parallel through the comedy, diverging

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, dir. Des McAnuff. Stratford Shakespeare Festival, 2012, filmed recording of a stage production, 21 March 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Silverstone, *Shakespeare, Trauma and Contemporary Performance* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 8, quoting OED def. 2b, ‘Trauma.’

<sup>3</sup> Silverstone, *Shakespeare, Trauma and Contemporary Performance*, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

only at its end. One is the time of holiday and of fiction, measureless and essentially beneficent... The other time is remorseless and strictly counted.’<sup>6</sup> While the ‘whirligig of time’ (5.1.367)<sup>7</sup> is both cruel and kind in this play, what ultimately makes *Twelfth Night* a comedy and not a tragedy is that for these characters, time... goes on.

*Twelfth Night* earned its name from the Feast of the Epiphany, a holiday encouraging an atmosphere of misrule based on ‘reversals of established norms.’<sup>8</sup> Festivity allows revellers to temporarily freeze this time of celebration before returning to the responsibilities of daily life. CL Barber notes that *Twelfth Night*’s festive spirit is best represented by its famous first lines: ‘If music be the food of love, play on’ (1.1.1). Music! Food! Love! Play on, that sounds like good fun! Conversely, critics including Harold C. Goddard and Jan Kott note the play’s ‘serious treatment of psychological states,’<sup>9</sup> focusing on the dark, dreary ‘morning-after’<sup>10</sup> symptoms exemplified by the play’s next lines, ‘That surfeiting,/The appetite may sicken and so die’ (Ibid., 2-3). This play is based on the bittersweet balance of enjoying the metaphorical party but recognizing that it ends.

Depending on the tone they want to set, some directors invert the opening scenes to begin not with Orsino’s festive food of love, but with Viola, who, like a character from Shakespeare’s later romances, survives after the ship on which she travels capsizes in a tempest. McAnuff opted for this switch, evoking maximum pathos for Viola. Once ashore, she pleads with the sea captain, ‘And what should I do in Illyria?/My brother he is in Elysium’ (1.2.2-3). She indirectly accesses their traumatic separation by referring to another sandy shore, this one being the ‘heaven of classical mythology.’<sup>11</sup> But whereas Elysium signifies a place of death, it is also one

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<sup>6</sup> Anne Barton, ‘Shakespeare’s Sense of an Ending in *Twelfth Night*.’ *Twelfth Night: Critical Essays*, ed. Stanley Wells (New York: Garland, 1986, print), p.309.

<sup>7</sup> William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, Or, What You Will*, ed. Roger Warren and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford, 1998, print). All references to this edition unless stated otherwise.

<sup>8</sup> Warren, ‘Introduction’, *Twelfth Night, Or, What You Will*, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Thad Jenkins Logan, ‘*Twelfth Night*: The Limits of Festivity.’ *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 22.2 (1982), web. p.223.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Danson, *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Genres* (Oxford: Oxford, 2000, print), p.70.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.29.

of 'immortality,'<sup>12</sup> suggesting that her memory of losing Sebastian cannot be put to rest.

Without a father or brother to retrieve her from this enemy land, Viola is painfully aware that even in her time of grief, she must find occupation. Surprisingly, her first choice of employer is not the wealthy Duke Orsino, but Olivia. Viola first hears of her as:

A virtuous maid, the daughter of a count  
That died some twelvemonth since, then leaving her  
In the protection of his son, her brother,  
Who shortly also died: for whose dear love,  
They say, she hath abjured the company  
And sight of men. (1.2.33-36)

Viola's trauma leads her to inadvertently gravitate toward the one person who may empathize with her<sup>13</sup> – both are fatherless, and have recently lost their guardian-brothers. Yet, empathizing with Olivia, whose social position affords her the luxury of being 'like a cloistress' who 'will veiled walk/And water once a day her chamber round/With eye-offending brine' (1.1.27-29), Viola knows that Olivia is in no state to welcome a stranger into her company, and instead disguises herself as a eunuch to employ herself with Orsino.

Barber suggests that when Viola begs the sea captain to 'Conceal me what I am' (1.2.50), she 'settles what she shall do next almost as though picking out a costume for a masquerade.'<sup>14</sup> I propose that Viola's motivations for cross-dressing are darker, manifesting themselves through her traumatic experience because she wants to emulate Sebastian's identity in particular. Upon their reunion, Viola notes that she wore the clothes that Sebastian was wearing when he went 'to his watery tomb' (5.1.228). It is unlikely that Viola lost her brother but not the clothes he wore when he was

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Everett, 'Or What You Will', in *Twelfth Night*, ed. Robert S. White (New York: St. Martin's, 1996, print), p.195.

<sup>13</sup> Erin Weinberg, 'Secret Diary of a PhD Candidate: Entry 7. Trauma Gravitates towards Trauma.' *The Shakespeare Standard*. The Shakespeare Standard, 12 Mar. 2012, web.

<sup>14</sup> C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton: Princeton, 1959, print), p.241.

lost; this is not the first inconsistency in one of Shakespeare's plays and, as with any, it is worthwhile to consider its effect. Many audiences see Viola in a fine suit, as in McAnuff's production, or in uniform, as in Trevor Nunn's 1996 film,<sup>15</sup> but consider this: if Sebastian had been shot and Viola wore his blood-stained shirt, this trauma-driven reaction would be much more apparent. As a twin, Viola was one of two. By appropriating Sebastian's clothes, Viola sartorially embodies the traumatic reality of being a lone twin and indirectly embodies her brother-guardian's absent protection in this enemy land. Her reaction shows how, to quote Caruth, trauma is 'a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.'<sup>16</sup>

Before stepping foot onstage, Olivia is already a topic of conversation. Valentine returns from her manor with another rejection for Orsino:

The element itself, till seven years' heat,  
Shall not behold her face at ample view;  
But, like a cloistress, she will veiled walk  
And water once a day her chamber round  
With eye-offending brine: all this to season  
A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh  
And lasting in her sad remembrance. (1.1.23-31, my italics)

There has been much critical dust kicked over the word 'element,' suggesting a degree of 'fashionable affectation'<sup>17</sup> on Olivia's part. Director Bill Alexander depicts Olivia's mourning as 'an adolescent reaction to grief,<sup>18</sup> whereas McAnuff stages her grief as sincere, replacing Olivia's chamber with a tomb around which she walks. Olivia's ritual of walking around her chamber each day symbolizes the survivor's emotional return to a traumatic event that, to quote Caruth, 'one cannot simply leave behind.'<sup>19</sup> Yet, Orsino

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<sup>15</sup> William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. Dir. Trevor Nunn. BBC Films, 1996. DVD.

<sup>16</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.7.

<sup>17</sup> Warren, 'Introduction', *Twelfth Night, Or, What You Will*, p.29.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Billington. Michael Billington, ed. *Approaches to Twelfth Night* (London: Nick Hern, 1990, print), p.53.

<sup>19</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p.2.



myopically sees ‘all this’, the loss that presently anchors her to memories of the past as opposed to a future with him. Olivia says ‘I cannot love him’ (1.5.246), suggesting that she is incapable of such an emotional response. Orsino thinks this to mean that she *would not* love him, and retorts, ‘I cannot so be answered’ (2.4.87).

‘All this’, and he still ‘loves’ her, still weaves what were at the time laughably passé Petrarchan conceits to state that she ‘purged the air of pestilence’ (1.1.19). Some suggest that Olivia and Orsino are cut from the same melancholic cloth, but I want to argue that Olivia’s melancholic and traumatic reactions genuinely relate to the ‘loss of a loved object,’<sup>20</sup> her brother and, perhaps indirectly, her father. I would make the case that Orsino, conversely, emulates the melancholy of a Petrarchan lover whose loss is, to quote Freud, ‘of a more ideal kind.’<sup>21</sup> Orsino employs the ‘artifice’<sup>22</sup> of the Petrarchan lover to rhetorically emulate a trauma that he has not experienced, in order to ‘represent the state to which Olivia’s withholding has reduced [him].’<sup>23</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that many directors invert the first two scenes, re-appropriating Orsino’s function to that of comic relief.

The play’s most significant comic relief comes from Feste. On the occasion of *Twelfth Night*, Feste’s role is that of the ‘Bishop of Fools’, part of a longstanding tradition to ‘travest[y] the solemn ceremonies of the medieval church’<sup>24</sup> and then be ‘uncrowned’ to subdue the festive disorder ‘when ordinary life resumed.’<sup>25</sup> His name indicates this significance and Michael Billington notes that ‘Feste [is] the character who determines the mood,’<sup>26</sup> offering rapid changes from light and humorous to heavier musings on mortality.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia.’ *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, Vol. XIV (London: Hogarth, 1957), p.244.

<sup>22</sup> Warren, ‘Introduction’, *Twelfth Night, Or, What You Will*, p.28.

<sup>23</sup> Leonard Tennenhouse, ‘Power on Display: the politics of Shakespeare’s Genres’, in *Twelfth Night*, ed. Robert S. White (New York: St. Martin’s, 1996, print), p.85.

<sup>24</sup> Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare’s Comedies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, print), p.247.

<sup>25</sup> Everett, ‘Or What You Will’, p.203.

<sup>26</sup> Billington, *Approaches to Twelfth Night*, p.ix.

Feste performs his role as Bishop of Fools when he offers to 'catechize' Olivia into believing that she, not he, is the fool (1.5.57). The question he asks is simple: 'Good Madonna, why mourn'st thou?' (Ibid., 61). She responds, 'Good fool, for my brother's death' (Ibid., 62). Feste says that his soul must be in hell, and she indignantly retorts that his soul must be in heaven. Feste wins the argument by responding: 'The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven' (Ibid., 65-66). Only when she can finally accept that her brother's soul is spiritually safe, can Olivia begin to emotionally heal. This shows that she may have had a melancholic reaction, but that her suffering is not a product of melancholia; rather, it is the crisis of surviving a traumatic event and the 'work of mourning'<sup>27</sup> that follows.

Driving Olivia away from her fixed state of trauma and towards living for her own future happiness, Feste tells her 'beauty's a flower' (1.5.47). Despite the fact that I have defended Olivia's traumatically inflected state of mourning, all signs still point to her narcissism, a weakness that Feste exploits to Olivia's advantage. By saying 'beauty's a flower', he harkens back to a familiar conceit of the Petrarchan sonnet. His deliberate unfashionability provokes both laughter and seriousness. He reminds Olivia that while her brother's body can no longer age, hers still does, and she must return to the world of the living before she loses her bloom. He has touched on truth and Olivia knows that, to quote Regan in *King Lear*: 'Jesters do oft prove prophets' (5.3.65).<sup>28</sup>

Travelling back and forth between Olivia and Orsino's manors, Feste 'determines' Viola's mood through song. "Come away death" concerns a 'lover who is about to die of unrequited love and who asks to be buried, uncommemorated and forgotten.'<sup>29</sup> It reminds Viola of the truth that her level of romantic fulfillment in her disguised state can amount to nothing more than the emulation of 'patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief' (2.4.114-115). Conversing with Orsino, Viola refers to a 'fictitious version of her

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<sup>27</sup> Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' p.244.

<sup>28</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*. ed. Jay L. Halio (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2005, print).

<sup>29</sup> Warren, 'Introduction', *Twelfth Night, Or, What You Will*, p.35.

female self<sup>30</sup> as the woman who died waiting for her love. In referring to a version of herself while embodying another, her departed male twin, Viola betrays the continued sense of her unassimilated trauma, obliquely accessing her fear of dying alone in Illyria, destitute, with no protection. Yet, in doing so, she begins to consciously recognize that cross-dressing can be but a temporary solution when her ultimate goal must be a conjugal future with Orsino.

Lawrence Danson suggests that ‘To find oneself in Shakespeare's comedies is to find the other, and to be found is to be not a self alone,’<sup>31</sup> yet in order for the comedy to conclude as such, there cannot be two Sebastians onstage. Whether it was Shakespeare's intention to extend the ‘emotional climax’<sup>32</sup> or the twins’ inability to truly ‘know,’ in Caruth’s sense, what is before them on account of their shared trauma, it is intriguing that the twins do not refer to each other by name immediately. They first establish terms of familiarity by returning to another shared traumatic event, the death of their father on their thirteenth birthday (5.1.238-9), an unwelcome coming of age. Viola distinguishes her kinship with Sebastian based on what Warren calls a ‘prosaic matter of identification’<sup>33</sup>: the shared fact that ‘my father had a mole upon his brow’ (Ibid., 236). The ‘very indirectness of this telling’ allows Sebastian to ‘know’ his sister based on ‘the removal of signifiers.’ This represents their inability to assimilate their traumatic separation and allows Sebastian to overcome his guilt from failing to fulfill his responsibility to protect Viola after their father’s death. What results from their tragically inflected reintroduction is the comic resolution, an oxymoronic ‘most happy wreck’ (Ibid., 263) that allows each character’s energy to shift away from their traumatic past and refocus on determining their happy future.

Most intriguing about the play’s comic resolution is that the joy evoked by the twins’ reunion is more touching than the moment that, as Auden charmingly notes, Orsino ‘drops [Olivia] like a hot potato and falls in love with Viola on the spot.’<sup>34</sup> In contrast with the re-union, the latter union

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<sup>30</sup> Ryan, *Shakespeare’s Comedies*, p.258.

<sup>31</sup> Danson, *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Genres*, p.72.

<sup>32</sup> Warren, ‘Introduction’, *Twelfth Night, Or, What You Will*, p.64.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.65.

seems 'fit in' for the sake of the comedy's structural soundness. The twins' reunion is more touching because Shakespeare fulfilled a hope that Viola dared not hope for. The playwright got to the truth of death, trauma, loss and grief because he was not immune to it, having lost his son in 1596. Hamnet was survived by his twin sister, Judith, and I agree with Kiernan Ryan, who suggests that 'it's hard to believe that Shakespeare didn't derive a profound delight from dramatizing what reality denied him: a twin son and brother's return from the dead.'<sup>35</sup> While it would be anachronistic to argue that Shakespeare deliberately wrote *Twelfth Night* to fit the terms of today's trauma theory, I can suggest that my own connection with the play stems from its ultimate message of hope. The rain may 'raineth every day' (5.1.392), but I treasure the hope that after the dust settles and the earliest pangs of grief subside, I will one day find my own happy ending.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.64. Quoting WH Auden's 1947 *Lectures on Shakespeare*.

<sup>35</sup> Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare's Comedies*, p.262.

## **Murder Most Foul: poison as a gendered weapon in Shakespeare**

Dara Kaye

Shakespeare's characters use potions or poisons in six plays, but in only one, *Hamlet*, is poison wielded by a man.<sup>1</sup> While poison is the weapon of choice for women committing or attempting murder in Shakespeare, it is consistently framed as an indirect, dishonorable tool in opposition to straightforward violence. Furthermore, poison causes greater anxiety than other violence, because it allows those with lesser physical strength, wits, political power, or other means to prevail over those with greater power, and is therefore potentially a force against tradition, order, and hierarchy. This paper considers Shakespeare's emphasis on poison as a female weapon, gives some historical and critical context regarding its use, compares Shakespeare's use of poison as a plot device to other dramatists' of the time, and explores how *Hamlet*'s Claudius, the outlier in this pattern, is dishonored by choosing poison as a weapon.

### **Historical and critical context**

Honorable conflict in Shakespeare typically involves physical challenge. Romeo faces Tybalt, avenging Mercutio. Prince Hal defeats Hotspur in battle. In *Richard II*, Mowbray and Bolingbroke bring their dispute before their king, who sanctions a duel. Each prays his righteousness will be verified by victory ('And as I truly fight, defend me heaven!' says Mowbray at 1.3.25 and Bolingbroke at 1.3.41).<sup>2</sup> Duels, then, test and prove hierarchical order, affording opportunity for providence to aid the righteous.

Women, however, generally have neither access to such dueling rituals nor the strength and training to defeat male opponents. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice articulates the predicament: '[T]hat I were a man!/I would eat his heart in the marketplace' (4.1.306-7). While Beatrice solves her problem by enlisting Benedick, a woman with violent intent who was unable or unwilling to obtain a man's assistance had to compensate for

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<sup>1</sup> The plays are *Hamlet*, *Cymbeline*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

<sup>2</sup> All Shakespeare quotations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

inferior strength, martial skill, and mobility. That poison provided such equilibration greatly contributed to its early modern reputation as the most heinous method of murder; Lord Chief Justice Sir Edward Coke remarked that poison is ‘the most horrible, and fearfull to the nature of man, and of all others can be least prevented, either by manhood or by providence.’<sup>3</sup> Poison, then, strips men of defenses normally guaranteed them by strength or skill. Hamlet, whose superior swordsmanship sees him strike Laertes twice before he is hit himself, dies from poison in an otherwise non-fatal wound. As ‘least prevented ... by providence,’ poison can interfere with the divine plan in ways other violence does not. The lowliest servant could threaten the king.

Elizabethan-era texts linked poison to the female body. Elizabethans viewed illness as imbalance and corruption of bodily fluids (humors ‘offending [...] in Quantity or Qualitie’<sup>4</sup>) poisoning the constitution, and medical tradition considered women particularly susceptible to physical corruption, especially subject to imbalances if their reproductive role was inadequately performed.<sup>5</sup> All people’s bodies, tradition held, were vessels containing humours, spirits, and vital vapours, with moral/spiritual, mental, and physical components intimately intertwined, but women’s bodies were seen as fundamentally more *permeable*, ‘as leaky vessels containing poison’ (Pollard, 93). This meant ‘the female body was understood to be both more vulnerable to contamination than a man’s and, when polluted, more contagious’ (Ibid.).

