UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS
Faculdade de Letras
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Literários

Tiago Cabral Vieira de Carvalho

THE COMIC AND THE TRAGIC NATURE IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: A CHARACTEROLOGICAL STUDY

Belo Horizonte
2024

Tiago Cabral Vieira de Carvalho

THE COMIC AND THE TRAGIC NATURE IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: A CHARACTEROLOGICAL STUDY

Dissertation submitted to Graduate Program in Literary Studies of Universiade Federal de Minas Gerais as a partial requirement for a Doctoral Degree in Literatures in English.
Advisor: Thomas LaBorie Burns, Phd.

Belo Horizonte

2024

S527.Yc-c

Carvalho, Tiago Cabral Vieira de.
The comic and the tragic nature in William Shakespeare [manuscrito] : a characterological study / Tiago Cabral Vieira de Carvalho. – 2024.
1 recurso online (261 f.: il., tabs., grafs., color., p&b.) : pdf.

Orientador: Thomas LaBoire Burns.

Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Linha de pesquisa: Poéticas da Modernidade.

Tese (doutorado) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Faculdade de Letras.

Bibliografia: f. 257-261.

Exigências do sistema: Adobe Acrobat Reader.

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616. – Crítica e interpretação – Teses. 2. Teatro inglês (Tragédia) – História e crítica – Teses. 3. Teatro inglês (Comédia) – História e crítica – Teses. 4. Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616 – Personagens – Teses. I. Burns, Thomas LaBorie. II. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Faculdade de Letras. III. Título.

CDD: 822.33

Ficha catalográfica elaborada pela Bibliotecária Priscila Oliveira da Mata - CRB/6- 2706
Biblioteca Professor Rubens Costa Romanelli - FALE/UFMG

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS
FACULDADE DE LETRAS
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS: ESTUDOS LITERÁRIOS

FOLHA DE APROVAÇÃO

Tese intitulada *THE COMIC AND THE TRAGIC NATURE IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: A CHARACTEROLOGICAL STUDY* , de autoria do Doutorando TIAGO CABRAL VIEIRA DE CARVALHO, apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras: Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da UFMG, como requisito parcial à obtenção do título de Doutor em Letras: Estudos Literários.

Área de Concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa/Doutorado

Linha de Pesquisa: Poéticas da Modernidade

Aprovada pela Banca Examinadora constituída pelos seguintes professores:

Prof. Dr. Thomas La Borie Burns - FALE/UFMG - Orientador
Profa. Dra. Miriam Piedade Mansur Andrade - FALE/UFMG
Prof. Dr. Marcel de Lima Santos - FALE/UFMG
Profa. Dra. Clara Matheus Nogueira
Prof. Dr. José Otaviano da Mata Machado Silva - UEMG/Ibirité

Belo Horizonte, 29 de maio de 2024.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **José Otaviano da Mata Machado Silva**, **Usuário Externo**, em 03/06/2024, às 09:08, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5º do Decreto nº 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Clara Matheus Nogueira**, **Usuária Externa**, em 03/06/2024, às 09:52, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5º do Decreto nº 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Miriam Piedade Mansur Andrade**, **Professora do Magistério Superior**, em 03/06/2024, às 19:29, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5º do Decreto nº 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Marcel de Lima Santos**, **Professor do Magistério Superior**, em 04/06/2024, às 14:03, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5º do Decreto nº 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Romulo Monte Alto**, **Coordenador(a) de curso de pós-graduação**, em 06/06/2024, às 16:07, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5º do Decreto nº 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

Documento assinado eletronicamente por **Thomas La Borie Burns**, **Professor do Magistério Superior**, em 06/06/2024, às 18:07, conforme horário oficial de Brasília, com fundamento no art. 5º do Decreto nº 10.543, de 13 de novembro de 2020.

A autenticidade deste documento pode ser conferida no site https://sei.ufmg.br/sei/controlador_externo.php?acao=documento_conferir&id_orgao_acesso_externo=0, informando o código verificador **3270683** e o código CRC **1D49E579**.

Acknowledgments

To CNPq, for funding this research.

Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep.

–William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 2.1.49-51

But neither here seek I, no nor in Heaven
To dwell, unless by mastering Heaven's Supreme;
Nor hope to be myself less miserable
By what I seek, but others to make such
As I, though thereby worse to me redound:
For only in destroying I find ease
To my relentless thoughts

–John Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.124-30

Tragedy is a goat and comedy a village Priapus and *dying* is the word that links both.

–Anthony Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*

Abstract

My argument in this dissertation is supported by two critical principles. The first is the tradition of the emphasis on character in the plays of William Shakespeare by a succession of distinguished Shakespearean critics, such as Samuel Johnson, William Hazlitt, Andrew Cecil Bradley, Harold Goddard, and Harold Bloom. The second is Northrop Frye's major division of literature, in his influential work *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), into two literary modes: the comic and the tragic. My emphasis on character leads to an also broad division of dramatic characters into two types: comic and tragic. In chapter 1, I discuss the individuality of characters in Shakespeare's works and how the nature of their wills can be understood as either comic or tragic with Frye's theory of comedy in mind. In chapters 2 and 3, I discuss how the characters in *The Merchant of Venice* and in *Measure for Measure* embody a comic nature while also arguing that the comic sense involves a sense concealment, an element not explored by Frye. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia offers salvation by averting bloodshed, although the reasons for her actions remain mysterious, i.e., the murky motivations behind salvation remain concealed. In *Measure for Measure*, Vincentio also offers salvation by concealing, through irony, the reasons why social order is maintained. I hence argue that concealment is in fact related to the comic. In chapters 4 and 5, I discuss destruction, the key element of the tragic sense, in *King Lear* and in *Hamlet.* What makes Hamlet tragic is that he is not *willing* to accept the structure of reality, which leads him to disturb the *status quo*. Hamlet, by revealing the truth of his father's murder, removes the concealment of the rottenness of Denmark. What makes Lear tragic is that the disturbance of social order for which he is responsible leads him to conclude that suffering is the essence of life. Both in *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, the tragic sense is conveyed by a lack of acceptance of the structure of reality, which leads to an overall feeling of cosmological emptiness, whose concealment is removed in *King Lear*. Therefore, part of the tragic sense in Shakespeare is the destruction of the concealment that holds the social order together. Finally, in chapter 6, I show how the transformation that Macbeth undergoes is due to an unknown force represented by the witches and the spirits that control them, that is, by fate. Macbeth, therefore, undergoes a transformation from a (partially) comic nature to a tragic one, by which I mean that, by murdering Duncan unwillingly, he brings a about destruction and removes the concealment of fate, which had played the main role in his change. His final soliloquy reflects his change of nature since it resembles the cosmological emptiness conveyed by *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

Key-words: William Shakespeare; drama; comedy; tragedy; characterological analysis.

Resumo

O argumento desta tese é embasado por dois princípios críticos. O primeiro consiste na tradição, conservada por uma sucessão de ilustres críticos shakespearianos, como Samuel Johnson, William Hazlitt, Andrew Cecil Bradley, Harold Goddard e Harold Bloom, de ênfase em personagens nas peças de William Shakespeare. A segunda é a grande divisão, feita por Northrop Frye na sua influente obra *Anatomia da Crítica* (1957), da literatura em dois modos literários: o cômico e o trágico. A ênfase em personagens leva a uma divisão também ampla de personagens dramáticos em dois tipos: cômicos e trágicos. No capítulo 1, é discutida a individualidade dos personagens nas obras de Shakespeare e como a natureza de suas vontades e inclinações pode ser entendida como cômica ou trágica, tendo em mente a teoria de Frye acerca da comédia. Nos capítulos 2 e 3, discuto como os personagens d'*O Mercador de Veneza* e de *Medida por Medida* incorporam uma natureza cômica e também mostro como o sentido cômico envolve um significado de encobrimento, um elemento não explorado por Frye. N'*O Mercador de Veneza*, Portia promove salvação evitando derramamento de sangue, embora as razões para suas ações permaneçam misteriosas, ou seja, as motivações por trás da salvação permanecem encobertas. Em *Medida por Medida*, Vincentio também promove salvação ao encobertar, por meio de ironia, as razões pelas quais a ordem social é mantida. Portanto, defendo que o sentido de acobertamento está relacionado ao cômico. Nos capítulos 4 e 5, discuto a destruição, elemento-chave do sentido trágico, em *Rei Lear* e em *Hamlet*. O que torna Hamlet trágico é sua natural incapacidade de aceitar a estrutura da realidade, o que o leva a perturbar o *status quo*. Hamlet, ao revelar a verdade sobre o assassinato de seu pai, remove a acobertamento da podridão da Dinamarca. O que torna Lear trágico é que a perturbação da ordem social pela qual ele é responsável o leva a concluir que o sofrimento é a essência da vida. Tanto em *Rei Lear* quanto em *Hamlet*, o sentido trágico deriva de uma incapacidade de aceitar a estrutura da realidade, o que faz emergir um sentido de vazio cosmológico, cujo encobrimento é removido em *Rei Lear*. Portanto, parte do sentido trágico em Shakespeare consiste na destruição do encobrimento que mantém a ordem social corrente. Por fim, no capítulo 6, mostro como a transformação que Macbeth sofre se deve a uma força desconhecida representada pelas bruxas e pelos espíritos que as controlam, ou seja, pelo destino. Macbeth, portanto, sofre uma transformação de natureza; ele passa de uma natureza (parcialmente) cômica para uma natureza trágica, o que significa que, ao assassinar Duncan contra sua vontade, ele destrói o acobertamento do destino, o principal responsável por sua mudança de natureza. Seu solilóquio

final reflete tal transformação uma vez que se assemelha ao sentido de vazio cosmológico observado em *Hamlet* e *Rei Lear*.
Palavras-chave: William Shakespeare; texto teatral; comédia; tragédia; análise de personagens.