Fear of a contaminated and contaminating female body loomed large in discourse on pregnancy and breastfeeding. Breastfeeding secures a special relationship between woman and child: ‘[nursing] maketh mothers to love such children best as they have given sucke unto.’<sup>6</sup> Elizabethans accepted breastfeeding as natural, even holy.<sup>7</sup> However, breast-milk and menstrual

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<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Pollard (2005) p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Gowland (2006) p.64

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Nicholas Fontanus’ *The Woman’s Doctor* (1652): “married women by lying with their husbands, do loosen the passages of the seed . . . barren women are more tormented with sickness, than those that are fruitful, because they who have children live in a more healthful condition, by reason of opening of the veins, and the coming away of the superfluous blood.” Excerpted in Aughterson (2001), p.477.

<sup>6</sup> Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, as quoted in Phillippy (2002), pp.112-13.

fluid – Elizabethan understanding of the reproductive system conflated the fluids’ origins – were thought to be a common ingredient in witches’ potions.<sup>8</sup> Tracts on and confessions of witchcraft often included accounts of a witch allowing a fiend to suck blood at her breast or other ‘witches’ mark,’ demonstrating breast-milk and female blood capable not only of nurturing an infant and connecting mothers to the divine, but also of poisoning women’s bodies and souls by anchoring them to Satan.<sup>9</sup>

Asp at her chest, Cleopatra plays with this breast-milk/poison connection: ‘Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,/That sucks the nurse asleep?’ (5.2.309-10). Lady Macbeth does as well, declaring the two exchangeable: ‘Come to my woman’s breasts,/And take my milk for gall’ (1.5.47-8). Lady Macbeth goes further, explicitly fantasizing about infanticide, beginning that horrific sequence with tender imagery of lovingly nursing ‘the babe that milks me’ before plucking her ‘nipple from his boneless gums,/And dash[ing] the brains out’ (1.7.55–58). Moreover, she ultimately employs milk to murderous ends, slipping poison into Duncan’s guards’ possets, drinks traditionally made with curdled milk (2.2.6).<sup>10</sup>

The Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* also alludes to this connection: ‘And she was weaned [...] /For I had then laid wormwood to my dug’ (1.3.26-8). Toddler Juliet comes to her nurse’s breast expecting nourishing comfort, but receives bitter rejection. Pure wormwood is poison, and it remains unpleasant even diluted and distilled to make a remedy.<sup>11</sup> Non-violent in intent, the Nurse is nevertheless another female character using poison to achieve her ends.

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<sup>7</sup> See *The Countesse of Lincolnes Nurserie* (1622), quoted in Chris Laoutaris *Shakespearean Maternities: Crises of Conception in Early Modern England* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2008), p.229.

<sup>8</sup> “Early modern medical writers believed that breast-milk was the blood which has been nourishing the foetus in the womb, drawn up to the breasts via a vein, and purified into milk” Purkiss (1996), p.131

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespearean Maternities* notes several examples of s, including that of one Alison Device, who ‘let a Divell or a Familiar appeare to her, and...suck at some part of her’. A fiend appeared which ‘did with his mouth...suck at her breast...’ (pp.164-5). Also see ‘familiar’ in *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<sup>10</sup> See *Shakespearean Maternities*, p.188.

<sup>11</sup> Wormwood’s main uses were to relieve labor pains and as an abortifacient. See Riddle (1994), p.161. On wormwood’s bitterness, also see Lamentations 3:15-19, Proverbs 5:4.



## Proving the pattern in Shakespeare

Of Shakespeare's plays featuring poison or potion, *Cymbeline*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *King Lear* feature power-hungry noble or royal women who use poisons and potions to secure position, while men gain or hold position through overt violence.<sup>12</sup> Antony's position is largely due to his prowess in battle, Kings Cymbeline and Lear command armies, and Macbeth is, if dishonorable, at least direct.

*Antony and Cleopatra* is suffused with language about potions, poisons, and drugs. Cleopatra is repeatedly compared to them and associated with serpents and venom.<sup>13</sup> She is a drug user: 'Give me to drink mandragora.[...]That I might sleep out this great gap of time/My Antony is away' (1.5.4-6). It is fitting that Cleopatra demands mandragora, a narcotic and aphrodisiac since ancient times, as Cleopatra's sexuality underlies her poisonously emasculating effect on Antony.<sup>14</sup> North's translation of Plutarch describes Antony as 'so rauished & enchanted with the sweete poyson of her love, that he had no other thought but of her...' <sup>15</sup> Here is Cleopatra as an embodied opiate, replacing thoughts of Rome and war with love and lethargy. Not only lustful, gluttonous, and slothful, Cleopatra infects others with those vices. Antony compares Cleopatra retreating with her fleet in Act 4 to Dejanira poisoning Hercules: 'The shirt of Nessus is upon me; teach me,/Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage' (4.12.43-4), simultaneously connecting Cleopatra with poison, and recognizing that her poisonous betrayal has activated the events leading to his own death.<sup>16</sup>

*Romeo and Juliet* initially presents a difficult case, as Romeo commits suicide by poison and Juliet by dagger. However, Romeo consistently uses language framing poison as a means to join Juliet, or to

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<sup>12</sup> This paper does not fully address *King Lear* or *Cymbeline*, for reasons of space and poison's peripherality to their plots, but Goneril and the Queen are the relevant female poisoners. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been similarly treated, as Puck is non-human and uses potion as a toy for play, not as a substitute for violence.

<sup>13</sup> See 1.2, 1.5.25, 2.5, 2.7, 4.15.

<sup>14</sup> "mandrake" *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

<sup>15</sup> Plutarch, trans. by North (1579), 987.

<sup>16</sup> See Pollard, p.76.

effect the transformation of death into life. They both engage in this, with Romeo's 'Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night' (5.1.34) and Juliet's 'Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,/To make me die with a restorative' (5.3.165-6). Romeo, then, is not diminished or feminized by using poison. Unlike characters employing poison as a vehicle for treachery against unsuspecting victims, Romeo is the willing object of his own action, his verbal alchemy transmuting poison to elixir. He says as much when he leaves the Apothecary: 'I sell thee poison, thou hast sold me none./...Come, cordial and not poison, go with me' (5.1.83-85).

Juliet's attempted suicide by poison fails as Romeo's cup and lips hold no 'friendly drop' (5.3.163). Juliet then borrows her husband's dagger – in a sense, briefly inheriting it. Much as Brutus reclaims honor in *Julius Caesar* by running into his own sword, Juliet is elevated by her choice. Indeed, Marc Antony eulogizes Brutus: 'This was the noblest Roman of them all/... Nature might stand up /and say to all the world, "this was a man!"' (5.5.68-75). Using a masculine weapon, Juliet demonstrates courage and virtue.

Lady Macbeth does not murder with poison, but she does use a soporific on Duncan's guards, aware it could kill them: 'death and nature do contend about them/Whether they live or die' (5.2.43-4). Moreover, the potion is a means to Duncan's death. While the guards may survive the ordeal, poison allows the Macbeths to frame them for murder, likely leading to their execution for treason.

Poison being dishonorable, and direct physical challenge impossible, one wonders what is left to a wronged woman in Shakespeare. *Much Ado's* Beatrice bleakly enumerates the options:

BEATRICE: O that I were a man for his sake!  
Or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake[...]  
I cannot be a man with wishing  
Therefore I will die a woman with grieving. (4.1.317-23)

A wronged woman's only honorable options are to prevail upon a male intermediary, or die.<sup>17</sup>

## Contemporary context

An overview of other popular plays suggests that casting poison as a feminine weapon was not universal among Shakespeare's contemporaries. Instead, poison is the purview of outsiders, especially Jews and Italians. In Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1590), Barabas poisons a convent full of nuns, including his daughter, then poisons his servant and Bellamira, the prostitute he's taken up with, finally taking a potion 'of poppy and cold mandrake juice' to fake death and escape prison. In *The Massacre of Paris*, the Old Queen of Navarre dies by inhaling scent from perfumed gloves, poisoned by an apothecary at Guise's request that 'every savour breed a pang of death' (1.2). In *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), the Duke has Vindice's fiancée poisoned when she refuses the Duke's advances, and Vindice orchestrates revenge against the Duke by means of her poisoned skull.<sup>18</sup> In *The White Devil* (1612), Doctor Julio and Christophero poison a portrait of Brachiano ('infects it with an oil/and other poisoned stuff' 2.2.29-30), and Francisco, Lodovico, and Gasparo poison the Duke of Brachiano after Brachiano has his wife killed.<sup>19</sup> In *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613), after confiding complicity in the Duchess' murder to her, the Cardinal poisons Julia to prevent her revealing it. Corbaccio tries (and fails) to poison Volpone in *Volpone* (1605). In Dekker's *Match Me in London*, Don John unsuccessfully tries to poison Don Valasco. While Pollard notes that *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, *The Duke of Milan*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy* all feature characters who 'die from necrophiliac embraces with female corpses,' those poisonings are all arranged by men. In each of these plays, men use poison for murder. In most, poison is the choice weapon for 'outsiders associated with intelligence and subtlety, such as Jews, Catholics, and especially Italians,'<sup>20</sup> whereas honorable men within the established hierarchy consistently use direct, physical means necessitating greater strength or skill than their opponents.

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<sup>17</sup> Hero, Cleopatra, Imogen, Desdemona, Hermione, and Helena (of *All's Well*) all reclaim honor by dying or being reported dead.

<sup>18</sup> Corder (2008) consulted for *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

<sup>19</sup> Webster, ed. by John Russell Brown (1996)

<sup>20</sup> See Pollard, p.9.

Contemporary writers expressed revulsion at the use of poison, perhaps none more vehemently than Scot in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), in which the typography brings ‘wise’ and ‘wife’ into close proximity:

Trulie this poisoning art called *veneficium*, of all others is most abhominable; as whereby murders maie be committed, where no suspicion maie be gathered, nor anie resistance can be made; the strong cannot auoid the weake, the wife cannot preuent the foolish, the godlie cannot be preferued from the hands of the wicked; children maie hereby kill their parents, the seruant the maister, the wife hir husband, so priuilie, so ineuitable, and so incurable, that of all other it hath beene thought the most odious kind of murther.<sup>21</sup>

Anxiety about poison here is catholic – an attack could come from the least likely people. However, Scot sees women as the most likely of the least likely: ‘[women] haue been the first inuenters, and the greatest practifers of poisoning, and more naturallie addicted and giuen therevnto than men’.<sup>22</sup> More telling is the chapter subtitle from which these quotations are excerpted: ‘That women haue vsed poisoning in all ages more than men’.

### **Claudius: the outlier**

*Hamlet’s* Claudius is the only man in Shakespeare who uses poison for violent ends. Neither woman, Jew, nor Italian, Claudius also thwarts the pattern set by other contemporary playwrights. By showing Claudius consistently sacrificing honor for convenience and personal safety, *Hamlet* paints Claudius as an effeminate coward. *Hamlet* (and especially Hamlet) links or conflates cowardice and effeminacy: ‘I, the son of a dear father murdered,/[...] Must like a whore unpack my heart with words, and fall a-cursing like a very drab’ (2.2.583-6). In a play including both ‘What a piece of work is man’ and ‘Frailty, thy name is woman!’, devaluation of women and of men who exhibit feminine traits is central. While many authors have discussed Hamlet’s real or perceived effeminacy, the gendered implications of Claudius’ chosen methods of violence have yet to be fully explored.

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<sup>21</sup> Scot (1584) p.116. For similar views, see Eglisam (1626), p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Scot, p.115.

Claudius launches five sneak attacks on the King and Prince Hamlet. Recalling the first, King Hamlet's ghost refers to Claudius as a poisonous snake: 'sleeping in my orchard/A serpent stung me' (1.5.35-6). This description conjures images of the Garden of Eden, with the Serpent/Claudius absorbing Eve's role as agent of and intermediary between evil and Adam/Hamlet. *Richard II* similarly identifies Eve with the Serpent: 'What Eve, what serpent, hath suggested thee/To make a second fall of cursed man?' (3.4.75-6). The Ghost's scene resembles a condensed *Genesis* 3-4, combining the Fall with Cain's fratricide. Thus in merely two lines, the Ghost accuses his brother of a dishonorable, effeminate approach to violence, the original sin, and the 'primal eldest curse.' Murder most foul, indeed.

Claudius directs his other four attacks against Prince Hamlet: the letter to the King of England instructing him to kill Hamlet, and ultimately the triple threat of sword, poison on the sword, and poisoned cup. Claudius admits he fears directly confronting Hamlet (4.7.9-24), and in each attack, chooses a circuitous method that avoids imperiling himself. While preparing poison for Laertes' sword and for the cup of wine intended for Hamlet, Claudius leaves the actual swordplay to Laertes and Hamlet. Hamlet knows which end of a sword to hold, as demonstrated against Laertes, and could be too threatening to Claudius in direct combat.

Contrast Claudius to 'valiant' (1.1.84) King Hamlet, who defeated King Fortinbras hand-to-hand. This single anecdote characterizes King Hamlet as an exceptional warrior who met challenges swiftly and honorably. Similarly, Fortinbras exemplifies an honorable rival, in a test of skill that exposes each party to equal risk. Claudius, however, never challenges an adversary directly. He cannot deal with young Fortinbras's rebellion, despite it being hastily marshaled with 'shark'd up' soldiers (1.1.98), who ultimately saunter into Elsinore easily. Claudius's skill with violence is limited and domestic; tasked with protecting national borders from young Fortinbras's army, he is incompetent.

Macbeth and Bolingbroke at least express ambivalence about regicide. Wanting a rival dead and refraining from action can be honorable, as can challenging an opponent directly.<sup>23</sup> The audience can retain some respect even for a king-killer, in the right circumstances. However, a clear line exists between usurpers who show inward ambivalence and outward courage, like Macbeth and Bolingbroke, and those who are ‘subtle, false, and treacherous.’<sup>24</sup> With Claudius’s consistent, effeminate reliance on poison, Shakespeare secures our contempt for Claudius as an unalloyed villain.

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<sup>23</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra* II.vii.73-80, *I Henry IV*, V.vi.86.

<sup>24</sup> Macbeth, hardly a hero, still commands more respect than Claudius; as Johnson noted, ‘the courage of Macbeth preserves some esteem.’

## Self-Knowledge by Death: Hegel, and Macbeth's Motives

Timo Uotinen

Macbeth's 'black and deep desires' and 'vaulting ambition' (1.4.52; 1.7.27)<sup>25</sup> are the closest things that Shakespeare gives us to Macbeth's motive. Both concepts, on a casual level, are quite self-evident in a play whose central character is defined by regicide: the desire and ambition is to become king. However, they are not synonyms as ambition is a form of desire pertaining to ascent in the social hierarchy. A closer inspection of these concepts will illuminate Macbeth's motivation. In this paper, I will examine Macbeth's desire and ambition through G. W. F. Hegel's concept of desire and his dialectic of the lord and the bondsman. My argument is that Macbeth's motives for murder are linked to his self-knowledge, which, in turn, is linked to death. Furthermore, because death is formative to Macbeth's self-knowledge, in achieving this knowledge Macbeth also causes his own demise.

For Hegel, desire is self-consciousness.<sup>26</sup> This self-knowledge, however, is not the Cartesian *cogito*, deriving from mere thought, but rather it comes from another, an object. In fact, it is 'a double object:'

one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however *for self-consciousness* has the character of a *negative*; and the second, viz. *itself*, which is the true *essence*, and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object. In this sphere, self-consciousness exhibits itself as the movement in which this antithesis is removed, and the identity of itself with itself becomes explicit for it.<sup>27</sup>

In Hegel's subject-object dialectics the subject perceives the external object (the first one) 'in the first instance' and, by it, in the second instance it becomes aware of itself as a perceiver, hence becoming the second object. 'The movement' from the first to the second object is how consciousness

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<sup>25</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Nicholas Brooke (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). All references to *Macbeth* are from this edition.

<sup>26</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 105, 109.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 105. Original emphasis.



becomes self-consciousness. The first object is negative because self-consciousness is only interested in itself which it knows through the first object. Self-consciousness has no other interest in the first object other than as means to know itself by which it gains gratification. However, the negativity actually resides in the self-consciousness as it continuously desires to know itself: it desires satisfaction.

In this satisfaction, however, experience makes it aware that the object has its own independence. Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object, for self-certainty comes from superseding this other: in order that this supersession can take place, there must be this other.<sup>28</sup>

Negativity is the desire for supersession only gained from an independent object. Desire seeks gratification. The gratification of self-consciousness comes from experiencing itself, it negates (and supersedes, i.e. sublates) its prior self in learning something new about itself.

On account of the independence of the object, therefore, it can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself effects the negation within itself; and it must carry out this negation of itself in itself, for it is *in itself* the negative, and must be *for* the other what it *is*.<sup>29</sup>

When Hegel said earlier that the first object has ‘a negative character’ it is because it is a self-consciousness as well. ‘Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.’<sup>30</sup> Thus desire is a way of approaching the world in order to satisfy itself on others and by this satisfaction it gives meaning—for itself.

Macbeth’s world is constructed according to his desire. He knows himself by his desire. Yet Macbeth does not achieve this kind of self-certain consciousness until after the murder of Banquo. Macbeth changes during the play, the first instance of which is apparent after the murder of Duncan: ‘To know my deed, ’twere best not to know myself’ (2.2.72). Macbeth’s desire brings him face to face with the first object, which is not yet superseded,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 109.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Original emphasis.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 110.

only negated. He is still caught between his conscience and his desire. The object, 'the deed,' is recognised but Macbeth does not yet recognise himself in it. Only after dismissing Banquo's ghost, when he is able to reflect on the murders he has committed, does he open himself up to self-knowledge:

for now I am bent to know  
By the worst means, the worst; for mine own good,  
All causes shall give way. I am in blood  
Stepp'd in so far, that should I wade no more,  
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.  
Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,  
Which must be acted, ere they may be scann'd. (3.4.135-41)

Macbeth reaches the self-consciousness his desire adumbrated. Now he wants to know what his desire means. The acceptance of his desire coincides with the dominion of his conscience. He no longer fears the image of his bloody hands (as he did in 2.2.58-62) but is committed to follow it through. In Hegelian terms this is the point of supersession, where the consciousness overcomes an inner division, when faced with an independent object, of being-for-itself over being-for-another, where consciousness turns inwards.<sup>31</sup> Macbeth, in overcoming the division between his desire and his conscience (his inner nature that 'is too full o'th' milk of human kindness,' 1.5.16), recognises his primacy over others, for which 'all causes shall give way.'