Contents

Abbreviations

Ado	*Much Ado about Nothing*
Ant.	*Antony and Cleopatra*
AWW	*All's Well That Ends Well*
AYLI	*As You Like It*
Cor.	*Coriolanus*
Cym.	*Cymbeline*
Err.	*The Comedy of Errors*
Ham.	*Hamlet*
1H4	*The First Part of King Henry the Fourth*
2H4	*The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth*
H5	*King Henry the Fifth*
1H6	*The First Part of King Henry the Sixth*
2H6	*The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*
3H6	*The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*
H8	*King Henry the Eighth*
JC	*Julius Caesar*
John	*King John*
LLL	*Love's Labour's Lost*
Lear	*King Lear*
Mac.	*Macbeth*
MM	*Measure for Measure*
MND	*A Midsummer Night's Dream*
MV	*The Merchant of Venice*
Oth.	*Othello*
Per.	*Pericles*
R2	*King Richard the Second*
R3	*King Richard the Third*
Rom.	*Romeo and Juliet*
Shr.	*The Taming of the Shrew*
STM	*Sir Thomas More*
Temp.	*The Tempest*

TGV	*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
Tim.	*Timon of Athens*
Tit.	*Titus Andronicus*
TN	*Twelfth Night*
TNK	*The Two Noble Kinsmen*
Tro.	*Troilus and Cressida*
Wiv.	*The Merry Wives of Windsor*
WT	*The Winter's Tale*
Luc.	*The Rape of Lucrece*
Ven.	*Venus and Adonis*

NCS	New Cambridge Shakespeare
AS	Arden Shakespeare
OS	Oxford Shakespeare

Introduction. The Relevance of Character

1. Comparing a Speaker in Lyric to a Character in Drama

To talk about narrative literary texts means to discuss characters since they are an integral part of the work. But how can the role of characters be emphasized so as to state their relevance in the resulting meaning of a text? The representation of inwardness was not a feature exclusive to William Shakespeare's texts or created by him,[1] but, as Marcel dos Santos suggests, it was an aesthetic technique which was perfected by the bard of Stratford (199). Shakespeare did not create the notions of inwardness, character, or personality. As Harold Bloom argues, however, what "Shakespeare invents are ways of representing human changes, alterations not only caused by flaws and by decay but effected by the will as well" (*Shakespeare* 2). Nevertheless, a question may be posed: to what extent can a character control his or her own will so as to actually control his or her actions and behavior? This is what I am going to be referring to as the problem of will throughout this dissertation.

Bloom's argument, however, is not exactly original since the renowned 18th century critic Samuel Johnson emphasized Shakespeare's ability to depict human character: Shakespeare showed "human nature as it acts in real exigencies" ("Preface to Shakespeare" 14) and "life in its native colours" ("Preface to Shakespeare" 37). A few years later, William Hazlitt also highlighted characterization in his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. Characterological features, therefore, have been a major concern in Shakespearean criticism since the 18th century. According to McAlindon:

> Shakespeare not only engaged with but went through and beyond the contemporary to capture in brilliantly realised characters and deeply moving scenes some of the most fundamental aspects of human nature and experience: the strength and vulnerability, the goodness and the wickedness of men and women; the desolation and courage of the individual at war with society; the cruel injustices and the terrifying uncertainty of life itself. (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 122)

It is important to add, however, that the fundamental aspects of human nature and experience McAlindon speaks of can only be *felt individually*. In other words, in the plays, reality only exists insofar as an individual person feels something about it, which is why, in fictional

[1] Cf. Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*.

situations, whether narrative or dramatic, characters are so important: it is through the sensations of characters that reality is represented poetically. According to Bloom, our "own personalities may well reduce to a flux of sensations, but that concourse of impressions requires presentation in detailed vividness if any one of us is to be distinguished from any other" (*Shakespeare* 281). Fiction and drama, therefore, depend considerably on characterological aspects, which in tum depend on figurative representation and literal meaning.

In this sense, there must be a differentiation between the display of subjective thoughts and feelings in fiction and drama. One thing that differentiates characters in drama from speakers in lyric poetry, for example, is narrative. According to Bloom, neither the speaker nor the addressees of Shakespeare's sonnets are a "dramatic inwardness or character in a play" (*The Sonnets* xi), since characters in the plays are subject to "self-change on the basis of self-overhearing" (*The Western Canon* 48). The main difference between dramatic and lyric poetry therefore seems to revolve around the presence or absence of a referential background. As Helen Vendler explains, since

> the person uttering a lyric poem is always represented as alone with his thoughts, his imagined addressee can by definition never be present. Lyric (in contrast to the dramatic monologue, where there is always a listener present in the room), gives us the mind alone with itself. Lyric can present no "other" as alive and listening or responding in the same room as the solitary speaker. (19)

And yet, even in soliloquies there must be some sort of literal or referential consistency, which is not a given in lyric, because character entails psychological features and a referential basis. The speaker of the *Sonnets* – which is the case of lyric poetry – is an impersonal voice, while the characters in Shakespeare's plays are personalized rather than depersonalized voices. The inwardness of characters in plays is prompted by events of the plot and actions of other characters. The referential (or representational) aspect is what binds linguistic or verbal play to dramatic poetry.

A good example of this is the moment in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which Bottom wrongfully acknowledges the reaction of his comrades.[2] Unaware of his transformation, he says:

[2] The story of the play begins as Theseus and Hippolyta, two middle-aged lovers, are celebrating peace between their peoples by getting married. Helena and Demetrius, and Hermia and Lysander, are crossed in love, but Hermia is forbidden to marry her lover by her father. Hermia and Lysander decide to flee the city to the woods. Hermia's friend, Helena, overhears their plans and decides to tell Demetrius. Helena figures that by telling him the news he will lose interest in Hermia, but the two go after Lysander and Hermia instead. Meanwhile, and a group of Athenian craftsmen, led by the Peter Quince, with Nick Bottom as the lead actor, gather to put on a play in honor of the Theseus' wedding.

"This is to make an ass of me" (*MND* 3.1.99),[3] referring to what seems to be their intention to make a fool of him, but the joke only makes sense if the spectator sees his transformed head and the reader is fully aware that his head has been transformed. Bottom's remark is lyrical, that is, it is a commentary on something that affects him subjectively. Different from pure lyrical poetry, however, it is not exclusively inward, since it outwardly refers to his condition and the reaction it causes in others. Bottom utters his commentary influenced by a figurative background. One of the biggest problems with understanding poetry is the inability of being able to see, for instance, the playful aspect of the arrangement of the inner elements of a lyric poem as sufficient and, consequently, succumbing to hermeneutic temptation, i.e., a search for philosophical meaning.

Although lyric poetry can be read in terms of emotional conflict, it does not involve character development. As Vendler explains, a "psychological view . . . stresses motivation, will, and other characterological features, and above all needs a story on which to hang motivation" (3). Shakespeare's sonnets "are inward, meditative, and lyrical . . . [while drama is] outward, expository, and narrative. . . . Even the sonnets uttered within plays by dramatic characters . . . are shaped by the themes of the drama and by the actions taking place on the stage; they do not show the successive intellectual position-taking that is such a striking feature of the *Sonnets*" (5-6). Therefore, a search for "meaning" in lyric poetry may result in a fruitless endeavor. Vendler argues that the wish of interpreters of poems to arrive at something we call "meaning" seems to be misguided. However important "meaning" may be to a theological or hermeneutic practice eager to convey accurately the Word of God, it cannot have the same importance in lyric. Lyric poetry, especially the highly conventionalized lyric of the sort represented by Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, has almost no significant freight of "meaning" in the ordinary sense of the word. "I have insomnia because I am far away from you" is the gist of one sonnet; "Even though Nature wishes to prolong your life, Time will eventually demand that she render you to death" is the "meaning" of another.

As the group rehearses in the forest, strange events take place. Because of an argument between the fairy king Oberon and his queen Titania Oberon orders his mischievous servant Puck to administer a love potion to her so that she will fall in love with the first creature that she sees. Oberon also orders Puck to give the potion to Demetrius whom he has heard mistreating Helena, the woman who loves him. Puck inadvertently gives the potion to Lysander, who falls in love with Helena and, in trying to correct the mistake, gives it to Demetrius. Both men lavish attention on Helena and leave a bewildered and angry Hermia in the dust. Continuing to cause trouble, Puck comes across the amateur troop of actors and bestows his critique on their performance by turning Bottom into a donkey. As his band leave him in the woods, Titania falls in love with him. In the end, all is righted and the marriages go ahead as planned.

[3] The quotations from the plays for which more than one edition were used are from the NCS edition unless when otherwise indicated.

These are not taxing or original ideas any more than other lyric "meanings" ("My love is like a rose," "London in the quiet of dawn is as beautiful as any rural scene," etc.). As Vendler states: "Very few lyrics offer the sort of philosophical depth that stimulates meaning-seekers in long, complex, and self-contradicting texts like Shakespeare's plays or Dostoevsky's novels" (13). In short, this comparison between lyric poetry narrative literary texts aims to emphasize the influence that a referential background makes upon characters within a narrative. And this influence is fleshed out, as Bloom suggested, in the form if a deep inwardness, which, again is less common in purer lyric poetry. John Milton's Satan, in *Paradise Lost*, for example, possesses, according to Bloom, a deep inwardness comparable to that of Shakespeare's Iago in *Othello* (*Shakespeare* 453). Walt Whitman's speaker in the poems of *Leaves of Grass*, on the other hand, seems to be less emphatic of the inwardness of an individual character precisely because of the lack of a narrative background – by which Satan is bound.