However, despite seeing how the mechanics of desire gain formal satisfaction, we have not yet touched upon the particularity of his desire: Macbeth's ambition. This social form of desire is illuminated by Hegel in the section building on his concept of desire, where he examines the independence and dependence of self-consciousness, namely Lordship and Bondage. When a self-consciousness comes across another it wants recognition because it 'exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.'<sup>32</sup> Yet because both self-consciousnesses want only to be for-themselves and not for-another, they end up in 'a life-and-death struggle.'<sup>33</sup> Therefore what ambition wants is recognition and it is ready to fight for it. Arthur Kirsch, in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 111.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 114.

his excellent Augustinian and Freudian reading of Macbeth's ambition and fear, recognises this tendency in Macbeth in describing him as the most self-absorbed of Shakespeare's tragic characters: 'the apogee of his ambition' is to be 'like a god.'<sup>34</sup>

For Hegel himself as well, the determining characteristic of Macbeth is his ambition. He admires Macbeth's empowered subjectivity, the 'reckless firmness, this identity of the man with himself and the end arising from his own decision.'<sup>35</sup> Macbeth gains this empowerment by the domination of his conscience instigated by his desire. 'At the start he hesitates,' Hegel explains, 'but then stretches out his hand to the crown, commits murder to get it, and, in order to maintain it, storms away through every atrocity.'<sup>36</sup> However, there is a problem in trying to fulfil one's ambition by murder, which Hegel is surely aware of, although he does not mention it. Because ambition needs recognition, it is implied that there is someone giving that recognition, which dead bodies cannot do.<sup>37</sup> In the dialectic of the lord and the bondsman, the life-and-death struggle does not end in death but in submission and thereby recognition. The lord is recognised as independent consciousness by the now dependent consciousness of the bondsman. The former is for-itself, whereas the latter is for-another—for the lord.<sup>38</sup> If Macbeth's desire solely takes the form of ambition, then murder and assassination would surely be counterproductive, especially after becoming king. I do not deny that ambition and the fear of losing what is gained play an important part in Macbeth's course of action but I would argue that there is a crucial element missing that is linked to Macbeth being a self-consciousness in the Hegelian manner we have discussed.

In the beginning of the play Macbeth is the bondsman, the dependent cognition. I see him bound in two ways: first, self-evidently, to Duncan; second, to Lady Macbeth. The bondage to Duncan is intertwined with the medieval natural order and its resulting feudal bonds, and it is the underlying

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<sup>34</sup> Arthur Kirsch, 'Macbeth's Suicide', *ELH*, 51 (1984), 269–296 (pp. 269, 284, 287).

<sup>35</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* Vol I & II, trans. by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I, p. 578.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 114.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 115.

bondage for the whole play. Yet, bondage to his wife, on which we shall focus, is more crucial for Macbeth. Up until the moment where Macbeth gains control of himself, through self-knowledge, Lady Macbeth is the dominating half of their relationship—he is dependent on her. As Kirsch points out, Macbeth, ‘early in the play, seems without will, while [Lady Macbeth] seems defined by it...’<sup>39</sup> Hegel elaborates on Lady Macbeth’s first moments on stage:

In her no affectionate comfort appears, no joy for her husband’s good fortune, no moral emotion, no co-operation, none of the pity that becomes a noble soul; she is merely frightened that her husband’s character will stand in the way of his ambition; him she treats as a mere means, and in her there is no hesitation, no uncertainty, no reflection, no weakness like what even Macbeth had himself at first, no remorse, but only the pure abstraction and severity of character, which carries out, without more ado, what is in line with it, until at last it breaks.<sup>40</sup>

Hegel’s description of Lady Macbeth could easily be that of Macbeth later in the play, after he changes. An inversion of roles takes place (also noted by Kirsch<sup>41</sup>). This is analogous to what takes place in the dialectic of the lord and bondsman. The lord becomes independent by the recognition of his bondsman; however, this makes him dependent on that recognition. The lord is dependent on the bondsman. The bondsman, on the other hand, through servitude and the fear of death he experienced becomes aware of the fleetingness of desire. ‘Through work ... the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is. [...] Work ... is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off.’<sup>42</sup> Lady Macbeth is the mastermind behind Duncan’s assassination: she instructs Macbeth on how to act (1.5.61-9) and comes up with the actual plan (1.7.61-73). But she waits when the crucial work is done by Macbeth after which she has an increasingly peripheral role, whereas Macbeth becomes stronger. Macbeth is a soldier and killing is his work. The process of his empowerment begins with Duncan and gains full strength with Banquo. Macbeth also distances himself from Lady Macbeth by not including her in

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<sup>39</sup> Kirsch, p. 290.

<sup>40</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, I, p. 578.

<sup>41</sup> p. 291.

<sup>42</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp. 116-8.

the plan to kill Banquo ('Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck'; 3.2.48). Thus he becomes the subject that Hegel admired that identifies only with himself—as a murderer.

Macbeth's motivation is tied into the way he knows himself through his formative relation with the world, which is death and destruction. At first, when the Weird Sisters prophesied his future Macbeth recognised only a part of it: 'By Sinell's death I know I am Thane of Glamis' (1.3.71). By another death he becomes Thane of Cawdor. It is the death of Duncan by which Macbeth is set on his deadly path. He knows himself only by that which he destroys. His desire cannot be satisfied as a social form to gain recognition because the formative relation, which keeps desire in check, is in essence anti-social. This paradox makes Macbeth self-destructive as Lady Macbeth reflectively states:

Nought's had, all's spent,  
Where our desire is got without content;  
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,  
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. (3.2.5-8)

Because Macbeth knows himself only through destruction, he sees (reflectively) his own destruction in others. This is why he has Banquo and Macduff's family killed. As Kirsch noted above, he wants to be like a god; yet not because of ambition but because of fear. As a god he would 'laugh to scorn the power of man' (4.1.93-4) and be beyond the destruction he sees in others. However, Macbeth does not escape the destruction he fears. By following his path of death he effectively facilitates his own death, because it is he that has taught

Bloody instructions, which being taught, return  
To plague th'inventor. This even-handed justice  
Commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice  
To our own lips. (1.7.9-12)

This is what J. M. Bernstein, in a reading of the young Hegel's 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate', calls 'the causality of fate'.<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>43</sup> J. M. Bernstein, 'Love and Law: Hegel's Critique of Morality', *Social Research*, Vol. 70, No. 2, 2003, 393–432 (p. 394).

causality of fate is the social, ethical, and mythical punishment or, as Bernstein puts it, ‘an ethical logic of action and reaction: to act against another person is to destroy my own life, to call upon myself revenging fates; I cannot (ethically) harm another without (ethically) harming myself.’<sup>44</sup> By his actions Macbeth evokes his own death. His self-knowledge is already the knowledge of his death, which is what his ‘Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself/and falls on th’ other’ (1.7.27-8) is trying to say. The tragedy of Macbeth lies in the mode of his self-knowledge, in the way he gains subjectivity, that his admirable self-possession is utterly self-defeating. ‘Thriftless ambition [...] will raven up/Thine own life’s means (2.4.28-9).

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## **'[T]he king hath killed his heart': Falstaff's deaths in *1 Henry IV* and *Henry V***

Rebecca Warren-Heys

In this paper I propose to explore how in death Falstaff manages to upstage his friend and King, Prince Hal (later Henry V). The first part of the paper will discuss the pantomime death of Falstaff at the battle of Agincourt in *1 Henry IV*, and how by rising from the dead Falstaff denies Hal the fulfilment of the time he has been awaiting since the second scene of the play. The second part of the paper will discuss Falstaff's actual death which occurs off-stage, as reported by Mistress Quickly in *Henry V*. By saying that Falstaff is now 'in Arthur's bosom,'<sup>1</sup> Quickly associates Falstaff with, or even raises Falstaff to the level of, the kings of old: precisely what Henry wants to achieve in his reign. Taken together, these two deaths – one fake, one real – form an impression of Falstaff by which the characters of the play, and its audiences then and now, remember him long after his exit from the stage, arguably to the detriment of Henry V.

### **'Death hath not struck so fat a deer today':<sup>2</sup> Falstaff's 'death' in *1 Henry IV***

In the closing acts of *1 Henry IV*, the battle of Shrewsbury occupies the actions and speeches of rebels and king's party alike. All classes of people are involved, from the King and Prince Hal, the heir to the throne, to Sir John (Jack) Falstaff and other nobles, in charge of other soldiers, to the infantry themselves, 'pitiful rascals' (4.2.63) many of whom become 'peppered' - killed (5.3.36).

Coming across each other on the field of battle, Falstaff and Hal have an interesting exchange:

FALSTAFF: Hal, if thou see me down in the battle and bestride me, so:

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, ed. T. W. Craik, Arden third series (Thomson Learning: London, 2005), 2.3.9. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part One*, ed. David Scott Kastan, Arden third series (Thomson Learning: London, 2002), 5.6.106. All further references are to this edition.

'tis a point of friendship.  
 PRINCE: Nothing but a colossus can do thee that friendship.  
 Say thy  
 prayers, and farewell.  
 FALSTAFF: I would 'twere bedtime, Hal, and all well.  
 PRINCE: Why, thou owest God a death. (5.1.121-6)

It is almost a prophecy, since indeed, in one of the closing scenes of the play, Hal comes across the corpulent Falstaff on the ground, as if dead:

O, I should have a heavy miss of thee  
 If I were much in love with vanity.  
 Death hath not struck so fat a deer today,  
 Though many dearer in this bloody fray.  
 Embowelled will I see thee by and by;  
 Till then, in blood by noble Percy lie. (5.4.104-109)

In this eulogy of sorts, the audience can hear mirrored the jokiness of the characters' previous exchanges, both on the battle-field and beforehand in the play. The rhyme that Hal switches to for these lines can have two effects: it could add to the courtly rhetoric of the eulogy; but rather, I think, it performs a witty double-talk, full of puns including 'heavy' for Falstaff's weight, 'deer' for Falstaff's being 'dear' to Hal, 'embowelled' reminding the audience of Falstaff's belly, and 'lie' meaning both reclining and deceiving. The comedy of these puns is appropriate to Falstaff's vitality, and, laughing at them as the audience may well be, perhaps hints that all is not lost for the fat knight. Indeed, Falstaff rises from his death, feigned as it was to escape battle with the fearsome Douglas, and faces an astonished Hal. It is my argument that Falstaff's re-animation following Hal's eulogy is a sensational theatrical moment which gives him the last laugh over Hal, since it ultimately denies Hal the effective transformation and pre-emptive coronation that he has desired from the outset of the play (see Hal's soliloquy at 1.2.185-207, and speech at 3.2.129-59). A key part of Hal's transformation is parting company with Falstaff and his crew – which would be somewhat easier were Falstaff actually dead. As Kiernan Ryan confirms,

At the battle of Shrewsbury with which Part 1 concludes, where he saves his father's life and defeats his extravagant rival Hotspur, Hal heroically proves himself to be a man of his word and a monarch in



the making. His affectionate indulgence of Falstaff on the battlefield confirms, nevertheless, that the narrative of redemption is still incomplete when the curtain falls on act V.<sup>3</sup>

But that is not all. Falstaff's resurrection does mock Hal's presumption of success, but Hal himself graciously accepts this mockery: 'if a lie may do thee grace, I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have' (5.4.157-8). By allowing Falstaff to take Hal's dead rival, Hotspur, upon his back (sd. 5.4.128), and claim his death as his own victory, Hal allows Falstaff to take 'all the budding honours of [Hotspur's] crest' (5.4.71) for his own. Falstaff is indeed the 'double man,' (5.4.138) both in the sense of his size, in carrying his own bulk and Hotspur's off the stage, and in claiming both his own and Hal's victories for himself. As Hal confirms to Falstaff, 'Thou art not what thou seem'st' (5.4.137).

In fact, all Hal is allowing Falstaff to do is 'correct' the change to the historical records which seem to have allowed Hal glory at Shrewsbury, since Hal was really too young to have done any of the actions that would have defined him on the battle-field according to the play: neither saving the king from Douglas (5.4.38-45), killing Hotspur (5.4.58-100), nor releasing the Earl of Douglas (5.5.17-31). There is an inserted potentiality in the play for Hal to claim centrality before he has reached full maturity, before he is ready, as it were; but Falstaff scuppers those plans. However much Hal has declared his intent in his soliloquy at the start of the play to use Falstaff for his own political ends (1.2.185-207), the play itself does not condone that Falstaff facilitates this. If anything, this makes the inevitability of Hal having to rid himself of Falstaff even more urgent. The result is that the audience witnesses Hal, almost depressed, entering *2 Henry IV* yet again in his father's displeasure. Instead of wiping the slate clean, forgetting his past and his past rivals, and striding, sword in hand, into his own play (*Henry V*), Hal limps back to the taverns, as if his reconciliation with his father in 3.2 of *1 Henry IV* had never happened at all. The ultimate consummation of Hal's 'I will' (1.2.207) is deferred until the next play and beyond.

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<sup>3</sup> Kiernan Ryan, 'The Future of History: 1 and 2 Henry IV' in *Shakespeare (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 46

## ‘[I]n Arthur’s bosom’:<sup>4</sup> Falstaff’s death in *Henry V*

*Henry V* is another play with more battles – this time at Harfleur and Agincourt – and the Chorus at the start of Act 2 extols England’s army: ‘Now all the youth of England are on fire,/And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies’ (2.0.1-2). But what the audience sees in the following scene – middle-aged men at the Boar’s Head tavern in Eastcheap – contradicts this. It is a poignant reminder of the ‘riots, banquets, [and] sports’ (1.1.56) that Hal indulged in during his youth. Juxtaposed against the courtly scene of Act 1, the scenes of Falstaff’s crew in their Eastcheap haunt acts in the most extraordinary way to literally and metaphorically obstruct Henry’s pursuit of glory in France, which he hopes will be the making of his reign (‘No king of England, if not king of France!’ 2.2.194). I say ‘literally’ because of the scene’s position in the play after the main action of the invasion of France has been announced, but before the troops have boarded ships to make the crossing, and ‘metaphorically’ because the scene slows down the action of the main plot with the sub plot about Falstaff and his friends.

In 2.1 the audience quickly learns that Falstaff, banished from the new King’s company at the close of *2 Henry IV*, is not well. His Boy runs in and tells both characters on stage and audience offstage that Falstaff ‘is very sick and would to bed’ (2.1.83). Simon Callow contends that:

When Quickly tells us the cause of Falstaff’s demise, that “the king hath killed his heart” [2.1.88], it plunges us straight back to the rejection scene at the end of *2 Henry IV* where Falstaff bewails the king that “I speak to thee my heart” [5.5.46]. This reminiscence casts a shadow on the new king’s radiance.<sup>5</sup>

‘Ah, poor heart’ (2.1.118) laments Quickly. Pistol agrees: ‘the king hath run bad humours on the knight, that’s the even of it’ (2.1.121-2). It seems that the ‘comic sub-plot’ of the play works for the audience to mitigate the other characters’ glorification of King in previous scenes of the play.

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<sup>4</sup> *Henry V*, 2.3.9.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Callow, *Actors on Shakespeare: Henry IV Part I* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), p. 102.

In 2.2, the repetition of the word ‘heart’ chimes back to Quickly’s and Pistol’s comments on Falstaff’s heart in 2.1. When the king says ‘we carry not a heart with us from hence/That grows not in a fair consent with ours’ (2.2.21-2, F only) he could almost be speaking of Falstaff; when Cambridge rejoinders that ‘there’s not, I think, a subject/That sits in heart-grief and uneasiness/Under the sweet shade of your government’ (2.2.26-28, F only) the audience almost wants to laugh with the irony of it. Grey agrees: subjects ‘do serve you/with hearts create of duty [F: and of zeal] [Q: for your sake]’ (2.2.30-1). It cannot be a coincidence that 2.1 is juxtaposed with 2.2, from which all these quotations are drawn. Indeed, at the start of the Act 2, Shakespeare-as-chorus thinks to take the audience directly to ‘Southampton’ (2.0.30, 35, 42) but then thinks better of it and doubles back to Eastcheap for 2.1. And this scene is not taken from historical sources; it is Shakespeare’s own invention.

2.3 takes the audience back to Eastcheap again, but this time the tone is noticeably more melancholy from the very outset. The audience is immediately told that ‘Falstaff... is dead’ (2.3.6), and there follows Quickly’s reminiscence of his death-bed scene. Interestingly, Quickly says that Falstaff is ‘in Arthur’s bosom, if ever a man went to Arthur’s bosom’ (2.3.9-10), and many editors gloss this as one of Quickly’s malapropisms. The Arden editor, T. W. Craik, says that ‘the Hostess means “Abraham’s bosom”’;<sup>6</sup> likewise, the Oxford editor, Gary Taylor, says plainly that the phrase is ‘a mistake for “Abraham’s bosom”’.<sup>7</sup> They base their glosses on the biblical story at Luke 16:22, which tells of Dives, the rich man who ends up in Hell, and Lazarus, the poor man who ends up in ‘Abraham’s bosom’, or heaven.<sup>8</sup> The Cambridge editor, Andrew Gurr, agrees that the line is ‘More properly Abraham’s [bosom]’,<sup>9</sup> but, following A. R. Humphreys,<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Note, p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry V* (Oxford World’s Classics), ed. Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Note, p. 141.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 16:22: ‘And it came to passe, that the beggar dyed, and was caryed by the Angels unto Abraham’s bosome.’ Craik also references *Richard II* 4.1.104-5: ‘Sweet peace conduct his sweet soul to the bosom | Of good old Abraham!’ and *Richard III* 4.3.38: ‘The sons of Edward sleep in Abraham’s bosom.’ R. W. Dent thinks the phrase is proverbial. See *Shakespeare’s Proverbial Language: An Index* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1980), p. 45 (A8).