The meaning related to long narrative texts, in the way Vendler discusses here, tends toward the ethical in the philosophical sense, i.e., in the sense that there is a right way to behave that can be grasped from the actions of the characters portrayed. For instance, the ethical "meaning" of *Macbeth*[4] could be phrased in this way: "Ambition is part of life, but it is dangerous and one should be cautious around it," but this would be a weak misreading.[5] Meaning-seeking in long texts, in spite of hermeneutic temptations, could be described, from an aesthetic or pragmatic point of view, as the explanation of why a character acts and thinks in a specific way when contrasted with a representational (narrative or not) background. For instance, in *Macbeth*, there may be a reason as to why Macbeth submits to Lady Macbeth's insistence that he carry out Duncan's murder, one answer being that he does not want to sexually fail her. This is where the dangers of hermeneutic temptations emerge and rational explanations – such as "what such

[4] Macbeth is Scottish general and skilled fighter, who receives a prophecy from three witches. The prophecy says that one day he will become the king of Scotland. Macbeth and his wife plot to murder king Duncan so as to take the Scottish throne for themselves. Macbeth hesitates in a first moment, but is then compelled by his wife to commit the deed. He is then wracked with fear. Forced to commit more and more murders to protect himself from enmity and suspicion, he soon becomes a tyrant. The couple holds on to power barely, as their vassals begin to abandon them. A movement of resistance championed by Duncan's sons, Donalbain and Malcolm, and Macduff – whose family Mabeth had murdered – threatens to topple their rule. Meanwhile, Macbeth's fear and Lady Macbeth's sense of guilt leads them to depression and madness.

[5] I am employing, here, a critical principle by Bloom, according to which "misreading" can be understood as a synonym of reading. Thus a "weak misreading" would correspond to a "wrong" reading, while a strong misreading" would correspond to a "right" reading. For more details on this, cf. *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), *A Map of Misreading* (1975) and *Agon* (1982), the three works that comprise his theory of influence, which contends that a belated author (the one influenced) realizes a strong misreading of the work of his or her predecessor (the one who influences).

character is doing is right or wrong, so we must mimic or avoid such behavior" – may arise. Ethical readings may attempt to identify the cause of Macbeth giving in to his wife's will as cultural or to denounce Macbeth as wrong or weak for succumbing to temptation. Thus, psychological aspects become relevant – but not dominant – in characterological-operating criticism. The search for meaning in drama, from a pragmatic point of view, is the search for representation of human character *as it is*. The hermeneutic search for "meaning", in the sense Vendler refers to, aims to describe character *as it should be*. Human character exists in relation to an external world, but the way poetic language represents it configures an autonomous form of play that does not succumb to ethical readings.[6]

Returning to the example of Macbeth, a translation of part of its aesthetic meaning would be related to the wisdom engendered through the expansion of consciousness with respect to the pragmatic perception of fear involved in unwillingly performing an action to achieve something desired. Ambition, a primary element in an ethical reading, ends up becoming a secondary element in an aesthetic reading. *Macbeth* could then be understood, as Lily Campbell tells us in her *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*, as a study in fear. It is not, however, a scientific study, but a pragmatic study that offers pragmatic truths. A philosophical reading would understand Macbeth as a warning that the dangers of being too ambitious is to live in constant fear. A psychological reading would understand the play as a form of instruction on how to deal with fear. Both these readings are prescriptive. An aesthetic reading, as opposed to those, is descriptive. It acknowledges that fear is part of human nature; that fear is part of human nature is a platitude. With such truth as a principle, an aesthetic critic attempts to understand it by translating what an author has described and depicted in a work as a result of his first and second-hand own impressions of, and experiences with, fear. What matters to an aesthetic point of view is understanding how fear operates in its various manifestations in several different characters. It does not instruct us on how to avoid or deal with fear. In everyday language, we talk about the meaning of a literary work as the "message" a piece conveys. This can also be observed in the question: "What is the moral of a certain story?" Failed attempts at grasping meaning in the hermeneutic fashion leads to misconceptions that art is moralizing.

---

[6] By "poetic", I refer to the playful nature of art and poetry. In this sense, throughout my discussions the words "poetic", "aesthetic", "pragmatic" and "artistic" are interchangeable. I derive this notion from the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, who, in his book *Aesthetic: As Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (1902) stated that the nature of art was pragmatic intuition, more specifically, "*lyric* intuition" (*Breviary of Aesthetics* 25).

Characterological emphasis avoids ethical or exclusively psychological readings because its principle is aesthetic. According to Tom McAlindon, behind "Shakespeare's delineation of the hero's moral fall lies a conviction that 'In men as in a rough'-grown grove remain / Cave-keeping evils that obscurely sleep' ["*The Rape of Lucrece*", 1249–50].[7] Misguidedly essentialist or not, the notion of cave-keeping evils in every human being was one which Shakespeare clearly took for granted" (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 110-11). Evil, in practical terms, entails inflicting pain, and pain is a constant in human life. What is going to differentiate characters is how they are *willing* to deal with pain. According to Vendler, dramatic characters require a representational background, i.e., they stress "motivation, will, and other characterological features, and above all need a story on which to hang motivation" (3). Will is an essential feature of characters in drama and a common element in characters. What differentiates and qualifies the nature of human will is how a character behaves or acts. And the two general qualifications for dramatic characters are the comic and the tragic.

2. Comic and Tragic Characters

The difference between a tragic and a comic nature, in my view, resides in how pain is received, that is to say, in how a character is willing to deal with it. If the character is willing to accept pain, he or she has a comic nature; if not, a tragic one. The acceptance of the comic does not, in my view, configure resignation, but, rather, *need*. We can see this perception of pain, on Shakespeare's part, in works as early as *The Comedy of Errors*, dated around 1593.[8] The affection that emerges from the reunion of the Dromio brothers in *The Comedy of Errors* hints at the essence of a comic nature. The two Dromios are *constantly* subjected to violence by the two Antipholuses.

DROMIO S. But I pray, sir, why am I beaten?

ANTIPHOLUS S. Dost thou not know?

DROMIO S. Nothing, sir, but that I am beaten

[7] *The Rape of Lucrece* is one of Shakespeare's narrative poems. It re-tells the legend of Lucrece, who is raped by Tarquin, a friend of Collatine, Lucrece's husband, when he is spending the night in their house. After the rape, Tarquin sneaks away of Lucrece's bedroom feeling guilty. Moments later, Lucrece commits suicide.

[8] *The Comedy of Errors* tells the story of two sets of identical twins who were accidentally separated by birth. Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus make landfall in a city which the other Antipholus and Dromio call home. Antipholus of Syracuse and his servant, Dromio of Syracuse, arrive in Ephesus, which turns out to be the home of their twin brothers, Antipholus of Ephesus and his servant, Dromio of Ephesus. When the Syracusans encounter the friends and families of their twins, a series of wild mishaps based on mistaken identities lead to wrongful beatings, a near-seduction, the arrest of Antipholus of Ephesus, and false accusations of infidelity, theft, madness, and demonic possession.

ANTIPHOLUS S. Shall I tell you why?

DROMIO S. Ay, sir, and wherefore; for they say every why hath a wherefore.

ANTIPHOLUS S. Why, first for flouting me; and then wherefore –

For urging it the second time to me.

DROMIO S. Was there ever any man thus beaten out of season,

When in the why and the wherefore is neither rhyme nor reason?

Well, sir, I thank you.

ANTIPHOLUS S. Thank me, sir, for what?

DROMIO S. Marry, sir, for this something that you gave me for nothing. (*Err*. 2.2.38-49)

Dromio of Syracuse "thanks" his master for giving him "something" – the beating – for "nothing" – he had not actually flouted his master previously. Another passage reveals the history between the other brother, Dromio of Ephesus, and his master:

> DROMIO E. I have served him from the hour of my nativity to this instant, and have nothing at his hands for my service but blows. When I am cold, he heats me with beating; when I am warm, he cools me with beating; I am waked with it when I sleep, raised with it when I sit, driven out of doors with it when I go from home, welcomed home with it when I return. (*Err*. 4.4.27.33)

This is Dromio of Ephesus's account of his history with his master. We see that the two clowns have had to sustain numerous blows from the Antipholuses throughout the play. Considering the account of Dromio of Ephesus, however, one may ask: have the blows been sustained only during the time-frame of the play? And, considering the dialogue between Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse, one may also ask: do the masters have good reasons to "correct" their servants through violence? This shows an often-unnoticed aspect of the nature of the comic: masters constantly assault servants for no good reason, while they do not oppose their senseless beating.

Why do slaves (or servants for that matter) not revolt against their masters? Is it because they have no choice, that is, if they revolt against their masters, they put their life in danger? Or is it because they are somehow satisfied with their condition, i.e., they want to keep their painful life rather than risk it in order to achieve freedom and a less painful life? The play seems to side with the second answer. On the other hand, there are characters who would rather die than undergo suffering that they do not wish for themselves. This is a core element of tragic characters such as Romeo and Juliet.

Death can be associated, of course, with loss and disease. But disease and loss of loved ones are related to a kind of pain not associated with the infliction of the pain of death itself on the individual. In this sense, if we do not consider its ambivalence, there is not much to be indicated regarding death unless to acknowledge that it is the ultimate kind of pain. But however painful death might be, if it ends all others, why does not everyone make their own quietus? This is part of Hamlet's brooding on death:[9]

> For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
>
> . . .
>
> When he himself might his quietus make
>
> With a bare bodkin?
>
> Who would fardels bear,
>
> . . .
>
> But that the dread of something after death,
>
> The undiscovered country from whose bourn
>
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
>
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
>
> Than fly to others that we know not of? (*Ham*. 3.1.70-82)

The threat of fiercer pains in the undiscovered country is, to Hamlet, the reason why everyone does not commit suicide. Wilson Knight calls Hamlet the ambassador of death: "Except for the original murder of Hamlet's father, the *Hamlet* universe is one of healthy and robust life, good-nature, humour, romantic strength, and welfare: against this background is the figure of Hamlet pale with

[9] The source of *Hamlet*'s text is Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, which was later translated by François de Belleforest, but the origins of this text can be traced back to old European legends. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the story of a medieval prince of Denmark, whose father, the previous king, had been murdered by his brother, Claudius, Hamlet's uncle. The plot of Shakespeare's play begins when Hamlet is visited by the ghost of his father, who impels his son to avenge him. From this moment on, Hamlet spends most of the play hesitating about avenging his father and questioning himself about why he hesitates. At the wedding reception of the newly crowned king Claudius and queen Gertrude, Claudius dispatches ambassadors to Norway, imploring an old enemy to keep his ambitious nephew Fortinbras in check. They also try to bring Hamlet, who is still mourning the death of his father, back into the royal life and ask him not to return to university. Hamlet agrees, seeing no choice in his circumstances, reluctantly accepting what he considers an ungrateful mother. In order not to not arouse Claudius's concern about his suspicion regarding the murder, Hamlet pretends to be mad. Claudius and Gertrude summon two school friends of Hamlet's, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to find out what is wrong, and a group of players that Hamlet was fond to see. With the sudden arrival of his two friends, Hamlet knows that something is wrong, but sees an opportunity to prove once and for all if the ghost is telling the truth. He asks the players to enact a short work that mirrors his father's murder and then he observes his uncle's reaction. Claudius is horrified by what he sees, which drives him to a chapel and Hamlet on to his task. Hamlet, however, still hesitates to kill Claudis. After Hamlet murders a member of the court, he is sent off to England. When he returns, Claudius plots Hamlet's death, but is also killed alongside Gertrude.

the consciousness of death. He is the ambassador of death walking amid life" (*The Wheel of Fire* 35). Hamlet, however, does not have any sort of lust for death. The association between death and sexuality, which occurs in this same speech, does not reveal a lust for death, but Hamlet's aversion to sexuality, which will be discussed in chapter 4.

*Rom*eo *and Juliet* provides additional musings on death. In 3.2, a conflict of kinship affects Juliet:

> NURSE Will you speak well of him that killed your cousin? 96
> JULIET Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?
> Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name,
> When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?
> But wherefore, villain, didst thou kill my cousin?
> That villain cousin would have killed my husband.
> Back, foolish tears, back to your native spring,
> Your tributary drops belong to woe,
> Which you mistaking offer up to joy.
> My husband lives that Tybalt would have slain,
> And Tybalt's dead that would have slain my husband:
> All this is comfort, wherefore weep I then?
> Some word there was, worser than Tybalt's death,
> That murdered me (*Rom*. 3.2.109)

There is worse news, to Juliet, than Tybalt's death:

> 'Tybalt is dead, and Romeo banished.'
> That 'banished', that one word 'banished',
> Hath slain ten thousand Tybalts. (*Rom*. 3.2.112-14)

What Juliet feels is that Romeo's banishment is considerably worse than the death of a next of kin:

> But with a rear-ward following Tybalt's death,
> 'Romeo is banished': to speak that word,
> Is father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet,
> All slain, all dead. 'Romeo is banished!'
> There is no end, no limit, measure, bound,
> In that word's death, no words can that woe sound. (*Rom*. 3.2.121-26)

G. Blakemore Evans' (the editor of the NCS editions of the play) gloss of line 126 is: there is no limit to "the death-dealing power of that word ('banished')" (NCS 149). That is, the pain of Romeo being banished is worse than that of her entire family (including herself) being killed. Romeo does not think much differently:

> ROMEO Ha, banishment? be merciful, say 'death':
> For exile hath more terror in his look,
> Much more than death. Do not say 'banishment'!
> FRIAR LAWRENCE Here from Verona art thou banished.
> Be patient, for the world is broad and wide.
> ROMEO There is no world without Verona walls,
> But purgatory, torture, hell itself:
> Hence 'banished' is banished from the world,
> And world's exile is death; then 'banished'
> Is death mistermed. (*Rom*. 3.3.12-21)

To Romeo, "'banished' / Is death mistermed." Thus, to him, the pain of banishment equals the ultimate pain, that of death. Death, by itself, is necessarily bad news, i.e., negative, and something to be avoided, unlike sexual success, which is something to be sought for. Both Romeo and Juliet indicate that there is a sort of pain worse than death. In their particular case, exile from Verona and consequently from one another. The main factor, nonetheless, remains that death is a sort of extreme pain, and one to be avoided, but not always the ultimate sort of pain.

Comic characters, like the Dromios, on the other hand, do not see death as a form of relief to undesired pain. The contentment with which the two Dromios have when they meet each other, contrasted with the bleakness that results from the meeting of the two Antipholuses, in my view, seems to be more meaningful than the foreseen joy that is commonly expected from a comedy. The Antyphouloses are wealthy blow-inflicting merchants, but the Dromios are penniless blow-taking servants; nonetheless, they are the ones who have a natural capacity for happiness, regardless of the uncountable blows – or, as Hamlet puts it, the "thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to" (*Ham*. 3.1.62-63) – they take either from their masters or from life.

According to Frye, in "tragedy, of course, enmity almost always includes hatred" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 168). But hatred is not something exclusive to tragedy. "Hate" and a few derivations (including adjectives, verbs, and the variation "hatred") have the most occurrences in *Coriolanus*,

with 23 entries. *Richard III* has 22; third place goes to *Romeo and Juliet*, with 21 occurrences; fourth place, surprisingly, goes not to a tragedy, but to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with 20 occurrences, surpassing even the hate of Shylock (eight in *The Merchant of Venice*) and Iago (seven in *Othello*). It is not surprising that hate, as Frye has observed, has a remarkable presence in tragedies such as *Coriolanus, Romeo and Juliet,* and *Othello.* Neither it is surprising that it is a recurrent word in a comedy like *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Shylock, the comic villain, has considerable presence. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which, at first glance, seems to be a light comedy, the number of occurrences of the entries of the word occur in the subplot of the young lovers. Fortunately, in that world, there is Puck to make all well again through his power of making slender accident occur at his will:

> And the country proverb known,
> That every man should take his own,
> In your waking shall be shown.
> Jack shall have Jill,
> Naught shall go ill:
> The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well. (*MND* 3.2.458-ff.)

The comic and the tragic are subordinated to the same painful reality. The difference resides in how a character takes or accepts this reality, i.e., they either accept pain as it is, in the case of the comic, or attempt to impose a new cycle of pain.

The best example of a comic character in Shakespeare's work is Sir John Falstaff, who appears in three plays,[10] while Hamlet is the best example of a tragic character. This is so because

[10] Sir John Falstaff is present in both parts of *King Henry IV* and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a play that was rumored to have been commissioned by queen Elizabeth. I consider only, however, the Falstaff of the two histories. *The First part of King Hery IV* tells the story of prince Hal leaving behind his days carousing in the Boar's Head Tavern to assume the royal role into which he was born. While King Henry IV is concerned about the oncoming Welsh rebellion, Hal, Falstaff, and Hal's friend, Poins, plan another robbery of some rich religious pilgrims. Hal plots with Poins that he will rob Falstaff and his other cronies after they have robbed the pilgrims and mentions to the audience that while he has lived a wild life, he secretly does not possess or endorse criminal leanings and will make amends when the time comes. After the robbery, Falstaff rails against Poins and Hal for not coming to his aid and then fabricates a story of how he fought off an army of thieves. Falstaff becomes angry, but lets it go. Word comes of the rebellion and Hal loathes having to meet with his father. The king denounces his son thinking he cannot count on him in this desperate time. However, the two reconcile to meet the challenge the rebellion. Through a series of comic scenes involving Falstaff, the troops are gathered on both sides of the battle of Shrewsbury. With the rebellion put down and Hal and the king reconciled, all seems well as Falstaff ruminates on his life, honor, and other themes that come across as silly ravings but are deeply thoughtful in a pragmatic sense. The stage is set for the second part, which features the ending of one dynasty and the beginning of another and the upshot from that change. In *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, after the decisive battle of Shrewsbury the rebel forces inimical to king Henry IV retreat and attempt to regroup. King Henry IV becomes sick. Hal returns reluctantly into the shadow of a distant father as he awaits his

Falstaff embraces reality as it is, while Hamlet disgusts it. According to Bloom, "Falstaff and Hamlet scarcely can be routinized or institutionalized. Falstaff disdains any task or mission, and Hamlet cannot tolerate being the protagonist of a revenge tragedy" (*Shakespeare* 279). Moreover, "Shakespearean drama is ultimately a theater of mind, and what matters most about Falstaff is his vitalization of the intellect, in direct contrast to Hamlet's conversion of the mind to the vision of annihilation" (*Shakespeare* 282-83). Finally, "Hamlet is death's ambassador while Falstaff is the embassy of life" (*Falstaff* 9). Falstaff is the epitome of the comic sense because "[t]ime annihilates other Shakespearean protagonists, but not Falstaff, who dies for love" (*Shakespeare* 272). Furthermore, Falstaff is the true and perfect image of vitalism, vitality, and life itself (*Shakespeare* 284). Additionally, "Falstaff . . . is wisdom, wit, self-knowledge, mastery of reality" (298). Lastly, his "zest for life pervades his torrent of language and laughter" (*Falstaff* 12). In short, Falstaff represents vitalism and passion for both life and reality. He is the best example of what Frye calls salvation because his thoughts and his actions are positive in regard to the continuation of life – rather than its destruction – however painful it might be. Hamlet, on the other hand, through his morbid disgust for human life and the pain associated with it, is negative in regard to the continuation of life, i.e., Hamlet is bound to destroy life rather than continue it.