<sup>9</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry V* (New Cambridge Shakespeare) ed. Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Note, p. 114.

concedes that ‘it conflates a good Christian death with the Arthurian knights sleeping in Avalon.’<sup>11</sup>

Yet Mistress Quickly’s apparent malapropism is in fact a lot more apt and astute than the editors seem to give her credit for. By ‘conflating’ Abraham and Arthur, Mistress Quickly associates Falstaff with, or even raises Falstaff to the level of, the kings of old. Humphreys confirms that ‘[t]he Hostess merges the biblical heaven and the Arthurian Isle of Avalon, whither her knightly patron has gone to join the company of the Round Table.’<sup>12</sup> If we allow ourselves to interpret Arthur’s bosom as a womb of English kings in this way, it means that Falstaff’s gets ‘into’ Arthur’s bosom and lies there with the kings of old. Hal too, as evidenced by his speeches at Agincourt and elsewhere, would like nothing better than to be compared to or associated with that epitomic English king, Arthur, and lie, finally, in his bosom. Remember that in the first scenes of the play Ely has urged the new king to ‘[a]wake remembrance of these valiant dead [ancestors]/And with your puissant arm renew their feats’ (1.2.115-6, F only); likewise, Exeter exclaims that ‘[y]our brother kings and monarchs of the earth/Do all expect that you should rouse yourself’ (1.2.122-3). Traditionally, King Arthur was one of those ‘brother kings and monarchs.’ In being ‘in Arthur’s bosom’, then, Falstaff has beaten Henry at his own game.

In any case, Quickly’s testimonial is one of the most important memories in the play, and we empathise with the teller, feeling her sorrow at Falstaff’s death. This is not good news for Henry, who can have expected to have lost some sympathisers in the audience because of it. And it is easy to forget, such is the power of this scene, that it does all in just 60 lines. This scene shows Shakespeare’s mastery of the reported event, and ensures that ‘the large shadow of Falstaff haunts the king even in the play in which he does not appear’.<sup>13</sup>

Undoubtedly part of the reason Henry has such difficulty escaping from Falstaff at this early stage is because they are so alike. There is no

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<sup>10</sup> A. R. Humphreys, *Henry V* (London: Penguin, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Note, p. 114.

<sup>12</sup> Humphreys, *Henry V*.

<sup>13</sup> Quinn, *Casebook*, p. 19.

denying that Henry is related to Falstaff: both are massively excessive, Henry engaging in a sort of drunken rampage through the ‘vasty fields of France’ (Prologue 12); ‘drunken’ because this excess is something Henry has in common with Falstaff, though, of course, to different ends.<sup>14</sup> In any case Henry strives to catch Falstaff up, to become the bigger man, to endure in the audience’s memory the longest, to survive and be a famous king. How well he succeeds in this is the subject for another paper, but Falstaff’s two deaths, one feigned, one all too real, form an impression which ensures that ‘the fat knight with the great-belly doublet’ (Henry V, 4.7.47) stays in ‘famous memory’ (Henry V, 4.7.91) – an epithet that Henry might well wish applied only to him.

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<sup>14</sup> ‘[Hal] sublates Falstaff’s crazy excessiveness – and Hotspur’s – into his mad campaign in France.’ Ewan Fernie, ‘Action!’ in *Presentist Shakespeares* (Accents on Shakespeare) eds Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 104.

## **Night of the Living Dead: three ghost scenes and the character of Hamlet**

Colin Yeo

Critical attention to Gothic criticism in recent years has increasingly looked towards the works of Shakespeare, acknowledging and analysing the stamp of the Bard's influence on the development of Gothic literature in the eighteenth century. Essays in Drakakis's *Gothic Shakespeares* (2008) and Williams and Desmet's *Shakespearean Gothic* (2009) address this connection at length. Shakespeare's 'predilection for spectres' and his preoccupation with the 'paraphernalia of death,' Drakakis proposes, point us to the descriptive term 'Gothic.'<sup>1</sup> The Ghost Scene in Act One of *Hamlet* is a scene that can be read as a precursor to the supernatural occurrences of Horace Walpole's *The Castle Of Otranto*, the text commonly acknowledged as the first Gothic novel. But what is the significance of this poignant 'Gothic' scene? This essay seeks to focus on the ghost scene as a focal point by which the multifaceted aspects of Hamlet's psychology can be understood. My particular interest is in cinema, and how various interpretations of Hamlet's personality can be gleaned through the performative aspect of the play and through the medium of film. The unnatural appearance of the dead in the play acts as an emotional trigger for the character of Hamlet, and each filmic adaptation of the play realises a different aspect of the character's emotionality. Here, I draw up an analysis of three screen adaptations of Hamlet; Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 version, Kenneth Branagh's 1996 version, and Michael Almereyda's 2000 version.<sup>2</sup>

Hamlet's complex and varied psychology is one that has attracted considerable scholarly debate. Many have postulated possible accounts and explanations for why he acts the way he acts. The significance of the appearance of the Ghost in Hamlet is addressed by W.W. Greg, who, in his essay "Hamlet's Hallucination", suggests that, unlike other works such as *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, who afford ghosts, Hamlet introduces an objective ghost as a fundamental plot element.<sup>3</sup> The presence

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<sup>1</sup> John Drakakis and Dale Townshend (eds.), *Gothic Shakespeares* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Franco Zeffirelli (dir.), *Hamlet*, Warner Brothers (1990); Kenneth Branagh (dir.), *Hamlet*, Columbia Pictures (1996); Michael Almereyda (dir.), *Hamlet*, Miramax Films (2000).

of the supernatural in *Hamlet* is one scene that can serve to realize the character's troubled, innermost mental faculties. Of all three versions of *Hamlet*, Zeffirelli's version is most emotionally affected. Mel Gibson's *Hamlet* paces the battlements of Elsinore with his sword drawn and his eyes pace up and down furtively, all the time glancing anxiously at his surroundings. In this scene, the body language displayed by Gibson's *Hamlet* is reflective of a troubled, anxious state of mind. The emotional terror written on his face is realized when his eyes locate his father's ghost, a vision that leads *Hamlet* to drop his sword in fright. A shot of Gibson's face reveals the paroxysm of terror that grips his character, and we see Gibson taking a gulp of saliva in response to the Ghost's mention of 'murder most foul' (1.5.32). On the mention of 'my uncle' (Ibid., 47), he exclaims 'my uncle,' but immediately afterward his eyebrows knit up in confusion. After listening to the Ghost's speech, the utterance of 'Remember me' (Ibid., 97) and the lines thereafter resound with sadness and emotion. By then Gibson speaks his lines in a half-weep, and displays his emotional instability openly by grinding his sword into the battlement, then slamming it repeatedly into a wall upon seeing his uncle and mother in the dining hall below. The emotional conflict Gibson's *Hamlet* goes through is evident and this scene paints us a picture of a disturbed and emotionally unstable *Hamlet*.

Zeffirelli's rendition of *Hamlet* offers an explanation for this emotional instability. His camera work in this scene alone suggests *Hamlet*'s possible struggle with an Oedipal complex. This is evident in this scene when the camera switches to focus on *Hamlet*'s facial expressions at certain points during this scene. The first of these focuses on *Hamlet* at the mention of the phrase 'shameful lust' (1.5.51). In that same frame, *Hamlet* is seen to turn away upon the mention of 'virtuous queen,' suggesting shame and possible guilt at his subconscious desire. On the mention of the words 'damned incest' (Ibid., 99), and 'mother aught' (Ibid., 92), the camera again cuts to *Hamlet*, drawing the viewer's gaze towards his character. The camerawork in this scene shares the character's vision with the audience; Gibson's *Hamlet* catches sight of his mother and uncle together in the

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<sup>3</sup> W.W. Greg, "Hamlet's Hallucination", *Modern Language Review*, Vol.12, No.4, pp.393-421, URL: [www.jstor.org/stable/3714827](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3714827), p.395.

castle's dining hall below. This shot serves to highlight his possible feelings for his mother; the sight of them is the catalyst which drives him to exhibit a fit of violence. Gibson's Hamlet starts waving his sword and tries to carve out a chunk of the battlement in the hopes of killing those sitting in the castle below. The lines 'pernicious woman' (Ibid., 111) are particularly issued with great disgust. As McCombe suggests, Gertrude's open displays of affection in Zeffirelli's rendition serve to reinforce the notion of Hamlet's disgust with his mother's open sexuality.<sup>4</sup>

In comparison with the other two versions of Hamlet, Zeffirelli's rendition brings out the theme of incest very strongly. In the Branagh version, Hamlet merely exhibits an expression of mild disgust at the Ghost's mention of the word 'incest.' Hawke's Hamlet also shows no trace of emotion when the Ghost relates his story: he keeps a wary eye on the Ghost all the time and there is no conceivable reaction that might suggest the undercurrent of an Oedipal complex. McCombe uses the theories of Jacques Lacan, and suggests that according to Lacanian psychoanalytic theories, Hamlet's desire for his mother has been transposed from the conscious to the unconscious. As portrayed in the Zeffirelli adaptation, Gibson's Hamlet's exhibits an unconscious desire for his mother.<sup>5</sup> Thus in Zeffirelli's version, Hamlet's reactions to the mentioning of his mother and the sight of his mother are actions that cause changes to his emotions and behaviour, fleshed out to clarity by Mel Gibson's body language and facial expressions. The result is a troubled Hamlet, who surrenders to his emotions easily.

At the other end of the spectrum is the Hamlet portrayed by Ethan Hawke in Almereyda's adaptation. Hawke's Hamlet reacts to the Ghost in a very different manner. Initially, Hawke's Hamlet starts off as wary of the Ghost. He lets the Ghost into his room, but always keeps a distance from the Ghost. While the Ghost relates his story, Hamlet keeps his distance, backing away from the Ghost as the Ghost walks towards him. Hawke's Hamlet

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<sup>4</sup> John P. McCombe, "Toward an Objective Correlative: The Problem of Desire in Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No.2 (1997), p.129. URL: <http://proquest.umi.com.ezproxy.library.uwa.edu.au/pqdlink?did=1308812671&Fmt=7&clientId=20923&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

<sup>5</sup> McCombe, "Toward an Objective Correlative: The Problem of Desire in Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*", p.128.



displays little trace of fear, but rather a closely guarded wariness that echoes the theme of isolation. The result of this isolation is manifested through the melancholic behaviour of Hawke's Hamlet. In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet often speaks of his 'weakness and his melancholy' (2.2.608) which he fears makes him susceptible to weakness. Siegel suggests that Hamlet suffers from mental and emotional fatigue as a result of his excessive brooding.<sup>6</sup> His weakness and melancholy is most evident in this version of Hamlet, where his introduction to the ghost scene begins with a call from Horatio, a call that wakes him up from sleep. This implies weakness in the form of lethargy. Hawke's Hamlet has significantly fewer spoken lines than the Branagh or Gibson's Hamlets, and Hawke's character reacts in a less emotional manner to the appearance of the Ghost. Unlike Branagh and Gibson's Hamlets, Hawke's Hamlet is relatively passive, and he does not actively seek out the Ghost, but is instead sought out by the Ghost. Indeed, the Ghost's words 'mark me' (Ibid., 3) are uttered almost as a request for the Ghost to seek permission to enter Hamlet's room.

According to Abbate, melancholy and introversion are the consequences of a technological addiction that alienates Hawke's Hamlet from others, and he suggests that Hamlet has lost his cheer way before his father's death.<sup>7</sup> Almereyda takes the theme of isolation and grounds it in a modern day context by presenting us with a Hamlet who is isolated by capitalist culture and technology. Television screens (a symbol of anti-sociality and isolation in the year 2000), such as the one in Hamlet's bedroom, are perpetually switched on and left running. Hamlet's friends do not approach him physically to alert him to the Ghost's appearance in this text, but mediate their means of communication through technology – a telephone call. Technology has ensnared this screen version of Hamlet, resulting in his isolation. As we see Hamlet rise from his bed, the camera pans out, to take a shot of him standing alone behind the glass of his room, looking very much imprisoned. After that, as the Ghost draws nearer, a glass door acts as a physical barrier that even the ghost must cross. Mark Brunett suggests that the most potent visualization of capitalism is brought out

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<sup>6</sup> Paul N. Siegel, "Hamlet, Revenge!", *Shakespeare Survey*, Issue 45 (1993), p.20.

<sup>7</sup> Allesandro Abbate, "To Be Or Inter-Be: Almereyda's end-of-millennium *Hamlet*", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Issue 32, No 2 (2004), p.83.

through Almereyda's use of reflective surfaces in the film.<sup>8</sup> The isolation that results from a capitalist culture is realized through a physical glass door, a barrier that inhibits even the supernatural. One of the few true images of genuine affection that Hamlet exhibits in Almereyda's film occurs in this scene where he embraces the Ghost; Hamlet here is a lonely man who is so isolated that he would gladly seek solace in the supernatural. The result is an isolated, seemingly emotionless Hamlet. Critics have panned Hawke's performance as dull and lifeless but what matters is not so much Hawke's performance, but Almereyda's solid realization of one of the critical themes of Shakespeare's play: isolation. Therefore the Hamlet that is produced as a consequence of being isolated is one that is brooding and melancholic, an aspect of his character that differs greatly from the Hamlet portrayed by Gibson.

If the three Hamlets were placed alongside each other, then Branagh's Hamlet can be said to occupy the space in between all three Hamlets. Branagh's Hamlet exhibits qualities that suggest emotional distress, but also possesses strong outward emotional control. Branagh's Hamlet first engages in a wordless soliloquy whose rapid, machine-gun paced tone of delivery at first emphasizes aggression. This sequence is interlaced with images suggesting destruction and death, such as explosions, and an image of his dead father lying in his grave. Faced with these images, viewers are primed to feel fear for Branagh's Hamlet. Of all three Ghost scenes, Branagh's adaptation comes closest to realising the scene's Gothic emotional engagement of terror. This emotional engagement is transposed onto the audience: we receive a nasty visual shock when the Ghost puts his hand on Hamlet's throat in a strangulating gesture. Even the character's flight through the forest brings to mind the oppressive threat and atmosphere of a contemporary slasher or horror film. However, in the face of this supposed inner turmoil, Branagh's Hamlet maintains his outward composure even when faced with the ghostly image of his dead father. With its echoing voice and alien looking blue eyes, Branagh's Ghost is by far the most intimidating of the Ghosts in all three adaptations, and yet even when faced with this, his

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Thronton Brunett, "To Hear And See The Matter: Communicating Technology in Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*", *Cinema Journal*, Issue 42, No 3 (2003), p.51. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225904>

Hamlet keeps his cool. In contrast to his troubled thoughts, outwardly Branagh's Hamlet is one that exhibits more calm and emotional control, as evidenced by his delivery of the lines 'Wither shall thou lead me' (1.5.1), a phrase that is presented as a command to the Ghost. After the Ghost leaves him, Hamlet initially appears to have lost control of his faculties. But soon after his voice gains strength from its initial semi-weep, and culminates in an aggressive utterance of the words 'pernicious woman' (Ibid., 111). Moments later, we see him stand up and, as he swears on his sword, the camera's shot that focuses on him suggests control and determination. As Sue Tweg suggests, compared to Mel Gibson, Branagh's Hamlet seems emotionally collected.<sup>9</sup>

An emotional connection between Hamlet and the Ghost is suggested in this version. Towards the end of his narration, Hamlet and the Ghost's eyes are pictured in a series of close-ups. Flashbacks are intercut with the close ups, and these images of eyes suggest a connection that allows them to connect with each other, looking into each other's 'minds eyes.'<sup>10</sup> Branagh's choice of cuts is suggestive of a mental connection between his Hamlet and the Ghost, a connection that perhaps acts as an emotional anchor. This, mental connection, I suggest, lends to a sense of emotional affinity between the Ghost and Branagh's Hamlet, an affinity that is able to keep him from becoming as emotional as Gibson's Hamlet, but at the same time allowing him to expel some of his negative emotions in a cathartic gesture instead of suffering introspectively like Hawke's Hamlet.

In an interview, director Michael Almereyda comments on his adaptation of the titular character: 'There is no definitive Hamlet, there's variance, different versions.' These three film versions of Hamlet all portray the Dane differently. In one he is a troubled man struggling with a possible oedipal complex. In another, he is a melancholic young man, isolated from people despite his wealth and power. Lastly, he is also portrayed as a person

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<sup>9</sup> Sue Tweg, "Well, we have a Go, Don't We?", *Screen Education*, Issue 43 (2003), p.47. URL:

<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.library.uwa.edu.au/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=22334639&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>10</sup> Agnieszka Rasmus, "I Could a Tale Unfold: From Metatheatre to Metacinema: Films Within the Films In Shakespeare on Screen" (2003), p.156. URL:

<http://www.cadernos.ufsc.br/online/cadernos7/rasmus.pdf>

that exhibits great control over his emotions, but also possesses an inclination towards aggression and anger. In a sense, there is no definitive interpretation of Shakespeare's character. What each filmic version of the text displays is a focus on a unique aspect of Hamlet's psychology. What we can take from this ultimately, is the recognition of various complexities that make up Hamlet's character and that there is no single defining trait that can be used to describe the Dane in his entirety. As I have shown in this essay, the highly charged emotional exchange that occurs in the 'Gothic' ghost scene offers a salient entry point to gaining an insight into Hamlet's multifaceted identity. A close reading of these three vignettes serves to underscore the importance of the performative aspect of Shakespeare's plays, a dimension that cannot be realized by a reading of the text itself. An analysis of an emotionally charged sequence such as the Ghost scene across three different filmic adaptations of the text hence offers a diverse range of interpretations that lend a sense of dynamism towards one of Shakespeare's most complex characters.