Salvation, as I understand it, relates to the meaning often derived from comedies and usually expressed as redemption, reconciliation, and acceptance. My view is mainly derived from Frye's, who wrote extensively on the comic sense. Based of Frye's theory, key-words for the comic are: redemption, reconciliation, acceptance, rebirth, renewal, freedom, or release (from irrational laws, tyrannical whims, a humor, or a mechanical form of repetitive behavior), and expanded energy. My point concerning the comic and the tragic senses is to remark how the hero of the respective play is decisive in forming the meaning of either salvation or destruction. My interest is not so much in the generic class of comedy or tragedy, but in the meaning of the comic and the tragic, and this meaning greatly depends on the nature of character.

---

death and the ascension that will follow. Elsewhere, life returns to normal outside the royal court. Falstaff returns to the Boar's Head Tavern, where his ladies, the Hostess and prostitute Doll Tearsheet, await. The Hostess threatens to have him arrested for debt if he does not fulfill his promise of marrying her. However, Falstaff averts both obligations by having an old acquaintance to pay his debts, promising the prince will repay him. Though Hal temporarily tries to take up where he left off, he finds the tavern less and less to his liking as his father dies and he ponders the reputation that he has built up for himself. He makes the decision to leave it all behind and pursue the kingship completely, even overzealously trying the crown on when he thinks his father is dead – a scene which will be discussed in the last chapter. Capturing his son in the act, the king warns Hal about the hardship of both becoming and remaining a king. In Hal's public coronation, Falstaff arrives with his crew to take their supposed place with the new monarch. However, he rejects the friendship of Falstaff.

3. Will and Self

The nature of a character is fueled by individual will. Will is an individual trait, a force that drives one to think and act. What a character thinks and how he or she acts is going to qualify that character as either comic or tragic. Additionally, this individual force that causes will is expressed somehow, and the result is an individual self. Hence, "will" and "self" may, in a sense, be interchangeable: a self is formed by a character's will, and yet we do not know with certainty how will is formed. According to Bloom, "Shakespeare's term for our 'self' is 'selfsame,' and *Hamlet* . . . is very much the drama in which the tragic protagonist revises his sense of the selfsame. Not self-fashioning but self-revision; for [Michel] Foucault the self is fashioned, but for Shakespeare it is given, subject to subsequent mutabilities" (*Shakespeare* 411). Stephen Greenblatt, who shares Foucault's view of the self, believes that individual thought is no more than the historical consequence of the circulation of social energies:

> If the textual traces in which we take interest and pleasure are . . . are the signs of contingent social practices, then . . . we can ask how collective beliefs and experiences were shaped, moved from one medium to another, concentrated in manageable aesthetic form, offered for consumption. . . . The "life" that literary works seem to possess long after . . . the death of the culture for which the author wrote is the historical consequence, however transformed and refashioned, of the social energy initially encoded in those works. (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 5-6)

To Greenblatt, "collective beliefs and experiences were shaped, moved from one medium to another"; there is no individual thinking, i.e., language does the thinking for the individual. Additionally, Greenblatt repeatedly finds evidence to show that "massive power structures . . . determine social and psychic reality" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 254) and concludes that "fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions—family, religion, state—were inseparably intertwined" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 256). Again: "In all my texts and documents, . . . the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. . . . If there remained traces of free choice, the choice was among possibilities whose range was strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 256). According to McAlindon, although elsewhere Greenblatt "accords Shakespeare a dangerous and sinister individuality, in his essay on

'The Circulation of Social Energy' he [Greenblatt] conducts a subtle attempt to dissolve his identity and deny his manifest superiority to all his contemporaries" (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 6). Additionally, the "determinist bias came to prominence first in Greenblatt's seminal study, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*" (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 10). According to McAlindon, in Greenblatt's eminently Foucaultian Epilogue, he "fatalistically sees disciplinary society producing the modes of opposition that in the end merely confirm the system from which the rebellious individual never escapes" (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 10). McAlindon calls this view deterministic or fatalistic because it regards human will as a product of the culture of a specific time and place. In Greenblatt's view, therefore, the inner self is an illusion, because will is overdetermined by the culture of a time and place.

4. Character and Personality

With the importance of individual will in mind, let us explore the view of recent authors on characters. According to Marjorie Garber, as she writes in *Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession*, in popular culture, character

> means ethics, values, and hard work: virtue, industry, and ambition. Personality means almost the opposite: celebrity, fame, likability, a talent for publicity and conspicuous consumption. Character is enduring; personality is superficial. But it was not always thus. . . . In the early years of the twentieth century . . . a certain dissatisfaction with "character" had set in among psychologists and others who regarded it as too closely tied to moral and ethical judgment. "Personality" became the preferred term in psychology departments, though the ethical sense of "character" never entirely lost its popular appeal . . . And, in the meantime, psychoanalysts, following [Sigmund] Freud, used words like "character," "character traits," and "character types," as well as "personality," in ways that were descriptive and diagnostic, medical rather than aspirational. (*Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession* 242)

In short, character "was ethical. Personality was psychological" (*Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession* 243). Garber continues:

> If "character" in the works of moralists and educationalists was ethical and inspirational, "character" in Freud's work might be said, by contrast, to indicate the presence of, or a tendency toward, some kind of psychological problem. "Character traits" for Freud are

> "permanent"[11] and "unalterable,"[12] in part because their origins in earlier personal development have been forgotten or repressed. As early as 1900, Freud had written, "What we describe as our 'character' is based on the memory-traces of our impressions; and, moreover, the impressions which have had the greatest effect on us . . . are precisely the ones which scarcely ever become conscious impressions; and, moreover, the impressions which have had the greatest effect on us. . . are precisely the ones which scarcely ever become conscious."[13] (*Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession* 248)

Garber concludes: "'the personality' for Freud is 'psychical'—i.e., mental, an aspect of the mind. The internal struggles of this 'personality,' including repression, identification, idealization, resistance, and displacement, all contribute to what Freud calls, in this same lecture, the 'formation of character."[14] (*Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession* 251). In conclusion, to Freud, character "is the outward sign, so to speak, of an inward personality" (*Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession* 251).

Bloom, when discussing the personality of Hamlet and what makes it sublime – which will be discussed in detail in chapter 4 –, states that personality is "a mode of freedom" (*Shakespeare* 427). If personality is, indeed, freedom, such freedom is bound to make one with a singular

---

[11] "We can at any rate lay down a formula for the way in which character in its final shape is formed out of the constituent instincts: the permanent character-traits are either unchanged prolongations of the original instincts, or sublimations of those instincts, or reaction-formations against them" ("Character and Anal Erotism" 175).

[12] "The effects of traumas are of two kinds, positive and negative. The former are attempts to bring the trauma into operation once again – that is, to remember the forgotten experience or, better still, to make it real, to experience a repetition of it anew, or, even if it was only an early emotional relationship, to revive it in an analogous relationship with someone else. We summarize these efforts under the name of 'fixations' to the trauma and as a 'compulsion to repeat'. They may be taken up into what passes as a normal ego and, as permanent trends in it, may lend it unalterable character-traits" ("Moses and Monotheism" 75).

[13] From "The Interpretation of Dreams", pp. 539-40.

[14] "I myself am far from satisfied with these remarks on identification; but it will be enough if you can grant me that the installation of the super-ego can be described as a successful instance of identification with the parental agency. . . . With his abandonment of the Oedipus complex a child must, as we can see, renounce the intense object-cathexes which he has deposited with his parents, and it is as a compensation for this loss of objects that there is such a strong intensification of the identifications with his parents which have probably long been present in his ego. Identifications of this kind as precipitates of object-cathexes that have been given up will be repeated often enough later in the child's life . . . In the course of development the superego also takes on the influences of those who have stepped into the place of parents-educators, teachers, people chosen as ideal models. Normally it departs more and more from the original parental figures; it becomes, so to say, more impersonal. Nor must it be forgotten that a child has a different estimate of its parents at different periods of its life. At the time at which the Oedipus complex gives place to the super-ego they are something quite magnificent; but later they lose much of this. Identifications then come about with these later parents as well, and indeed they regularly make important contributions to the formation of character" ("New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis," 63-64).

personality distinctive – as the dictionary definition suggests.[15] The dictionary definition, of course, ceases being helpful when the influence of popular culture, as Garber suggests, starts to pervade it and we begin to understand a celebrity or a politician as a personality because of fame or notoriety. I am not, however, interested in a precise distinction between character and personality. My main interest is in what Freud refers to as "permanent" or "untearable" character traits. These traits, I argue, define character as either comic or tragic.

5. Characterological Emphasis

In addition to a characterological emphasis, there are two other critical principles that I would like to highlight here. The first is part of McAlindon's set of principles:

> Fundamental to the essays in this book are the following intentions: to concentrate on what I judge to be the play's intended meanings; to take due account of the entire text in the process of interpretation; to attend where profitable to aspects of historical context other than the political; to enhance appreciation of the dramatist's conscious art; and to encourage readers to empathise with his perspectives on character, action, and life. (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 1)

While all of these principles can often be interdependent, the one I would like to emphasize is the third: to take due account of the entire text in the process of interpretation. If we are to take the narrative background of fiction into account in characterological analysis, each individual part of the whole text has to be accounted for with respect to what the whole contributes to the main meaning. In other words, while a literary text may present several different subject-matters and many scattered tropes and images, for the purposes of my methodology, they converge on the individuality of character.