## **Murder and Responsibility: A Comparison between *Arden of Faversham* and *Othello***

Emma Poltrack

In the sixteenth century, murder carried with it certain preconceptions as to the motivations of the perpetrators and their subsequent capture and punishment. These views were based on a belief in the supernatural. The Devil was thought to tempt and drive people to commit crimes, while God was seen as chief arbiter and dispenser of justice. These two influences were seen as bookends to a crime, the cause and consequence of people's actions. Women, being weak and susceptible to suggestion, were thought to be especially at risk of devilish influence, and some of the most common crime narratives of the day centered around the ill-doings of women.<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of these stories led to accepted conventions regarding supernatural influence, treacherous wives and the killing of infants. Using *Arden of Faversham* as a point of comparison, this paper will show how Shakespeare's *Othello* reconfigures these conceptions of crime to promote an increased emphasis on personal responsibility.

To be driven to murder only required a weak mental constitution upon which the Devil could prey.<sup>2</sup> Literature of the time is full of warnings and examples of such supernatural influence. King James I wrote in *Daemonologie* how Satan, 'that olde and craftie serpent, being a spirite, hee easily spyes our affections and so conforms himself thereto, to deceave us to our own wrack.'<sup>3</sup> Timothy Bright wrote similarly how the Devil is able 'to discover the vanity of our mindes, and the secrete thoughts of our heart: which after he hath found...he suggesteth... instigation of sinne and disobedience against God & his holy commandments.'<sup>4</sup> These beliefs regarding Satan's power to influence a person were then applied to instances of crime, as can be seen by the language used in contemporary crime

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Clark, *Women and the Street Crime of Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.38.

<sup>2</sup> Clark, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> James I, *Daemonologie in forme of a dialogue, diuided into three booke*s (1597), Early English Books Online, copy from Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, available at <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>, Internet, accessed March 16, 2011, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Rentoul Reed, Jr., *Crime and God's Judgment in Shakespeare* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), p.173.

literature. In 1604, a pamphlet detailing Elizabeth Caldwell's murder of her husband reflected how the author 'bethought me of the strange invasion of Satan...how that ugly fiend (ever man's fatal opposite) had made practice, but I hope not purchase of their corruptible lives, and brought them to the last step of mortal misery.'<sup>5</sup> In *The Murder of Page of Plymouth*, love is the means 'whereby the Devil so wrought in the hearts of them both, that they preached day and night how to bring her husband to his end.'<sup>6</sup>

*Arden of Faversham* is another example of the devil's influence working through that of love or, possibly, lust. Based on the true murder of Thomas Arden by his wife, Alice, in 1551, the play *Arden of Faversham* was first published in 1591.<sup>7</sup> The play tells of an unfaithful woman married to a rich husband whom she no longer cares for and whom she conspires with her lover to murder. From the outset, Alice expresses her desire to kill her husband, for she vows:

[...] If I live, that block will be removed  
And Mosby, thou that comes to me by stealth,  
Shalt neither fear the biting speech of men  
Nor Arden's looks. As surely shall he die  
As I abhor him, and love only [Mosby.] (1.137-141)

The crime is motivated by lust, and this lust in turn is given a supernatural proportion, for Alice later laments that she was 'bewitched' by Mosby and 'woe worth upon the hapless hour/And all the causes that enchanted [her]!' (8.78-79). Mosby also considers himself 'bewitched' and promises 'to break [Alice's] spells and exorcisms' (Ibid., 93-95). Both Alice and Mosby recognize that what they are doing is wrong, but neither accepts responsibility for his or her decisions. Instead they blame each other,

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<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Dugdale, *A true discourse of the practises of Elizabeth Caldwell, Ma: Ieffrey Bownd, Isabell Hall widdow, and George Fernely, on the parson of Ma: Thomas Caldwell, in the county of Chester, to haue murdered and poysoned him, with diuers others*, 1604, EEBO, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery (our page 5)

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, "The Murder of Page of Plymouth" in *Blood and Knavery: A Collection of English Renaissance Pamphlets and Ballads of Crime and Sin*, ed. Joseph H. Marshburn and Alan R. Velie (Cranbery, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1973), p.60.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur F. Kinney, ed. *Renaissance Drama: An Anthology of Plays and Entertainments* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing 2003), 229. A third quarto of the play, published in 1633, testifies to the story's popularity. Clark, p.89.

granting each with supernatural powers, before continuing in their plots against Arden.

In a way, lust is also the driving force of *Othello*. Whereas Alice and Mosby's actions are driven by their own lust, Othello reacts to the suspicion of lust in his wife. In neither of these cases is a supernatural presence evident. While Iago does have influence on Othello's decisions, his stated goal is only 'to abuse Othello's ear/That [Cassio] is too familiar with his wife (1.3.393-395). Iago's professed purpose is to undermine Othello's security in his marriage, and disquiet him. Once this is achieved and Othello suspects Desdemona's chastity, it is Othello – not Iago – who decides to kill Desdemona. That Othello declares he will 'furnish [himself] with some swift means of death for that fair devil' (3.3.479-481) is telling, for it requires Othello to actively choose a course rather than passively submit to a suggestion. That he then reaffirms this choice by vowing 'to let her rot and perish and be damned tonight/she shall not live' further consolidates the burden of responsibility within Othello.

How Othello reacts to the possibility of his wife's infidelity reflects concerns regarding gender roles within the household. In the time Shakespeare was writing, the husband was recognized as the supreme head of the household, while the wife was expected to recognize that authority and owe him obedience.<sup>8</sup> The household was viewed as a mini-kingdom with the husband as a domestic monarch, and it was his responsibility to keep his house in order, his wife's transgressions reflecting on his own dominance.<sup>9</sup> The perception of the familial structure as analogous to a kingdom meant violence against a husband by a wife or servant was considered 'petty treason' and was a capital offense.<sup>10</sup>

In *Arden of Faversham*, Alice's transgressions are public knowledge and Thomas Arden himself remarks in the opening scene how Alice and

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<sup>8</sup> Keith Wrightson, *English Society: 1580-1680* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.98.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen, "The Family and the Household" in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 86; Clark, 42; Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.63.

<sup>10</sup> Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.21.

Mosby 'have privy meetings in the town' and that 'on his finger I did spy the ring/Which on our marriage day the preist put on' (1.16-18). Whatever Arden feels personally about his wife's unfaithfulness, he is most concerned with the blot on his reputation, as the affair is carried on publicly and 'all the knights in Kent make table-talk of her and [Mosby]' (1.343-4). The language used by Arden to describe Alice's infidelities is echoed in Iago's manipulations of Othello, drawing on the fear and knowledge of women's potential for adultery. Arden recounts to Alice how 'I heard thee call on Mosby in thy sleep...you started up and suddenly instead of him caught me about the neck' (1.66-70). Iago provides Othello with a similar story:

In sleep I heard [Cassio] say 'Sweet Desdemona,  
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves;'  
[...] then laid his leg  
Over my thigh, and sigh'd, and kiss'd; and then  
Cried 'Cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor!' (3.3.421-428)

Iago uses this established rhetorical convention to convince Othello of his wife's infidelity, capitalizing on the common theme of the treacherous wife.<sup>11</sup>

Subsequently, Othello attempts to replace his own sense of personal betrayal with that of societal duty, framing his violence in the context reestablishing social order as 'she must die, else she'll betray more men' (5.2.6). A few lines later he comments on how her 'balmy breath, that dost almost persuade/Justice to break her sword!' (5.2.16-17). In attempting to transform himself from a man to an abstract concept by equating himself with justice, Othello again is trying to push the responsibility of his impending violence onto something greater than himself. This version of events, however, cannot be sustained, as Othello's vision of the act as one of justice quickly begins to crumble. He admits that Desdemona's pleading 'dost stone my heart/And makest me call what I intend to do/A murder, which I thought a sacrifice!' (5.2.63-65). The difference between these two concepts is important, as a sacrifice implies something noble and necessary whereas murder carries with it an underhanded and malicious connotation.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.114



Othello's uneasiness with what he has done can be seen upon discovery of Desdemona's murder. Othello grapples with his culpability, briefly allowing Desdemona's dying words that her death was caused by 'nobody. I myself,' to stand unchallenged before confessing 'twas I that killed her' (5.2.122-125). He still, however, believes his actions to be warranted for he admits he 'were damned beneath all depths of hell/But that [he] did proceed upon just grounds to this extremity' (5.2.135-137). All of Othello's assertions of justice rely on Desdemona's alleged infidelity and regaining his place as a man. Desdemona, however, was chaste and faithful, and once this is revealed, Othello's foundations for actions are undermined. In the face of this realization, Othello attempts to shift the blame to Iago and, in doing so, calls upon the convention of the devilish instigator, soliciting the 'will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil, why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?' (5.2.298-299). Othello asserts it is Iago who is to blame, but Iago's part in the proceedings is not sufficient to clear Othello of guilt for Desdemona's murder.

Having decided to act, the individuals must then face what they have done, 'for so it commeth to passe, that such as are pricked in conscience for anie secret offense committed have ever an unquiet mind.'<sup>12</sup> In *Arden of Faversham*, Alice turns on Mosby, declaring 'twas thou that made me murder him' (14.275) and professing 'my husband's death torments me at the heart' (Ibid., 279). Conscience was considered one of the instruments God used to bring a murderer to justice, and Michael and Mosby both express a fear that Alice will betray them and 'undo us through her foolishness' (Ibid., 316). That feelings of guilt could lead to confession was evidence of God working on the souls of the wicked, and it followed then that, in their repentance, they would accept their death not for an individual act but for the wicked ways in which they lived their lives<sup>13</sup>. In *Arden of Faversham* Alice asks to 'let my death make amends for all my sins' (18.33), believing that through repentance she will be forgiven. However, she still

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<sup>12</sup> Holinshed, as quoted in Abraham Stoll, "Macbeth's Equivocal Conscience" in *Macbeth: New Critical Essays*, ed. Nick Moschovakis (London: Routledge, 2008), p.133.

<sup>13</sup> John Bellamy, *Strange Inhuman Death: Murder in Tudor England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005), p.35. (The principal murderers of the real-life Arden case all confessed to their sins, so the dramatic treatment of guilt and conscience only strengthened the belief that the wicked will be punished. Bellamy, p.45.)

refuses to take the responsibility onto herself for ‘but for [Mosby] I had never been a strumpet’ (8.14). Othello is never given the opportunity to have conscience work on him, for his crime is never concealed: Emilia interrupts Othello in the act of suffocating Desdemona. Conscience in these plays does not serve as a means of apprehending perpetrators. It does, however, serve as an acknowledgment of one’s own responsibility. Othello, like Alice, imagines a heavenly reunion with Desdemona but anticipates ‘when we shall meet at compt/This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven/And fiends will snatch at it’ (5.2.271-273) Instead of heavenly forgiveness, Othello calls upon hell to ‘blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur/Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!’ (5.2.277-278).

Conscience as an instrument of God was only one of the ways in which God was expected to punish the perpetrators and ensure that ‘murder will out.’<sup>14</sup> The idea that crimes, especially murders, would be discovered and the perpetrators convicted largely rested on a belief in God’s divine judgment.<sup>15</sup> Again and again this language pointing to providence is used in crime literature where ‘is described the...vengeance which God inflicteth on murthers’ and how ‘thus did the Lord unfold this wretched deed’ or how the ‘wonderful works of God might be glorified, and the murders discovered.’<sup>16</sup> One of the most important ways in which this divine providence was illustrated was through the murdered corpse bleeding afresh when in the presence of the murderer. It is in this way that Alice is apprehended in *Arden of Faversham*, for ‘The more I sound his name, the more he bleeds/This blood condemns me, and, in gushing forth/Speaks as it falls and asks me why I did” (16.5-6). In *Othello*, the presence and ‘revival’ of the body is used to quite a different effect. Like Arden’s bleeding corpse, Desdemona’s body revives after her death to comment on her murder but, unlike Arden, the revival is verbal. Instead of accusing her killer, Desdemona provides a false assertion of suicide before dropping into a true death, upending the literary convention to have the victim cry murder and so identify the nature and

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<sup>14</sup> Reed, Jr. 57; Clark, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 203.

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous, *The Murder of the Page*, 59, 63; Anonymous, “The Cruel and Bloody Murder” in *Blood and Knavery: A Collection of English Renaissance Pamphlets and Ballads of Crime and Sin*, ed. Joseph H. Marshburn and Alan R. Velie (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1973), 37.

perpetrator of the crime.<sup>17</sup> Othello is placed in the position of having to take responsibility for himself.

Crime in the sixteenth century, and especially with murder, came with a set of preconceived notions, the most popular of which centered on the sexual deviance of wives. The unfaithful, murdering wife stereotype and the unwed, unchaste murdering mother of the 1500's were still commonly held conceits when Shakespeare wrote *Othello* at the turn of the sixteenth century, as well as a sort of supernatural force being found in the cause and consequences of such crimes. Shakespeare's use of these conventions, however, push the crimes in his play away from examples of societal or supernatural causality and instead begin to show an individual's responsibility for his or her actions. Unlike Alice, Desdemona is a faithful wife, and thus the societal pressure to keep the house in order becomes an invalid argument. In Shakespeare's play we don't see a true devilish influence: we instead locate the motive within the individual. Additionally, the play contains no example of divine intervention in the punishing of the crime though, like in *Arden of Faversham*, the body of the victim results in consequences. By acknowledging and then playing with the commonly held tropes of the time regarding crime, Shakespeare places the responsibility back on the individual.

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<sup>17</sup> Gaskill, 221.

## Falstaff's anguish, our anguish

Dave Paxton

I knew, when I was planning to write this paper, that I wanted to make it 'personal,' in the sense that I wanted to make sure that, whatever I said, it had resonance around my own experiences, and wasn't the sort of dry, factory-line production that many of us dread having to sit through at conferences – those of us, that is, who don't make a strenuous effort to avoid conferences, on the grounds that, in the name of intellectual seriousness, one should engage in acts of academic dissidence (but that's a story for another time). The problem is that one can't write 'personally' on death in the way that one can write personally on, say, falling in love or being bullied, so it becomes a question of writing about other people's deaths, but in a 'personally' engaged way – or something else along those unhelpfully ambiguous lines. I want to write about Falstaff, first because I like the incongruity of considering this life-giving figure in relation to death, second – and more importantly – because I feel that his weird deathliness has strong resonance for our own time and place, though I will only be able to gesture towards that point.

In 5.4 of *I Henry IV*, Falstaff comes out with his great paeon to life: 'To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed' (5.4.114-8).<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom estimates Falstaff in this vein, writing:

Falstaff, to most scholars, is the emblem of self-indulgence, but to most playgoers and readers Sir John is the representative of imaginative freedom, of a liberty set against time, death, and the state... Add a fourth freedom to timelessness, the blessing of more life, and the evasion of the state, and call it freedom from censoriousness, from the superego, from guilt.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *I Henry IV*, ed. David Bevington (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). All references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), p.288.

Academics take great pleasure in publically disagreeing with Bloom, for one bad reason or another, but what's interesting is that those critics who dislike Falstaff – Germaine Greer thinks that he's 'a familiar kind of parasite who [preys] upon the common people in [a] risible fashion'<sup>3</sup> – express their dislike, in a certain sense, on Bloom's terms: they direct their attention and condemnation towards Falstaff's *life*. Thus a weird sort-of critical dialectic arises, wherein one sort of critic eulogizes Falstaff's life-affirming vitality, while the other sort of critic condemns that vitality because it expresses itself in criminality (or at least acts that are claimed to be criminal by the war-state, no doubt for reasons that would be worth investigating). In both cases, critical attention is focused away from Falstaff's relation to death and onto his *life-which-is-opposed-to-death*; if death is mentioned positively at all, it is in relation to Falstaff's actual death in *Henry V*.

But Falstaff is obsessed with death from the first time that we meet him. The obsession manifests in various ways: it can be traced in the minutiae of Falstaff's language, in the texture of his metaphors, in the rhetorical flourishes that he employs, in the trains of thought that break out of him, and in the responses that other characters' references to death drawn from him. The one thing often leads to the other. In 1.2, Hal's passing reference to 'the ridge of the gallows' (1.2.6-7) plays upon Falstaff's mind for almost twenty lines, while the conversation veers erratically elsewhere, before Falstaff urgently returns to the issue: 'I prithee, sweet wag, shall there be gallows standing in England when thou art king?' (Ibid., 55-7); again: 'Do not thou when thou art king hang a thief' (Ibid., 58-9). The image of being hanged continues to obsess Falstaff: it first infects his rhetoric, then comes to *constitute* it. Falstaff enters the scene in 2.2 screaming: 'Poins! Poins, and be hanged!' (2.2.4) Again: 'I doubt not but to die a fair death, for all this – if I scape hanging for killing that rogue' (Ibid., 13-4). Again: 'If the rascal have not given me medicines to make me love him, I'll be hanged' (Ibid., 17-8). Again: 'give me my horse, and be hanged!' (Ibid., 28) Again, to Hal: 'Hang thyself in thine our heir-apparent garters!' (Ibid., 41) A moment later, Gadshill, faced with the prospect of money, cries: 'There's enough to make us all,' and Falstaff's dark, disturbed response comes straight back: 'To be

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<sup>3</sup> Germaine Greer, *A Very Short Introduction to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.80.

hanged' (Ibid., 54-5). Falstaff can't get this image and prospect out of his head: it doesn't tend to, apart from in the last example I gave, rise into the logic of his speech, but it swills around the rhetorical forms that bolster that speech; the discursive excess points to the excess in Falstaff's psyche. And the hanging-references – 'There lives not three good men unchanged in England, and one of them is fat and grows old' (2.4.4-6) – alternate with equally crazed references to, among other things, plague: 'A plague upon you both!' (2.2.19-20); 'A plague upon't when thieves cannot be true one to another!' (Ibid., 25-6); 'A plague upon you all!' (Ibid., 27); 'What a plague mean ye to colt me thus?' (Ibid., 4-5); and, finally, those incessant, glorious ejaculations in 2.4: 'A plague of all cowards' (2.4.110).