The second principle is the use of what Antony Nuttall refers to as "Transparent criticism" as opposed to "Opaque language" (*A New Mimesis* 80). According to Lionel Charles Knights, "Falstaff is not a man, but a choric commentary" (*How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?* 15). According to Nuttall, in such a statement, the "Opaque language of criticism rises up to condemn its former ally, the Transparent language. Knights's unguarded epigram expresses a hard formalist view and can be easily rebutted. Falstaff is quite clearly presented, through fiction, as a human

[15] According to online version of the Merriam-Webster: "the complex of characteristics that distinguishes an individual or a nation or group; distinction or excellence of personal and social traits; a person of importance, prominence, renown, or notoriety"

being" (*A New Mimesis* 82). According to McAlindon, "Falstaff not only poses from time to time as a godly, bible-quoting, and self-righteous Protestant, but is also endowed with a secular form of the extraordinary . . . secular . . . grace" (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 83). According to A. C. Bradley, the

> bliss of freedom gained in humour is the essence of Falstaff. His humour is not directed only or chiefly against obvious absurdities . . . old father antic the law, and the categorical imperative, and our station and its duties, and conscience, and reputation, and other people's opinions, and all sorts of nuisances. I say he is therefore their enemy; but I do him wrong; to say that he is their enemy implies that he regards them as serious and recognises their power, when in truth he refuses to recognise them at all. They are to him absurd; . . . He will make truth appear absurd . . . and honour . . . and patriotism, . . . and duty, . . . and war . . . and religion . . . and the fear of death, by maintaining perfectly untouched, in the face of imminent peril and even while he *feels* the fear of death, the very same power of dissolving it in persiflage that he shows when he sits at ease in his inn. These are the wonderful achievements which he performs, not with the sourness of a cynic, but with the gaiety of a boy. And, therefore, we praise him, we laud him, for he offends none but the virtuous, and denies that life is real or life is earnest, and delivers us from the oppression of such nightmares, and lifts us into the atmosphere of perfect freedom. (*Oxford Lectures on Poetry* 186-87)

According to Bradley, then, Falstaff does not even recognize ethical "absurdities". He makes truth, honor, patriotism, duty, war, and religion look like absurdities. He even shrugs off the fear of death. And because of this power, according to Bradley, he delivers us from the oppression of ethical beliefs and "and lifts us into the atmosphere of perfect freedom". McAlindon also argues that Falstaff's dominant characteristic is his ability to outwit his cunning and malicious interrogators and accusers: "What results then is not a simple piece of anti-Puritan satire but a form of comedy which turns a Puritan butt into an exceptionally appealing character with a quicksilver mind and tongue" (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 84-85). In this sense, opaque language would not be able to account for the magnitude of Falstaff's individuality.

Once again, as previously discussed, Falstaff is Shakespeare's epitome of the comic. And this comic sense emerges from *the character* of Falstaff and all his individual traits. Bloom argues that "while it is true that Shakespeare's persons are only images or complex metaphors, our

pleasure in Shakespeare primarily comes from the persuasive illusion that these shadows are cast by entities as substantial as ourselves" (*Shakespeare* 281). Furthermore, according to Toril Moi,

> *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?* is a flat-out attack on the belief that it is intellectually interesting to discuss Shakespeare's characters. Pouring scorn on the idea that Shakespeare was first and foremost a "creator of characters," someone uniquely capable of creating men and women as "real as life," Knights singles out A. C. Bradley . . . as one of the worst offenders (*HMC*, 1). Bradley and other critics of his ilk, Knights argues, show their critical abjection by praising Shakespeare "because he provides 'the illusion of reality,' because he puts 'living people' upon the stage, and because he creates characters who are 'independent of the work in which they appear' (*HMC*, 26)." (*Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* 33)

Moi goes on to explain that, in the context of T. S. Eliot's, I. A. Richard's and Knights's formalism, the critic's duty is

> to examine first the words of which the play is composed, then the total effect which this combination of words produces in our mind" (*HMC*, 7). . . . critics must focus on the concrete and the particular, the details of language itself. They must examine the "quality of the verse," the "rhythm and imagery," and "Shakespeare's handling of language" (*HMC*, 17), so as to establish the "pattern" (*HMC*, 50n), the "pattern of the whole" (*HMC*, 64), or the "dramatic pattern" (*HMC*, 28) of Shakespeare's text. In short, they must behave as readers of modernist poetry. (*Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* 36)

According to Knights, in "the mass of Shakespeare criticism there is not a hint that 'character' – like 'plot,' 'rhythm,' 'construction' and all our other critical counters – is merely an abstraction" (*Explorations* 15). But why, Moi inquires, is Knights so convinced that "'character' and 'plot' are abstractions? And why doesn't it occur to him that 'pattern,' 'dramatic pattern,' and 'total response' are no less abstract? What exactly is abstract about a character in a play?" (*Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* 36)

Moi also indicates that "Stanley Cavell noted that the taboo on character talk appeared to be grounded on no real arguments" (*Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* 38):

> [The critic] has been made to believe or assume, by some philosophy or other, that characters are not people, that what can be known about people cannot be known about characters, and in particular that psychology is either not appropriate to the study of these

> fictional beings or that psychology is the province of psychologists and not to be ventured from the armchairs of literary studies. But is any of this more than the merest assumption; unexamined principles which are part of current academic fashion? (*Must We Mean What We Say?* 268)

As I discussed previously, one current academic fashion is to consider the inner self as a deterministic product of social or historical circumstances. In this line of thought, the individuality of character is brushed aside. Moi concludes:

> What could be more striking than the difference between an essay discussing characters' motivations and intentions, their emotions, moral dilemmas, and existential crises, and an essay focusing on language, structures, and patterns? Clearly, an essay on imagery in *Macbeth* will be utterly different from an essay dissecting the characters' moral dilemmas. But this is a difference grounded in the critic's aesthetic, intellectual, and professional preferences and interests, not in some kind of inexorable logical necessity. There is no fundamental reason why a critic can't mix character analysis and formal analysis, or why she can't enrich her moral character analysis with convincing analysis of verbal patterns. (*Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* 40)

I therefore argue that characterological analysis is not hindered by formal aspects – such as structures, patterns, and imagery. In fact, the formal aspects contribute to characterological analysis because it is how an individual character receives external elements and conveys the result of his or her impressions to the world, and not the external elements themselves, that matters. Structures, patterns, imagery and even language are relevant insofar as they reveal something about an individual character.

Samuel Johnson claimed that in "the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species" ("Preface to Shakespeare" 12). William Hazlitt, commenting on this passage, observes that what Johnson said of Shakespeare's characters "is in contradiction to what [Alexander] Pope had observed, and to what everyone else feels, that each character is a species, instead of being an individual. He in fact found the general species or *didactic* form in Shakespear's characters, which was all he sought or cared for" (*Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* 7-8). Harold Goddard argues that Shakespeare "was interested in life and character, not in political abstractions" (*Meaning of Shakespeare*, v. 1, 63). Andrew Cecil. Bradley contends that the "dictum that, with Shakespeare, 'character is destiny' is no doubt

an exaggeration, and one that may mislead (for many of his tragic personages, if they had not met with peculiar circumstances, would have escaped a tragic end, and might even have lived fairly untroubled lives); but it is the exaggeration of a vital truth" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 13). Finally, Bloom states that "the representation of human character and personality remains always the supreme literary value, whether in drama, lyric, or narrative" (*Shakespeare* 3-4). Regardless of the divergences among these authors, their focus is always on character.

In my discussions, I follow in the tradition of Samuel Johnson, William Hazlitt, A. C. Bradley, Harold Goddard, and Harold Bloom, of an emphasis on character. A character with individual will thinks and acts autonomously and is not overdetermined by social factors. For this reason, such a character ends up attracting attention, for the good or for the bad. When for the good – and this is part of my argument – the character is comic: when for the bad, tragic. As will be discussed in chapter 1, notions such as "tragic" and "comic" bear more importance in understanding character than plot.[16] As Bloom insists: "Again, Shakespeare writes no genre;

[16] The plays in the First Folio were divided into comedies, histories, and tragedies. Over the years, other subcategories, such as romances and problem plays were devised by critics. Specific genre classifications, in my view, are often not very helpful, but broader and more general classifications might prove helpful. In tragedy, deaths are not natural, but caused by external factors. In histories, in which wars are common, deaths are also not natural, but they are not tragic. In comedies, even natural deaths are averted. What I am indicating here, therefore, is that elements that define genre – such as marriages in comedies, wars in histories, and violence in tragedy – lose relevance when we pay more attention to character. Hence, in my view, genre classifications are only helpful insofar as they subserve characterological features. In other words, genre is relevant insofar as it helps identifying the presence of a tragic or comic character traits in a play. Genre classification would vary according to editors in Elizabethan England as well – cf. Andrew's Murphy *Shakespeare in Print* (2003). Let us discuss *Troilus and Cressida* as an example of problematic genre classification. In its quarto version, the play has been dubbed as history. In the Folio, it appears as a tragedy. Currently, it is classified as a comedy. Hence, the play was originally designed, in a general sense, as a tragedy. But there are hardly any elements common to other Shakespearean tragedies present in *Troilus and Cressida*. In this play, there is no catastrophe – e.g., a caused death outside of war – either avoided or prompted by a respectively comic or tragic character. Additionally, although there are elements common to histories, like wars, it is not a history either. This play is currently classified as a problem play, and this problematic categorization is discussed by E. M. W. Tillyard in the beginning of his *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (1950). But generic classification can still be helpful for criticism. The problem with genre begins when the ultimate goal of a critic becomes categorization, i.e., when the hunt for structural patterns becomes the focus of critic to the detriment of aesthetic understanding and appreciation. From a pragmatic perspective, meaning is independent of genre. In some cases, however, acknowledgment of genre can be more helpful than in others. According to A. C. Hamilton, who wrote the introduction to Frye's *The Myth of Deliverance*, to Frye, "the 'problem' of any play, or of any literary work, lies in its structure, not its content" (xiii). As Hamilton indicates, Frye had a strong formalist stance as a critical principle, of which *The Myth of Deliverance* is a clear instance. The three chapters of the book are entitled "The Reversal of Action", "The Reversal of Energy", and "The Reversal of Reality". Hence, it is clear that he values structure of plot – in which reversals occur – over anything else. For now, what is important to have in mind is that, despite Frye's strong formalist influence – which we can also observe in the introduction of *Anatomy of Criticism* – and his clinging to structure of plot and to genre, he does not ignore that it is exactly the idiosyncrasies of human character that are the main object of literature. As Johnson observes, in Shakespeare's plays, the "plots are often so loosely formed that a very slight consideration may improve them, and so carelessly pursued, that he seems not always fully to comprehend his own design" ("Preface to Shakespeare" 21). One thing that Shakespeare teaches us is that we must pay more attention to character rather than to plot or structure. Therefore, I deviate from Frye in regard to his formalist tendencies. Despite agreeing with him

extravagance, a wandering beyond limits, is his truest mode. He will not be confined by any convention or by any intellectual enterprise" (*Shakespeare* 660).

Therefore, with emphasis on character in mind, it follows that character can essentially be of two types: either comic or tragic. Such categorization depends on the nature of the will of the character. If a character is, for instance, *willing* to avoid violence to achieve his or her goals, he or she is comic. If not, he or she is tragic. Although I consider the views of a few authors who wrote about comedy and tragedy, the main approach I adopt is that of Frye's. Having in mind Frye's theory of comedy, which conveys the meaning of salvation, i.e., a comic character is *willing* to maintain the social *status quo*, it follows that tragedy conveys the meaning of destruction, i.e., a tragic character is *willing* to disturb the *status quo* to achieve his or her goals.

But what is the cause of will? Is it biological? How far do environmental causes influence human behavior? Do material conditions affect the way we feel? Does language influence the way we think? One of the biggest questions anyone can ask is: can we control the way we think and feel? As discussed previously, I do not believe that self is wholly historically fashioned, i.e., it is not solely determined by the culture of a time and place. In my view, it is given and then *provided a form through action and language*. The fact that it can be provided a shape does not mean that that shape is determined by culture.

This discussion could easily lead to an intellectual trap because the two views seem deterministic: in one, the self is determined by social and cultural environment; in the other, it is naturally endowed, but its final form is formed individually. Therefore, the major difference would reside in the origin of cause, but there is another difference, nonetheless; in the second view, besides the origin being different, it is not fully deterministic because there is individual, and thus not social, agency. A self cannot be abruptly changed at will since it is mostly given. What individual will does is to freely provide a final form. Greenblatt argues for social and cultural determinism of the self. Bloom and McAlindon, for free individual shaping. Therefore, what is to be indicated here is that expression of one's own consciousness does not entail "self-fashioning", i.e., expressing inner thoughts does not mean that self is significantly formed by external cultural aspects.

---

regarding his major division of literature, contrary to Frye, I argue that the main cause of the meanings of the comic and the tragic are characters, and not plots.

The point with this latter discussion is to indicate that I do not consider that will suffers significant influence from social environment in the plays. I adopt the view that the cause of human will cannot be determined. What we have available is the *outcome* of what an individual self is. In the ensuing chapters, I will show how characters embody a comic or tragic nature in five plays: *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia, tricks Shylock, the comic villain, into quitting an attempt against Antonio's life. Salvation is met since violence is averted. Therefore, what makes Portia a comic heroine is the fact that she manages to maintain social order by avoiding bloodshed. In *Measure for Measure*, Vincentio also maintains social order. The protagonist manages, through irony, to keep hidden the motivations that result from human will. Therefore, what makes Vincentio and the other characters in the paly comic is the concealed pleasure that characters enjoy in both giving and taking pain. In both comedies, therefore, salvation is achieved because the social order is maintained, although the reasons for this maintenance are concealed. In *Hamlet*, on the other hand, social order is disturbed by Hamlet. His refusal to kill Claudius is the cause of his own demise, but Hamlet is also responsible for the death of an entire family: Polonius, Ophelia, and Laertes. Therefore, what makes Hamlet tragic is that he is not *willing* to accept the structure of reality, which leads him to disturb the *status quo*. In *King Lear*, Lear also refuses to accept the world for what it is. The banishment of Cordelia is the cause of most of the destruction that ensues in the plot. His ensuing madness is a sign of the disturbance he causes in social order. What makes Lear tragic, hence, is that the disturbance for which he is responsible leads him to conclude that suffering is the essence of life. Both in *King Lear* and in *Hamlet*, the tragic sense is conveyed by a structural unacceptance of the structure of reality, which leads to an overall meaning of cosmological emptiness. Finally, in *Macbeth*, the protagonist undergoes a change in nature. The transformation of nature which Macbeth suffers is not due to social determinism, but due to an unknown force represented by the witches and the spirits that control them. In this sense, Macbeth is more acted upon rather than actually someone that acts. Nonetheless, his transformation of nature goes from a partially comic (who would have accepted the pain) to a tragic one (someone who unwilling inflicts pain on subjects who also take pain unwillingly). His final soliloquy reflects his change of nature since it resembles the cosmological emptiness conveyed by *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

In short, the meaning of a narrative text is conveyed mainly not by genre, but by the nature of characters. In Shakespearean drama, the nature of characters can be either of two kinds: comic

or tragic. Comic characters endure the current cycle pain, while tragic ones do not. Tragic characters operate in a comic background. That is to say that the reality of Shakespearean drama (the general circumstances of plot and the individual psychology of characters) is mixed, but characters are either comic or tragic. One of the meanings conveyed by the comic sense is that of concealment; by the tragic, of exposure of what is behind that concealment. In conclusion, I argue that, in Shakespearean drama, the nature of characters can convey two main senses: the comic and the tragic, of which we see a transition in *Macbeth*.

Chapter 1. The Problem of Will in Shakespeare

Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.
This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange
That even our loves should with our fortunes change,
For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.
–William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.2.180-84

In the first section of this chapter, I will present instances of Shakespeare's work in which the human will is displayed as an object of concern – even if indirectly. In the second section, I will elaborate on the theoretical discussion of the comic and the tragic as presented in the Introduction. My aim in this chapter is therefore to show how the human will in Shakespearean drama displays the two denominations of the comic and the tragic.

1.1. Individual Will and the Issue of Terminology

Hamlet is a play largely about human will. As will be thoroughly discussed in chapter 4, the characters in the play attempt to find answers to questions like 'why do I feel like this?' or 'why does he or she behave like that?' Hamlet, in particular, suffers because he feels guilty for not feeling compelled to avenge his father. The problem of will is a problem whose question is: why does this or that character feel compelled to commit a certain act? The passage from *Hamlet* used as an epigraph provides what probably is the best depiction of these issues in Shakespeare. Either grief or joy spurs us to action, but the call to action fades along with the feeling of either grief or joy. Grief becomes joy, and joy turns to grief, based on unpredictable twists of fate. It remains an open question whether love drives one's fate, or one's fate drives love. We see reverberations of Hamlet's cosmological view in, for instance, the conflict of deities in *Pericles*, the conflict of powers in *The Tempest*, the conflict between nature and fortune in the musings about will in *As You Like It* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, and the conflict between nurture and nature in *Coriolanus*.

1.1.1. *Pericles*[17]

In the introduction, I briefly mentioned how "will" and "self" might be interchangeable words, because of their semantic proximity, i.e., although they pertain to the same semantic field and refer to similar things, the border separating the meaning of such words may become blurred. The definition of these words is not problematic only within a theoretical realm, but also in pragmatic terms, such as notions like "fortune" and "nature". In *Pericles*, for instance, after Pericles wins the tournament, he says: "'Tis more by fortune, lady, than my merit" (*Per*. 2.3.11). John Gower, as chorus, in the epilogue, says:

> In Pericles, his queen and daughter seen,
> Although assailed with fortune fierce and keen,
> Virtue preserved from fell destruction's blast,
> Led on by heaven, and crowned with joy at last. (*Per*. 3-6)

Fortune assails, but virtue, which is led by heaven, crowns with joy. Which is the superior entity, fortune, or heaven? That is, which force prevails when humans are endowed with gifts or have their courses of action predetermined? In *Pericles*, there are only two deities: Neptune and Diana, and Diana seemingly wins. What are we to make of that victory? Pericles had attributed his victory in the tournament to fortune, and Gower says that fortune is the one entity that assails. What are we to make of this inconstancy in the hierarchy of natural entities and deities? In the worlds of Shakespeare's plays, do humans have free will or are they controlled by external forces?

1.1.2. *The Tempest*[18]

These lines from *The Tempest* are ambiguous as to what is meant by fortune:

---

[17] The story of the play begins with Pericles searching for a suitable bride. When he reveals king Antiochus' incest with his daughter, Pericles flees to Tyre with an assassin on his trail. Pericles is shipwrecked in Pentapolis, where a tournament is being held, and which he wins. On his travels away from Tyre – continuing to flee Antiochus' wrath – Pericles marries Thaisa, who is believed to have died shortly after giving birth to their daughter Marina during a storm at sea. Pericles passes off his young daughter Marina to be raised by others. In the meantime, Thaisa becomes a priestess in the temple of Diana. After many years, Pericles ascends the Tyrian throne and receives a second chance at life and love with the miraculous reunion of his family.