Falstaff enacts his own death twice in *I Henry IV*, once in his imagination, once actually on the battlefield. The first, fantastical enactment comes in 2.4, after the robbery. Poins has predicted that Falstaff will claim 'how thirty at least he fought with, what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured' (1.2.5-7), but what Falstaff actually comes out with exhilaratingly overflows the boundaries of Poins's prediction, and moves us onto the territory of the masochistic: 'I am a rogue, if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have scaped by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose, my buckler cut through and through, my sword hacked like a handsaw – *ecce signum!*' (2.4.58-62) Falstaff's fantasy of being 'thrust through' is a fantasy of his body and self-hood being violently ruptured; the fat man imagines himself skewered and held aloft by an army of swords. Only a disruption of natural process, a 'miracle,' provides escape from this predicament, but the escape is into another extraordinary fantasy, a fantasy in which the power-dynamics swap around, and Falstaff re-asserts his self-integrity by adopting the position of attacker (but is he also implicitly still the victim as well?). The fantasy grows imposingly – 'I have peppered two of them' (2.4.184-5), 'Four rogues in buckram let drive at me' (Ibid., 188-9), 'I... took all their seven points in my target' (Ibid., 194-5; note Falstaff's increasing passivity in the fantasy). The bounds of Falstaff's self-hood are conquered again, but this time by excessive energies spilling *out* of them, flowing into newly envisaged forms of identity: Falstaff is now 'Hercules,' he is a 'lion' (Ibid., 261,5).

It is unsurprising, given that Falstaff's mental *trying out* of death leads him into these amazing visions that, when he actually fakes his death in 5.4, and receives such a pathetic response from Hal – 'Embowelled will I see thee by and by' (5.4.108) – he is outraged: 'Embowelled! If thou embowel me today, I'll give you leave to powder me and eat me too tomorrow' (Ibid., 110-1). Falstaff's movement from 'the true and perfect image of life indeed' to 'powder' is also the movement of Alexander, as imagined by Hamlet: 'To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till a find it stopping a bung-hole?' (5.1.198-200).<sup>4</sup> None of this means that Bloom's image of a Falstaff who has 'the blessing of more life' does not lock onto, anchor itself in, something in the play. Falstaff's is clearly an attempted ethics of *life*, of hedonism, self-expansion and self-fulfilment, which gloriously sets itself up in opposition to counterfeiting death. But the attempt to outrun death does not result in the absence of death from Falstaff's psyche and discourse: it results in its recurring, disturbing *presence*. The hedonism leads directly into the deathliness; the attempt at 'more life' increases and intensifies the dehumanization, the existential terror, and it also leaves Falstaff unable to articulate it, unable to allow it into his discourse, to think it through, to deal with it. The fear consequently morphs into a violent obsession. The result is a weird sort-of schizophrenic dislocation: Falstaff's glowing self-contours keep cracking open, revealing Yorick's skull lying beneath, grinning and grimacing. The deathliness is indeed so strong that it creates waves of energy which flow around the play and buffet the other characters:

GADSHILL: Sirrah, if they meet not with Saint Nicholas' clerks, I'll give thee this neck.

CHAMBERLAIN: No, I'll none of it. I pray thee keep that for the hangman, for I know thou worshippest Saint Nicholas as truly as a man of falsehood may.

GADSHILL: What talkest thou to me of the hangman? If I hang, I'll make a fat pair of gallows; for if I hang, old Sir John hangs with me, and thou knowest he's no starveling. (2.1.59-67)

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<sup>4</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

This is the point in my paper where I become dangerously irresponsible, the point at which I give up literary criticism and begin egoistically projecting my personal concerns onto the text. What I actually want to do is consider – amateurishly, speculatively... of course! – why critics and audiences of our culture so often idealize Falstaff, responding to his glowing *livingness* but not apparently noticing his death-obsession, his anguished existential predicament, even though it couldn't be more glaringly obvious. My suspicion is that we misunderstand Falstaff because he is too close to us – to our society and to our-selves. One doesn't need a lot of critical insight to realize that our society and culture is hedonistic, either blatantly or subtly, in a thousand different ways. Almost everywhere that one looks, one finds operating a logic and ethics of self-realization, self-expansion, pleasure-seeking, positivity, optimism in the future. One finds this ethics in the forms of the Culture Industry, in advertising, in prevalent political ideologies (for example in neo-liberalism, but also, in a different way, in things like the logic of the Occupy movement), in our modern discourse of sexual fulfilment (think about the logic that drives every gay 'coming out' film), in the discourse of new-atheism and the War on Terror, in self-help books, even in the logic that runs through a lot of academic work (the same logic that has congested universities, as Leavis put it, 'with telly- and pin-table-addicted non-students'<sup>5</sup>). There is everywhere for us, as Slavoj Zizek states it, 'an injunction to enjoy,'<sup>6</sup> an injunction to succeed, an injunction to realize one's true self, one's potential, one's dreams. And of course this sort of ideological network is produced by a late capitalist society which, at bottom, is alienating and oppressing, which pulls people apart and stunts them in an unprecedentedly violent way: the two things come together, the former as an ironic result of, and ideological mystification of, the latter.

Our situation is beautifully captured by Erich Heller, in his book on Nietzsche (he is talking about the future in capitalism):

For men will become enemies, and each his own enemy. From now onward they will hate... however many comforts they will lavish upon themselves, and hate themselves with a new hatred,

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<sup>5</sup> F.R. Leavis, *The Living Principle* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1998), p.10.

<sup>6</sup> Slavoj Zizek, "zizek on living healthy", online video, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjk\\_EAa80QQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjk_EAa80QQ)



unconsciously at work in the depths of their souls. True, there will be ever better reformers of society, ever better socialists, and ever better hospitals, and an ever increasing intolerance of pain and poverty and suffering and death, and an ever more fanatical craving for the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers. Yet the deepest impulse informing this striving will not be love and will not be compassion. Its true source will be the panic-struck determination not to have to ask the question “What is the meaning of our lives?”<sup>7</sup>

I also think of this great passage from Mark Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism* (Fisher is talking about his experience as a teacher):

Many of the teenage students I encountered seemed to be in a state of what I would call depressive hedonia. Depression is usually characterized as a state of anhedonia, but the condition I'm referring to is constituted not by an inability to get pleasure so much as by an inability to do anything else *except* pursue pleasure. There is a sense that 'something is missing' - but no appreciation that this mysterious, missing enjoyment can only be accessed beyond the pleasure principle.<sup>8</sup>

The first passage describes a social hedonism, the second passage a psychological hedonism... and in both cases there is something tangibly wretched about it: there is the inescapable sense that beneath the laughter and beneath the positivity, there is something hollow, hateful, terrified, deathly.

It’s in this context that I respond to Falstaff. I think that we (those of us who do) respond so positively to Falstaff because he reflects back to us our own terribly strained, wretched condition. We see in him the glowing, glittering surfaces and ideologies of our own time and place, but we also see in him our existential anguish, our inarticulable, impossible obsession with, and hatred of, our mortality... we see in him our dehumanization. And, inevitably, we also misunderstand Falstaff for precisely the same reason – he is too close to us so, in order to enjoy him, we have to whitewash him, idealize him as the lord of laughter and ‘the representative of imaginative freedom,’ the ray of sunlight that bursts out of the dull grey stretches of the

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<sup>7</sup> Erich Heller, *The Importance of Nietzsche* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.5.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Hants: O Books, 2009), pp.21-2.

History plays; and, of course, by doing this we also implicitly idealize ourselves. Caliban sees his own face in the glass, but he sees it badly... and for good reason.

**'Legs and arms and heads chopped off in battle': the dead and damaged body and just war in *Henry V***

Anne Kosseff

As *Henry V* draws toward the climactic battle of Agincourt, King Henry's incognito conversation with three of his encamped soldiers offers a moment of explicit connection between war's destruction of the body and the morality of warfare. This episode is notable as one that seems to have no precedent in the play's direct source material (Taylor 40), therefore we can assume that the philosophical and spiritual conversation here is included for thematic, rather than strictly historical, reasons. When the conversation turns to the justness of England's cause for going to war with France, the soldier named Michael Williams (Called only '2 Soldier' in the First Quarto) makes the following statement about the king's responsibilities toward the subjects who fight for him:

But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make when all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in battle shall join together at the latter day and cry all 'We died at such a place', some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afraid there are few die well that die in a battle, for how can they charitably dispose of anything when blood is their argument? Now if these men do not die well it will be a black matter for the King, that led them to it, who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection. (4.1.134-46)

Williams's speech, dominated by the image of the body parts joining together to condemn King Henry, is worth close attention for the ways in which it explicitly addresses the injuring of bodies that Elaine Scarry describes as the central action of war. By foregrounding the injured bodies and by creating a gruesomely fantastical image out of their physical components, Williams employs a language that destabilizes the heroic and political images of war articulated by the Chorus and embraced by King Henry. The speech, and King Henry's response to it, also crystallizes the play's themes about the relationship between the realities of war and the discourses that obscure them.

The most striking element of Williams's passionate speech is the image of severed limbs coming together to create a Frankenstein's monster-like creature. (Although it is possible to interpret 'join together' in the more abstract sense of speaking as one, the pointedly physical imagery of this speech gives 'join together' a richly physical sense as well.) Into the midst of the theological discussion about just war, Williams forcefully introduces the physical realities of war. The audience is invited to move with Williams from the realm of abstract ideas that do not encourage mental pictures (e.g., the cause being just, the king having much to answer for) into the physical—and visually suggestive—reality of 'legs and arms and heads chopped off in battle.' The literal physical outcome of war is again highlighted by Williams's use of 'blood' as metonymy for 'violence' in line 143. The physical core of Williams's argument is evident in the fact that Williams describes the corporeal, embodied aftermath of the battle crying out against the king rather than the more conventional concept of departed souls doing so.

Williams's emphasis on gore—severed body parts and blood—speaks to Elaine Scarry's contention that the purpose of war 'is to alter (to burn, to blast, to shell, to cut) human tissue' (64). According to Scarry, in war as well as in torture, language is often complicit in masking the physical realities of the activity: 'In each, the incontestable reality of the body—the body in pain, the body maimed, the body dead and hard to dispose of—is separated from its source and conferred on an ideology or issue or instance of political authority impatient of, or deserted by, benign sources of substantiation' (62). By *embodying* the generalities of the discussion, by showing the true injuring to which the abstractions refer, Williams is going a considerable way toward making visible that 'incontestable reality of the body' at war. And by making those realities central to his ethical argument about war, Williams's language interrupts—or at least exposes—the process through which the king deflects attention from the physical destruction of bodies toward external constructs like the righteousness and heroism of war.

Williams's animated body parts participate in a pattern of reality and fantasy joining together in the discourse of war. In fact, the action Williams

describes—the parts of dismembered corpses joining together to create an uncanny whole—is representative of the process through which Hotspur, Canterbury, the French King, and many other Shakespearean characters imagine war’s physical realities transforming into something fantastical and gruesome. In the case of Williams’s imagining, the limbs “chopped off in battle” join to create a figure that arrests the audience’s attention; the strange image of a body that might have all the parts of a real, living human body, but is cobbled together out of dead flesh, horrifies. The ‘legs and arms’ that speak out in judgment alongside the heads add to the grotesqueness of the picture, recalling the image of wounds serving as mouths that Hotspur invokes in his defence of Mortimer in *Henry IV, Part 1* (1.3.94-97). But where Hotspur imagines Mortimer’s wounds speaking of his loyalty to Henry IV, Williams’s imagined wounds speak of nothing except the devastation that war causes.

The monster created of all of this destroyed flesh embodies war’s physical destruction, and gives voice to the other human costs of war that necessarily derive from the physical ones. The body parts swearing and crying out in physical pain force us to take notice, because ‘the visible and experienceable alteration of injury has a *compelling* and *vivid* reality because it resides in the human body, the original site of reality’ (Scarry 121, emphasis original). But those body parts are joined by others crying out ‘upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left.’ The suffering of physical pain is connected with the lamenting over the broken familial and economic bonds that result from war’s destruction of flesh. Williams’s short speech links the various forms of loss that war creates—the most basic physical losses of life and limb and the ruptures in the social building blocks of civilization that those physical losses bring.

Yet Williams describes loss in terms that are oddly creative. Out of loss, usually depicted as a vacuum where something has been, Williams creates a physical *something*. In a similar context, that of Hamlet’s cannibalistic vision of a king being eaten by worms which are eaten by fish which are eaten by beggars, François Laroque refers to Hamlet’s ‘power to visualize which cuts through discursive logic and places explosive

oppositions side by side' (31). Such a description serves equally well to depict Williams's manner of discourse. After all, Williams's ability to physicalise the discussion of just war 'cuts through' King Henry's discursive logic in order to oppose the loss and creation inherent in the figure of the 'joined together' body.

In its creative construct, Williams's picture of the cobbled-together body speaking out on Judgment Day offers an awful inverse of the famous image—also strangely dismembered—of the ferocious soldier that Henry paints before the gates of Harfleur. Henry instructs the soldiers on how to comport their sinews, blood, eye, brow, teeth, nostril, and breath, in order to make themselves into fearsome living soldiers (3.1.1-17). Although purportedly spoken in the midst of battle, as indicated by its opening imprecation to go into the breach 'once more,' Henry's speech creates a fearsome ideal of how a soldier should bear himself as he *enters* battle. The soldier Williams constructs one act later is made up of flesh that has already been through the realities of war. His dismembered and reassembled body, though more overtly fantastical, is made up of parts that are more firmly tied to the realities of war than Henry's aspirational soldier imitating 'the action of the tiger' (3.1.6).

Williams's figure is conditional—the animated body parts will only speak out against King Henry 'if the cause be not good,' suggesting that the body parts and their 'joined together' amalgamation could be used to confer authority on a war incited for a just cause. However, Williams's very act of placing the physical reminders of battlefield agonies at the centre of a debate about the justice of war alters the terms of the conversation. According to Scarry, 'The failure to express pain...will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power; conversely, the successful expression of pain will always work to expose and make impossible that appropriation and conflation' (14).

As Williams's speech moves beyond the figure of the animated body parts, he edges toward the suggestion that the king will have much to answer for regardless of the justness of the cause for which he sends his subjects to die. Williams's argument against unjust war shows signs of generalizing

when he describes the ‘bad deaths’ that necessarily occur in war: ‘I am afraid there are few die well that die in a battle, for how can they charitably dispose of anything when blood is their argument?’ Blood is the argument on both sides in any war; soldiers who die in battle will inevitably die in the midst of committing or attempting to commit violent acts. Henry himself has attested to the dark power that ‘impious war’ can have on the souls of soldiers in his threatening speech before the gates of Harfleur (3.3.16). According to Ros King, ‘Williams has actually begun tentatively to advance the argument that if the damage to innocents is immoral, and since war cannot avoid causing such damage, it should be avoided’ (23). Following Williams’s invocation of body parts ‘chopped off in battle,’ it is easy to initially hear his scepticism that anyone dies well in battle as another reference to the physical agonies associated with battlefield deaths; after all, it is also true that few die comfortably who die in battle. This ghost of meaning, which might linger even after the auditor has assimilated the spiritual meaning of Williams’s ‘die well,’ links the corporeal arguments of the first part of Williams’s speech with the spiritual arguments of its conclusion.

King Henry, however, firmly grasps onto Williams’ spiritual meaning, and it is to this section of Williams’s argument that he crafts a response. Many commentators have addressed the logic and justice of Henry’s response to Williams (Taylor 39-40; Greenblatt 61-2; King 23). I am inclined to agree to with Greenblatt, who characterizes Henry’s response as ‘a string of awkward “explanations” that are “mutually contradictory [and] cast long shadows on the king himself’ (61). However it is worthwhile in this instance to focus on the rhetorical register in which he gives his response, rather than the adequacy of his logic. Part of the power of Williams’s argument comes from its privileging of the physical realities of war over the external ideologies or institutions that those realities are used to substantiate. The sense that Henry sidesteps the important issues in the discussion comes partly from his failure to engage Williams in the same language of war’s physical and social losses. In the language he uses when arguing that his role in sending soldiers to war is not a morally fraught one, Henry cleanses the blood and gore out of the depiction of the deaths in question. The first indication of this tendency is his euphemistic use of ‘miscarry’ to describe

death in the first sentence of his response. He remains in the same philosophical and spiritual register throughout the long speech that follows (4.1.146-84).

The rhetorical difference at play in this interaction is neatly encapsulated in the Chorus's words about the anticipation of war at the beginning of the second act: 'For now sits expectation in the air / And hides the sword from hilts unto the point / With crowns imperial, crowns and coronets, / Promised to Harry and his followers' (2.0.9-11). The sword—the instrument that works to destroy human flesh at the centre of war's characteristic activity—becomes fully obscured by the signs of empire and political power (and, as Taylor suggests with the secondary meaning of 'crowns' as 'coins,' perhaps also economic power [118]). This image, which resembles a heraldic device of Edward III (Gurr 90), describes the relationship that Scarry argues is central to the functioning of war: 'the essential structure of war, its juxtaposition of the extreme facts of body and voice, resides in the *relation* between its own largest parts, the relation between the collective casualties that occur *within* war, and the verbal issues (freedom, national sovereignty, the right to a disputed ground, the extra-territorial authority of a particular ideology) that stand *outside* war' (63, emphasis original). The Chorus's metaphor represents this process on multiple levels as even the injuring and the external issues that mask it are represented by symbols (the sword and the crowns). While describing the phenomenon of war's realities being obscured, Shakespeare demonstrates just how difficult it is to represent those realities verbally.

Though he shies away from physically graphic language when conversing with Williams, King Henry does use graphic discourse about war at various moments throughout the play. During his first appearance in the play, he offers an admonition to the Archbishop of Canterbury to provide honest counsel about war with France that foreshadows Williams's speech:

For God doth know how many now in health  
Shall drop their blood in approbation  
Of what your reverence shall incite us to....  
For never two such kingdoms did contend  
Without much fall of blood, whose guiltless drops



Are every one a woe, a sore complaint  
'Gainst him whose wrongs gives edge unto the swords  
That makes such waste in brief mortality (1.2.18-29).

Like Williams, Henry imagines the physical outcome of battle crying out to God against the injustice of wrongfully waged war. The king shows that he has the ability to imagine and speak in the concrete language of war's realities. Unlike Williams, however, Henry's association between physical devastation and injustice does not waver from its conditionality. The blood will only speak out against someone whose 'wrongs' incite battle. Henry firmly maintains the possibility that the archbishop might offer a just cause for the invasion of France that will leave both himself and his counsellors guiltless of blood.

As the play progresses, Henry uses physical language, and the injured bodies it describes, for baldly partisan purposes, explicitly appropriating the significance attached to damaged bodies to score points against his politico-military opponents. Two scenes after his conversation with Williams, Henry discusses with Montjoy an after-life for his soldiers quite different from the one Williams has warned of. Instead of collaborating in the prosecution of Henry's soul on Judgment Day, the fleshy remains in Henry's speech join together as partisans to the English side, infecting the French with their rottenness. Far from crying out against Henry for leading them into morally ambiguous battle, these corpses continue their fight against France beyond death, 'Leaving their earthly parts to choke your clime / The smell whereof shall breed a plague in France' (4.3.98-103). Williams's far more ambivalent—and less partisan—invocation of war's human destruction resonates throughout the discourse of war in *Henry V*.

**‘Sorrow flouted at is double death’: death and violence in *Titus Andronicus***

Sujaan Mukherjee

Wilson Knight described *Macbeth* as ‘Shakespeare's most profound and mature vision of evil,’<sup>1</sup> and there is a general critical consensus on this issue. I would like to argue that, while *Macbeth* may be his most ‘profound and mature vision of evil,’ *Titus Andronicus* is his most comprehensive vision of evil and of violence. *Titus Andronicus* is a play much maligned by critics, for example Samuel Johnson, J. Dover Wilson, T.S. Eliot and others. Johnson’s remarks epitomize early critical opinion: ‘The barbarity of the spectacles, and the general massacre, which are here exhibited, can scarcely be conceived tolerable to any audience...That Shakespeare wrote any part...I see no reason for believing.’<sup>2</sup> Recent criticism, however, has generally seen the play in a more favourable light and has done much to reestablish its popularity. Even so, a degree of discomfort with the ‘shocking violence’<sup>3</sup> in the play is evident in recent writings on *Titus Andronicus*; and very few of the essays I have been able to read confront the problem of violence directly. In this paper I will try to offer a reading of the twin strands of death and violence and their interplay, which for me is the most significant theme running through *Titus Andronicus*.

Philip Henslowe’s diary ‘lists several tombs in his inventory of properties,’ and according to Eugene M. Waith the play opens to a scene of the Capitoline Hill, with the tomb of the Andronici ‘set up in the middle of the back wall of the stage’ (Ibid., 83) Even before the first words are spoken the theme of the play would have been established for the spectators. The first appearance of Titus is on a chariot, to the sound of drums and trumpets, bringing victory to Rome. He also brings with him ‘a coffin covered in black’ (Ibid., 87) which contains the dead body of his son, slain in the battle with the Goths. He is to be laid by his brethren, the valiant dead of the Andronici. We find in Titus an articulation of the pride associated in ancient

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), p.160.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Murphy, *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, volume II (New York: George Dearborn, 1837), p.489.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene M. Waith (ed.), *The Oxford Shakespeare: Titus Andronicus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.65. Subsequent references are to this edition.

Roman thought with death on the battlefield. Catherine Edwards invokes Polybius's description of the Roman funeral rites for a fallen aristocrat: 'The funeral procession included not only the body of the deceased and the mourners, but also other family members wearing masks (and appropriate clothing), each impersonating a distinguished ancestor of the man who had died.'<sup>4</sup> To die in battle quite literally assures one a happy after-life. For Titus the tomb is a 'sacred receptacle' of his joys, 'sweet cell of virtue and nobility' (1.1.92-93). Disturbingly, the tomb almost serves the purpose of Titus's own trophy room, a place where his contribution to his state is measured out in sacrificed sons. (Titus will at first deny a place in the tomb to Mutius, whom he kills for disobedience.) But for the son's soul to find rest, Titus must sacrifice the eldest son of the captured Goth Queen, Tamora. This act initiates a cycle of violence, which I argue does not conclude even with the ending of play.

It is at this point that we may profitably turn our attention to the 'Peacham drawing,'<sup>5</sup> which shows Tamora (along with two of her sons, Chiron and Demetrius) begging for the life of her first born, Alarbus. The reason for drawing attention to this sketch is to note the posture Tamora has assumed. This is a posture that recurs in the play several times and, in four of these cases, it signals significant turns in the dramatic action. It is assumed for the second time in the play by Marcus Andronicus, Lucius and Quintus, who beg Titus to allow burial to Mutius; the third time by Lavinia, shortly before she is to be violated; and finally by Titus when he is pleading for the release of his falsely accused sons. I was unable to access the article "The Pleas in *Titus Andronicus*" by Judith Carr, which seems to have dealt with the posture of supplication in detail. Still, for the purpose of the present paper, I would like to note after F.S. Naiden (*Ancient Supplication*) and Walter Burkert (*Homo Necans*), that this posture probably has its roots in not merely social behaviour but in biology. Three (that of Titus, Lucius/Quintus/Marcus, and Tamora) of the four instances that I have chosen reflect pleas for the lives of others. Lavinia's plea is remarkable because after completing steps 1 and 2 of the act of supplication as described by F.S. Naiden<sup>6</sup>, she does not beg for her life, but in a complete reversal of the trope,

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<sup>4</sup> Catherine Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (Yale University Press, 2007), p.19.

<sup>5</sup> This can be found at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peacham\\_Drawing.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peacham_Drawing.jpg).

begs for her death. The point I am trying to make is that if indeed, as Burkert argues, the posture of supplication has come to signify a plea for life throughout human history, the violence which Shakespeare sees in the world of *Titus Andronicus* perverts this ultimate and apparently universal gesture of pleading for one's life into a gesture of begging for one's death in this world. For Burkert, of course, the very presence of this posture in art signifies an inherent human tendency towards killing one another.

The violence in *Titus Andronicus* is pervasive and excessive. Like Macbeth, Titus can primarily express himself through the language of the battlefield. He is employed by the state for defining its own frontiers. After Titus fails to stop Bassianus from claiming Lavinia, Saturninus rejects him, saying: 'No, Titus, no, the Emperor needs her not;/Nor her, nor thee, nor any of thy stock. (1.1.299-300). Saturninus unwisely creates within his realm a source of violence independent of the state. As Walter Benjamin says, 'violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law.'<sup>7</sup> As such, he is to be targeted both by the state and by Tamora, who holds personal grievances against him. The first step that Tamora takes after coming into power is to reclaim Titus by her false act of forgiveness. But as we are well aware this is simply a ploy to control the source of possible threat. It is this double nature of the grudge against Titus that gives rise to the excesses in violence that I have mentioned. On the one hand the state metes out what Benjamin calls 'law-preserving violence,' and, on the other, at a personal level it inflicts injuries that are in excess of this. Benjamin writes: 'all violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving.' He says, 'If it lays claim to neither of these predicates, it forfeits validity' (Ibid., 287). The law in *Titus Andronicus* does not quite forfeit validity. What we as the audience/reader see as violence perpetrated by the state, is unknown to almost all the *dramatis personae*. Indeed, the excess is meted out only by private persons in some way related to the state.

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<sup>6</sup> F.S. Naide, *Ancient Supplication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.4.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence", in *Selected Writings, Volume I* (Belknap: Harvard, 199), p.281.

Going by the evidence available to the decision-making *dramatis personae*, it is impossible to argue against the condemnation of Martius and Quintus. That they are killed, however unjustly, falls in the realm of law-preserving violence. Presumably the idea of sending the severed heads to Titus is not openly discussed with the Judges, Senators and Tribunes. Before this, we have the complete mutilation and violation of Lavinia by Chiron and Demetrius. Tamora seeks exact revenge:

Give me the poniard. You shall know, my boys,  
Your mother's hand shall right your mother's wrong. (2.3.120-1)

Her sons dissuade her and she hands over Lavinia's fate to them:  
Therefore away with her, and use her as you will;  
The worse to her, the better loved of me. (2.3.166-7)

She wants Lavinia rendered harmless. But this does not happen. One could argue that in Lavinia's rape and mutilation, what we see is not the killing, but only the excess.

In *Philosophy in the Bedroom* the Marquis de Sade speaks of cruelty as the third sort of preference when people resort to libertinage: 'cruelty...very far from being a vice, is the first sentiment Nature injects in us all. The infant breaks his toy.'<sup>8</sup> (In the opening sequence of Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) the boy is engaged in destructive 'free play,' where he indulges in this breaking and destruction of his toys). For Sade, 'cruelty is simply the energy in a man civilization has not yet altogether corrupted.'<sup>9</sup> Of course, reading Shakespeare in the light of Sade is anachronistic, but is Shakespeare's treatment of the violence on Lavinia very different from the Sadean idea? There seems to be a profoundly disturbing element of *jouissance* in the acts of Chiron and Demetrius. In the case of Martius and Quintus, while death is meted out by the state, the excess of cruelty is achieved by the display of

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<sup>8</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, trans. Richard Seaver and Austyn Wainhouse, digitized and typeset at Superverv 32C Inc. 55. URL: [http://easywaytowrite.com/philosophy\\_in\\_the\\_bedroom.pdf](http://easywaytowrite.com/philosophy_in_the_bedroom.pdf), accessed on 17 May 2012, at 16.30 hours.

<sup>9</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, trans. Richard Seaver and Austyn Wainhouse, digitized and typeset at Superverv 32C Inc. 56. URL: [http://easywaytowrite.com/philosophy\\_in\\_the\\_bedroom.pdf](http://easywaytowrite.com/philosophy_in_the_bedroom.pdf), accessed on 17 May 2012, at 16.30 hours.

their severed heads to Titus. Titus sacrifices his right hand because he is promised that this will save the lives of his sons. Charles H. Frey writes:

Many feel uncomfortable with this drama of rape, mutilation, and murder not because it is so violent but because the action and language produce, in our time, uneasy laughter... I do not think one can make the play more palatable, however, by imagining Elizabethan taste to be wildly different from taste today.<sup>10</sup>

The ‘uneasy laughter’ has bothered audiences/readers and critics alike. Yet I do not think that the play is less palatable because of that. This is precisely the reaction that Shakespeare expects of us. He is well aware of the fact that the play is unsettling and that human beings are ill equipped to react to violence of this order. Titus has killed a son trying to defend a state that has abandoned him; his daughter has been raped and mutilated; the severed heads of his sons, accused of murdering the ruler’s brother, are brought to him on a tray along with his own severed hand. Titus is unable to believe what he sees: ‘When will this fearful slumber end?’ (3.1.251) When Marcus shatters his illusion, Titus can merely laugh: ‘Ha, ha, ha!’ (Ibid., 263). This for me is the moment when one cycle of violence ends. Like the ‘knocking at the gates’<sup>11</sup> we are given a moment of relief. This is our ‘uneasy laughter’. Shakespeare has anticipated it and subsumed it within the aesthetics of his play. (It is absent from both of his primary sources, “The Prose History of Titus Andronicus” and “The Ballad of Titus Andronicus”.)

The series of killings continues after this brief release from the intensity of the action. Apart from the censoring, so to speak, of the nurse and other attendants by Aaron, the killings in the latter half of the play are all performed by Titus. Titus’s killings have an uneasy air of ceremony about them. He plays along with the show put up by Tamora, Chiron and Demetrius, ties up the two brothers and tells them in gory detail the fate they are about to meet.

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<sup>10</sup> Charles H. Frey, “Man’s Rage/Woman’s Grief: Engaging Death in Evelyn Gajowski, ed., *Titus Andronicus*,” in *Re-Visions of Shakespeare: Essays in Honour of Robert Ornstein* (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp., 2004), p.67.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas De Quincey, ‘On the Knocking at the Gate’.  
<http://www.ellopos.net/notebook/quincey.htm>.

You know your mother means to feast with me,  
And calls herself Revenge, and thinks me mad.  
Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,  
And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,  
And of the paste a coffin I will rear,  
And make two pasties of your shameful heads,  
And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam,  
Like to the earth swallow her own increase. (5.2.184-191)

In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Seminar VII*, Jacques Lacan discusses Sade's *Juliette*. He quotes from Sade:

The existence of murderers is as necessary as plagues; without both of them everything in the universe would be upset...such dissolution serves nature's purposes, since it recomposes that which is destroyed...The service of nature requires far more total destructions...destructions much more complete than those we are able to accomplish. Nature wants atrocities and magnitude in crimes; the more our destructions are of this type, the more they will be agreeable to it. To be of even greater service to nature, one should seek to prevent the regeneration of the body that we bury. Murder only takes the first life of the individual whom we strike down; we should also seek to take his second life, if we are to be even more useful to nature.<sup>12</sup>

From here, Lacan goes on to analyze Sophocles' *Antigone* in the light of the idea of 'double death.' He says that Creon 'seeks to break through a barrier in striking at his enemy Polynices beyond limits within which he has the right to strike him. He, in fact, wants to inflict on him that second death that he has no right to inflict on him' (Ibid., 254). The same, Lacan argues, applies to Hamlet's refusal to kill Claudius when he catches his uncle off-guard, praying. While in Lavinia's case there was just the 'excess,' Titus indulges both in the killing and in the excess; even if he does not exactly ensure 'double death,' he certainly evinces the 'atrocities and magnitude in crimes' that Sade demands.

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 210-211.

It is Lucius who goes a step further than his father. After he has heard the crazed boastings of a captured Aaron, he says: 'Bring down the devil, for he must not die/So sweet a death as hanging presently' (5.1.145-6). Lucius has a far more painful death planned for Aaron. The framework of Christian salvation or damnation is absent in *Titus Andronicus*, and so the deferring does not take the same language as that of Hamlet. But somewhat like Creon, Lucius condemns Aaron to death by half-burial. Once again, the act of killing itself is not directly performed by Lucius. He commands only the excess. The killing is an obvious by-product. It may be recalled that Titus had advised Lavinia to kill herself after her rape and mutilation. It seems at the end of the play that her death was only a deferral made in order to allow a settling of scores.

*Titus Andronicus*, probably more than any other Shakespearean play, concerns itself with the ideas of the after-life. The cycle begins in an attempt to ensure the happy after life of a person and ends the notion of the 'double death' of its characters. The crimes that occur during the course of the play do not always directly achieve the primary death of persons. Rather, I would argue, the crimes focus more on the element of excess, sometimes tending towards assuring a 'double death.' For Lacan, the ultimate end of the Sadean idea of violence is 'creationism'. Lacan writes that Nature's 'own laws are chains. What one has to sweep aside in order to force nature to start again from zero, so to speak, is the reproduction of forms against which nature's both harmonious and contradictory possibilities are stifled in an impasse of conflicting forces. That is the aim of Sadean crime.'<sup>13</sup> I think it may be safe to conclude, anachronistically, that *Titus Andronicus* is a 'Sadean' play. In the end Lucius says: 'May I govern so,/To heal Rome's harms and wipe away her woe!' (5.3.146-7). The promise is not kept. What may still elicit an 'uneasy laughter' is the fact that the attempted 'double death' of Aaron, and his being survived by the son he had with Tamora, may imply that the cycle of violence does not in fact come to an end.

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<sup>13</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 260.



## Christopher Marlowe and death

Joy Leslie Gibson

Webster, as T.S. Eliot wrote, was much ‘possessed by death’<sup>1</sup> and so, it could be argued, was Christopher Marlowe.<sup>2</sup> Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* falls into a cauldron; Tamburlaine dies of sheer exhaustion; Edward the Second dies by being executed with a red-hot poker, a death disputed by Ian Mortimer in his biography of Edward the Third, *The Perfect King*; and Faustus descends into Hell. Where came this interest? From inheritance.

The plays of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were of two kinds. The first kind were those based on Bible stories from the Old Testament, or taken from the New Testament, depicting the life of Christ. Towns such as Coventry and York had their own cycle of plays which they presented yearly. These plays were in the vernacular and were often earthy and full of humour. The characters were acutely observed and presented.

The other kind were Morality Plays, such as the *Paternoster Play*, performed at York, which is referred to in Wycliffe’s *De Officio Pastoralis*. Four of these plays have survived: *Wisdom*, *Mankind*, *The Castle of Perseverance*, and *Everyman*. John Gassner writing of these plays says:

The morality plays reflected the important cultural interests of a period extending from the middle of the fourteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century. They were *moralistic... humanistic... and... politico-religious* when Britain entered upon a period of conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>3</sup>

The dramatic form of these plays is spiritual journey, during the course of which the protagonist meets a number of allegorical figures such as Lust, Greed, Pride and the rest of the Deadly Sins. He can also encounter god as in characters named Good Deeds, Mercy, Charity and Confession... but never Forgiveness.

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<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, ed. Romany and Lindsey (London: Penguin, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> John Gasner, *Medieval and Tudor Drama* (Bantam Books: New York, 1963)

A.C. Cawley in his “Introduction” to *Everyman and Medieval Plays* writes:

Thus *Everyman* is distinguished from *Mankind* by its consistent seriousness from *Wisdom* by its lack of interest in the contemporary scene, and from *The Castle of Perseverance* by the economy of its language and construction.<sup>4</sup>

In *The Castle of Perseverance* Mankind is given two angels – the Bad and the Good, who fight for his soul. His attendants are Lust, Folly Covetousness (who looks after his money) and Backbiter. Also among his attendants are Lechery, Gluttony and Sloth. His companions include Pride, Wrath and Envy – all the Seven Deadly sins. To combat these come the Seven Virtues, Meekness, Chastity, Abstinence, Charity, Industry, Generosity and Patience.

Confession and Penance then arrive and exhort Mankind to Repent and when the Daughters of God Mercy in white, Righteousness in red, Truth in ‘sad green, and Peace in black Mankind realises his errors and as he dies his soul turns to the Good Angel who takes him to God . The Daughters of God plead for him and as Mercy is God’s favourite daughter God forgives Mankind by saying: ‘If thou love me and hold me in awe then Heaven will be your reward and my Face will thou see. This is my Judgement’ (my translation). God then enjoins the Seven Virtues on the entire human race and promises His mercy and forgiveness.

*Everyman* is arguably the greatest of the four plays and has an integrity and austereness that makes its message both solemn and moving. Again it tells the journey of a man who is summoned by Death and he has to make ‘a reckoning’ of his life. Everyman has lived for pleasure and to acquire wealth and he has completely forgotten about Charity. He realizes that he has to show all his works and how he has spent his life. He applies to his Kinfolk, to his Goods and to Fellowship to accompany him on his journey. They all refuse. Knowledge tells him to go to his Good Deeds, but she is so feeble that she cannot help him until he is contrite. Confession comes to him and he repents, and he scourges himself to show the contrition that ‘getteth forgiveness’. In the play the Seven Sacraments are acknowledged as the way to get salvation and the duties of Priest are enumerated; and a

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<sup>4</sup> A.C. Cawley, *Everyman and Medieval Plays* (J.M. Dent: London, 1962)

fear of Hell is always constant in the thought. Again, *Everyman*, like the other literary forms of the Middle Ages, stresses the penalty of going to Hell unless one repents of one's sinful life.

Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is in direct descent from Morality Plays and can be considered the last play in this genre. It has many of the features of both *Everyman* and *The Castle of Perseverance*. Unlike the other plays it is not Death who comes to summon Faustus: it is the Mephistopheles who tempts him. In exchange for his immortal soul Faustus will gain all knowledge. Once the document is signed there is, unlike the characters in the other plays, there is no redemption. Like *Perseverance*, this play has a Good and Bad Angel who debate Faustus's situation and try to guide him: like the Good Angel beseeches him not to '...heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head... But to... Read, read the Scriptures,'<sup>5</sup> while the Bad Angel encourages him to become the lord and commander of knowledge.

As in other plays qualities are personified. Faustus tries to repent, but is told that it is too late. As a reward, however, he sees the Seven Deadly Sins and converses with them. He also makes love to Helen of Troy. Like *Mankind*, another Morality Play, there are comic interludes in *Faustus* but always there is he feeling of imminent death and what Hell is like. It is *inside one*. Unlike the other plays Faustus cannot be redeemed at the end: his contract is inviolable and though God has mercy he is also just and justice must prevail. Faustus cannot put off his fate, and though he pleads for mercy it cannot be. Unlike *Everyman* and the protagonist in *Perseverance* there is no redemption.

On first reading, compared to the Morality plays, *Doctor Faustus* offers no hope. Closer examination, however, does reveals that Faustus does know that he has done wrong and he does want to repent as *Everyman* does, but it is too late he has taken an irreversible step and given his /soul away, something that the Morality play protagonists have not done. Although Death is not a character in *Faustus* it is an ever present and a dominant theme throughout.

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (London: Penguin, 2005)

## Death in Midsummer

John Langdon

Like the childhood memory of a summer night, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* presents an intricate set of interwoven elements so effortlessly that the resulting comedy often belies its own complexity. Various intersecting character classes and plot devices combine to offer a whole that seems both breezy and unified – a rushing, riotous celebration of both the lighter and the rougher underpinnings of love's mating season. New love. New life. Characteristically, however, Shakespeare balances his portrayal of budding, green love (and the distinctly suggested genesis of new life that accompanies it) with the spectre of death, rising, in this case, in a stylized and ritualized manner. Although pointedly mentioned several times in the play, death seems far from central to it. Only in the climactically comic play within a play – the handicraftsmen's presentation of 'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe, a very tragical mirth' (5.1.56-7)<sup>1</sup> – does a symbolic or ritual death feature prominently. Yet it is the deaths of Pyramus and Thisbe, and Bottom's participation in the wall scene, that provide the essential crux on which the comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* rests.

The play-acted deaths of Pyramus and Thisbe may be seen as one of a number of ritual deaths, sharing certain symbolic values, that occur throughout Shakespeare's plays. These ritual deaths echo the folk customs of slaying the carnival king or queen, serving to usher in new or renewed life. These mock deaths mark not only the passing of old patterns, but also the transformation of specific characters, and even the changing of the tenor of the play as a whole, into something broader and more comprehensive than its previous form. Hero's mock death in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Hermione's supposed death in *A Winter's Tale* are obvious examples of such devices, but Shakespeare's plays contain many more. In these instances, a character is represented as having died, or is reported as dead, only to return in a final moment in order to help resolve the underlying tensions of the play.

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks, gen. eds., Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (London: Cengage Learning, 2007, print). All references are to this edition.

Notably, *Hamlet* also features a play within a play, where a character is represented as dying, but the ritual itself (the play) is interrupted when Claudius suddenly departs. In this case, the lack of resolution in the ritual death echoes the absence of a happy or contented resolution of the play as a whole.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, as Jan Kott readily notes, is most similar to that of the lovers in *Romeo and Juliet*. However, as Kott explains:

Romeo could not even touch Juliet when she leaned out the window. The Wall scene ('O kiss me through the hole of this vile wall' [198]) is the "bottom translation" of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. The sequel of suicides is the same in both plays. But Thisbe 'dies' differently. The burlesque Juliet stabs herself perforce with the scabbard of Pyramus' sword.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of Kott's idea of a translated scene, however, it might be more useful, especially in keeping with the *Midsummer* emphasis on nature and renewal, to view the Wall scene as a more symbolic version of the staged reality that *Romeo and Juliet* represents. "Pyramus and Thisbe", as a play within a play, presents a specific ritual – a play-acted scene that takes place within the larger assumed 'reality' of the staged world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Although Pyramus and Thisbe die, albeit perhaps comically, within the context of their scene, not only the *Midsummer* audience, but also all of the characters on stage know that Bottom and Flute, who play Pyramus and Thisbe in the scene, do not die.

To underscore this, Shakespeare deliberately shatters even the momentary illusion of Pyramus and Thisbe's awkwardly scripted deaths – telegraphing to both the off-stage audience and the on-stage character observers that Bottom and Flute remain very much alive. Immediately after his onstage death as Pyramus, Bottom sits up to contradict Demetrius' statement about Wall being left (along with lion and moon) to bury the dead.

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<sup>2</sup> Kott, Jan. "The Bottom Translation." *PDF: The Bottom Translation*, trans. Daniela Miedzzyrzecka. Sonoma University. Web. 16 May 2012, <[www.sonoma.edu/performingarts/theatre/\\_docs/jan\\_kott.pdf](http://www.sonoma.edu/performingarts/theatre/_docs/jan_kott.pdf)>.

Bottom contends, 'No, I assure you; the wall is down that parted their fathers,' (5.1.345-6) after which, Flute quickly rises as well. This humorous discontinuity not only restores the flow of the comedy as a whole, but also marks, in a sense, that the moment of sacrifice has passed. The audience has been shown the tragic potential inherent in the *Midsummer* love themes, death has been appeased, and the play can move on to its successfully contented conclusion. By contrast, *Romeo and Juliet* presents the characters as themselves, not masquerading as other characters or presenting a fiction to any others, but immersed within the comparative reality of their own onstage world. Their deaths retain the finality of the unbroken stage illusion. Other characters, once they arrive, perceive both Romeo and Juliet as dead. Romeo, unlike Bottom, has no last word. Even Mercutio's death stops both his nimble thoughts and his fluid words. Death, in the world of the play imposed by *Romeo and Juliet*, remains uncompromising and uncompromised.

Beyond this obvious contrast between "Pyramus and Thisbe" and *Romeo and Juliet*, however, there is a more specific set of characteristics that mark the Wall scene as a moment of ritual death. The wall, with its chink, that separates Pyramus and Thisbe, and the lion roaming their night-time forest, strongly suggest the gateway that the religious anthropologist Mircea Eliade describes as being 'guarded by lions and monsters.'<sup>3</sup> The scene also alludes to the barriers to true love within *Midsummer*'s forest, resonating with Eliade's 'gates to castles [that] are guarded by automatons, fairies or demons' (Ibid., 192), echoing the fundamental elements of the perilous initiation into love and sexual union. Fraught with danger, the initiatory venture deep into the recesses of the psyche's darkened forest involves the very real risk that one may easily lose one's love or oneself in the quest for union and the regeneration or issue (5.1.396) that this union may promote. Pyramus and Thisbe's Wall scene, and their death, following almost directly upon Bottom's return from Titania's fairy bower, further reminds the audience that there are inherently grave dangers, as well as potential rewards, in venturing beyond the wall for love.

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<sup>3</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (Putnam: Spring Publications, 2009, print), p.192.

Bottom's changes over the course of *Midsummer* reflect this. The audience first sees him as an anxious blowhard, dominating and bullying his companions in the second scene in an attempt to further inflate his own questionable glories as a performer. Puck's subsequent metaphor of the ass's head not only physically actualizes Bottom's character, but also suggests the raw animal nature of his liaison with Titania. By the end of his performance as Pyramus, however, Bottom and his company receive the Duke's diplomatically gentle commendation, as he speaks of 'fine tragedy' (5.1.345-6) and subsequently confirms that their play 'is, truly, and very notably discharged' (5.1.346-7). The initial coercion of Flute to face his hesitation at playing a woman has helped transform him into one of the successful band of players, ironically suggesting his movement towards his imminent manhood. By playing his own part, Bottom has fulfilled his goal of helping his company successfully entertain the Duke and Duchess on their wedding day – for which he and his company, Shakespeare clearly indicates, are selected above so many others.

At the same time, even though Theseus notes that Bottom may potentially still be an 'ass' at the end of the play, his role as the noble but clumsily scripted Pyramus is commensurate with his larger symbolic function within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. From a metaphysical standpoint, Bottom's initiation and transformation, as Kott indicates, specifically hearkens to the rituals of hermetic initiatory traditions. In undergoing his initiatory ordeal, however, Bottom not only enacts his own rebirth, but also becomes the agent for the rebirth of the play as a whole. As Eliade puts it:

All the rites of rebirth or resurrection, and the symbols that they imply, indicate that the novice has attained to another mode of existence, inaccessible to those who have not undergone the initiatory ordeals, who have not tasted death. (Eliade 22)

Describing it another way, Eliade emphasizes that 'Initiatory death is indispensable for the beginning of spiritual life' (Ibid., 22). In light of his journey into the fairy realm, it is hardly surprising that Bottom spouts confused scriptural verses upon emerging from his 'dream.' Joseph Campbell's observation about 'the interdependence of *thanatos* and *eros*,

their import as the complementary aspects of a single state of being'<sup>4</sup> reaffirms the conclusion that the connection between Bottom and Titania is no mere romp. Also interestingly relevant are Frazer's descriptions of the seasonal folk rituals in which death is slain in order allow new life to arise.<sup>5</sup> The fact that the carnival king is frequently beheaded in these rituals marks a further parallel with Bottom's transformation as he loses first his own head, and then returns to his own form, losing his ass's head to gain his own once more.

On a grand scale, Bottom fulfills his role as the May King, travelling to the underworld and back, and finally undergoing a ritual death in order to symbolically pave the way for *Midsummer's* successful resolution. Because death is diverted, appeased, or symbolically conquered through the ritually dramatized deaths of Pyramus and Thisbe, the Duke's household is subsequently released from fear that they might 'outsleep the coming morn' (5.1.351) in any serious way. That life and love defeat death through the proxy of the often clownish Bottom, marks another instance of Shakespeare balancing death with life and high station with low. Of all the new life and love in *Midsummer*, it is Bottom who, in his most ridiculous form, not only sees, but also intimately interacts with, Titania's moonlit world. Through his liaison with the fairy queen, low-stationed mortality consorts with royal immortality. As Bottom descends into the underworld – the fairy realm also traditionally having strong associations with the realm of the dead – the weaver weaves together the fabric of the different worlds of the play, rescuing and redeeming mortality in the face of the inevitable approach of death, while simultaneously helping restore balance to the natural, fairy world.

It may initially seem bold to assert that Bottom's transformation and subsequent return to self allows love to triumph in the midsummer night – staving off death from the mortal world. However, as he swims back to himself through the fleeting and confused remnant images of his dream,

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Mythic Dimension: Selected Essays 1959-1987*, ed. Antony Van Couvering (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997, print), p.42.

<sup>5</sup> Frazer, James. "The Golden Bough." *The Golden Bough*. Wikimedia. Web. 21 May 2012. <[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Golden\\_Bough](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Golden_Bough)>.



Bottom's focus returns again to Thisbe where he 'shall sing [his dream] at her death' (4.1.217). In finding himself once more, Bottom becomes a player again, looking to the sacrifice, the death scene, yet to come. Eliade writes:

[I]t remains true nonetheless that a human being becomes *himself* or *herself* only after having solved a series of desperately difficult and even dangerous situations; that is, after having undergone 'tortures' and 'death,' followed by an awakening to another life that is qualitatively different because it is regenerated. If we look closely, we see that every human life is made up of a series of ordeals, 'deaths,' and 'resurrections.' (Eliade, 195-196)

While Bottom's experience has not been torture, it has taken him far outside of the world of his understanding. Having been to the fairy bower, Bottom's return to himself marks the return to order in the play. In this way, Shakespeare allows the audience of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to experience the wonder of human renewal through the proxy of one of the more remarkable, and remarkably humble characters in the canon. The wise Duke Theseus says that 'Love, therefore, and tongue-tied simplicity [i]n least speak most, to my capacity' (5.1.104-5). Not only does love – Titania's, his fellow players,' and his own love of playacting – redeem Bottom, but through his own redemption, Bottom also proves central to helping the greater love of *Midsummer* conquer the grim spectre of Death and separation. In so doing, Bottom symbolically sacrifices himself to redeem his audience as well.

## **BOOK REVIEW**

*Quoting Death in Early Modern England: the poetics of epitaphs beyond the tomb*

By Scott L. Newstok

*[We were surprised and delighted that Professor Newstok, having been told about our project and the theme of our first issue, made contact with us, and offered us a copy of his book. Our warmest thanks to him.]*

This is an exceptionally learned and sophisticated piece of writing. Newstok's ostensible subject is the epitaph in Early Modern England, but what is most valuable about his book is the way in which it places the act of epitaphic writing within a certain set of – e.g. religious, political – contexts and, by doing so, illuminates these contexts by means of the specific, obsessively traced example.

The common epitaphic flourish is 'Here lies'... but what does 'Here' denote? The answer is obvious if 'Here' is inscribed on a tombstone that covers a body (or is it obvious?), but what if the epitaph is printed in a book and circulated? To what does 'Here' refer then? This is the sort of question that Newstok is dealing with.

Another one (which requires a different sort of answer – historical as opposed to historical-theoretical) is why there 'is a comparatively sudden proliferation of epitaphs in the latter part of the 1500s' (16).

The answer to that last question has something to do with the loss of Catholicism: 'Purgatory, annual masses, and prayers for the dead ensured the perpetuation of memory; the dissolution of these institutional practices encouraged an individualistic turn' (19). The removal of public structures of mourning meant that the attempt to deal with death had to happen elsewhere... first on tombs themselves, but then, when 'the epitaph' had become solidified as a literary, rhetorical form, in books. This move into textuality is also a move into subjectivity; the Reformation entailed a privatizing of existential/religious experience.

This privatization becomes entangled, however, with the fact that, at this time, people began to write their own epitaphs when they were still alive. This ‘peculiar manner of self-projection,’ writes Newstok, ‘became prevalent in the Elizabethan period; indeed Elizabeth herself appears to have been the first major public figure in England to declare this mode of anticipatory retrospection’ (63).

What does it mean to write one’s own epitaph? It is, in part, an attempt to finalize one’s life, *on one’s own terms*; one writes the truth of what one has been; one disallows the possibility of other interpretations. And this declaration of identity is, in part, an ethical act; there arises a split, or at least tension, between the possibilities of ‘moral and factual veracity’ (81).

Newstok explores these issues with great intelligence: he provides an impressive, even disorientating amount of data, and he ties this data into clear and persuasive arguments; there is a theoretical agility about the book, which is refreshing to lock minds with, and also an intellectual authority and intensity.

The prose is, at times, incredibly intricately woven – it often borders on the aphoristic – one consequence of which is that the book sometimes becomes quite difficult.

I showed it to a couple of intelligent and educated but not academic readers, and they had to put it down after a couple of paragraphs, in bemusement and frustration, not understanding what was being written about (the book opens: ‘*Here* is what this book is all about./Or rather, not *here*, but “here,” “in quotation marks.”/When we hear “hear” (“hear, here!”), we have heard a homophonic anti-pun... Here we find the declaration of presence in voice as well as location’). My personal preference is for a slightly less ‘sophisticated’ sort of writing.

But this is a book that repays close attention, and is something that can be learned from.

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