[18] The plot follows the story of Prospero and his daughter Miranda. A power struggle had lead Prospero, the former duke of Milan, into exile with Miranda on a remote island This was caused by his ambitious brother, Antonio, who, with the help of Alonzo, king of Naples, seized the court. Prospero, over the years, has become an adept magician, controlling storms, commanding magical creatures such the spirit Ariel, his messenger, and the half sea monster Caliban. In an attempt to put past conflicts to rest, Prospero conjures up a storm to shipwreck the king of Naples and his party, which includes Antonio. Although nobody dies in the shipwreck, the crew is separated. The sailors are safely stowed in the wreck asleep, while the royals are left to fend for themselves. Ferdinand, the king's son, is taken prisoner by Prospero and is marveled by Miranda, who had never seen another man. As their situation looks hopeless, Antonio

PROSPERO Know thus far forth:
By accident most strange, bountiful fortune
(Now, my dear lady) hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop. (*Temp*. 1.2.177-84)

From its first mention, the word "fortune" has the same meaning in *Hamlet* of accidental chance, When, however, Prospero mentions chance for the second time, he says that he must worship a star, otherwise his good luck will droop. Lear tells Cordelia to mend her speech so that she does not mar her fortunes (*Lear* 1.2.89-90). Thus, fortune might mean either chance or luck, or, as here, consequences.

1.1.3. *All's Well That Ends Well*[19]

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, we can observe the same issue. Helen firmly believes that that she is the master of her own fate:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
. . .
The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
To join like likes and kiss like native things. (*AWW* 1.1.218-25)

---

gets back to his old tricks and convinces Sebastian, Alonzo's brother, that he should kill his brother and assume the throne for himself. Their plan is thwarted time and again by Ariel. Miranda and Ferdinand spend time discovering each other and fall in love while the conspirators try to overthrow Prospero, who is always watching them. Prospero only seeks to have his dukedom restored instead of exacting revenge on his brother. Prospero relishes on Miranda and Ferdinand's marriage and sets Ariel free.

[19] The play is set in contemporary France. Helen is the daughter of a recently deceased court physician who pursues Bertram, count of Rossillion. She uses her family's secrets to cure the ailing king of France to gain Bertram's hand in marriage, but he rejects her. Going from France to Italy, Helen chases the man she loves relentlessly, even faking her own death to trick the French court so as to force Bertram to marry her.

The last two lines are problematic.[20] Although the syntax is not clear, the meaning can be glossed as: "Even people separated by space can be brought together by nature so that they can kiss like they were born in proximity". Again, the problem of semantic proximity: if heaven and nature are the entities that endow humans with qualities and determine the course of action, how can our remedies lie in ourselves? Helen's speech is contradictory because she says, at first, that we are independent from heaven, but then she says that the same heaven exerts some control over us and that nature has the power to join the space in fortune, i.e., nature has the power to bring together two people separated by fortune. But if we have "free scope", as she says, are we not in some way independent of heaven, fortune, and nature? In 3.2, she insists on extreme ownership:

> is't I
> That chase thee from thy country and expose
> Those tender limbs of thine to the event
> Of the none-sparing war? And is it I
> That drive thee from the sportive court (*AWW* 3.2.102-06)

My point here is to show how the determination of will can become uncertain or blurred.

1.1.4. *As You Like It*[21]

As You Like It opens with a scene that shows animosity between two brothers, Orlando and Oliver. Orlando says that his older brother Oliver has ignored their father's will, withholding Orlando's inheritance, denying him an education, and treating him like a peasant. After Orlando leaves, Oliver reveals his hate toward his brother: "I hope I shall see an end of him, for my soul – yet I know not why – hates nothing more than he. Yet he's gentle, never schooled and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved, and indeed so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people who best know him, that I am altogether misprized" (*AYLI* 1.1.127-32). Oliver complains that, although he inherited his father's fortune, he is less fortunate than his brother since Orlando is an upright man, uneducated, yet bright, and everyone loves him.

---

[20] As Susan Snyder, the editor of the OS edition, argues, though "the meaning is clear, the syntax is not, with the object of brings, which in turn governs the next line, unclear or absent. . . . *space* (= something like *difference* at 1.3.112) is an error for *spaces* . . . we . . . have to bend the hypothetical *spaces* to mean 'those separated by space'" (90).

[21] The storyline follows the journey of Rosalind, the daughter of the deposed Duke Senior. Running away from the royal court ruled by the tyrant Duke Frederick, cousins Rosalind and Celia and their clown Touchstone find solace in an attempt to find Rosalind's father in the forest of Arden. Rosalind falls in love with the equally banished Orlando, whose devotion she tests by dressing up like a boy. In the end, Rosalind manages to unite other couples that form in the forest and the plays ends with a celebration of new marriages.

Oliver considers himself, compared to Orlando, to be "altogether misprized" – unfortunate. In the following scene, Rosalind and Celia are introduced and they engage in a "debate" about the distinction between fortune and nature:

> CELIA Let us sit and mock the good housewife Fortune from her wheel, that her gifts may henceforth be bestowed equally.
>
> ROSALIND I would we could do so: for her benefits are mightily misplaced, and the bountiful blindwoman doth most mistake in her gifts to women.
>
> CELIA 'Tis true, for those that she makes fair she scarce makes honest, and those that she makes honest she makes very ill-favouredly.
>
> ROSALIND Nay, now thou goest from Fortune's office to Nature's: Fortune reigns in gifts of the world, not in the lineaments of Nature.
>
> CELIA No? When Nature hath made a fair creature, may she not by Fortune fall into the fire? Though Nature hath given us wit to flout at Fortune, hath not Fortune sent in this fool to cut off the argument? (*AYLI* 1.2.27-36)

Celia wants to mock fortune because it bestows gifts unequally, something Oliver had noticed in the previous scene. She therefore suggests a distinction between fortune and nature. Her premise is that nature gives virtue. According to Celia's conclusion, however, if fortune makes one "fall into fire", i.e., lose virtue (NCS *AYLI* 82), nature does not necessarily offer virtue – since fortune is giving the quality of virtue. Touchstone enters and Celia says: "Peradventure this is not Fortune's work neither but Nature's who, perceiving our natural wits too dull to reason of such goddesses, hath sent this natural for our whetstone" (*AYLI* 1.2.39-43). Touchstone's entrance is neither fortune's nor nature's work. Is the distinction between nature and fortune relevant? As Celia herself said, the two women are mocking both fortune and nature, and, consequently, the distinction between the two. Their pragmatic conclusion is that there is no distinction between fortune and nature, or, if there is one, it is not pragmatically relevant. Another character, Le Beau, enters and the three find an opportunity to mock him:

> LE BEAU Fair princess, you have lost much good sport.
>
> CELIA 'Sport': of what colour?
>
> LE BEAU 'What colour', madam? How shall I answer you?
>
> ROSALIND As wit and fortune will.
>
> TOUCHSTONE *[Imitating Le Beau]* Or as the destinies decrees. (*AYLI* 1.2.78-82)

In the following scene, Adam, Orlando's servant, alerts him:

> . . . what make you here?
> Why are you virtuous? Why do people love you?
> And wherefore are you gentle, strong, and valiant?
> Why would you be so fond to overcome
> The bonny prizer of the humorous Duke?
> Your praise is come too swiftly home before you.
> Know you not, master, to some kind of men
> Their graces serve them but as enemies?
> No more do yours: your virtues, gentle master,
> Are sanctified and holy traitors to you.
> O what a world is this when what is comely
> Envenoms him that bears it! (*AYLI* 1.3.4-15)

Adam is alerting Orlando that the very features that make him amiable to some also make him hateful to others. The first lines of his speech seem to elliptically refer back to the discussion about nature and fortune. Adam seamlessly mingles the questions "what are you doing here?" and "why did you do that?" with "why are you loved and hated?" and "why are you like that?" There seems to be a point to these first three scenes, which comprise the first act. All the characters involved seem to accept that features like virtuousness, charisma and wit are endowed – by fortune, nature, destiny, or anything that cannot be controlled – rather than achieved. In other words, will is given rather than momentarily fashioned by an individual. According to Marjorie Garber, "Rosalind stands alone among Shakespeare's comic heroines as clearly as she stands alone on the stage for the Epilogue. Like Prospero, . . . she tempers her magic with humanity, and were she to divest herself of her doublet and hose, she might justifiably address them as Prospero addresses his 'magic garment': 'Lie there, my art' (*Tempest*, 1.2.24)" ("The Education of Orlando" 71). Those with a comic nature, like that of Rosalind, acknowledge, without resentment, that will is a given fact.

1.1.5. *Coriolanus*[22]

If, in *As You Like It*, the characters do not know if it is either nature or fortune that endows virtue, in *Coriolanus*, the clash is between nature of character and nurturing by the mother. Coriolanus' self is forged, as Nuttall explains:

> Cominius says of Coriolanus,
>
> > He was a kind of nothing, title-less,
> > Till he had forg'd himself a name i' th' fire
> > Of burning Rome. (V. i. 13-15)
>
> From being a kind of nothing he became – never a person, but rather a *thing*, insentient, an instrument, a machine. He is repeatedly spoken of in these terms. Cominius calls him 'a thing of blood' (II. ii. 107). Coriolanus himself, in strange exultation, cries out to his men, 'O, me alone! Make you a sword of me?' (I. vi. 76). Cominius later says of him,
>
> > He leads them like a thing
> > Made by some other deity than Nature. (IV. vi. 91-2)
>
> and Menenius calls him both 'engine' and 'thing' (V. iv. 20, 24). There is something very sad in the way this artfully brutalized piece of nothingness is at last brought to deny its own conditioning. (*A New Mimesis* 117)

What exactly causes this transformation from nothing into engine or machine in Coriolanus? What exactly does Cominius mean by "other deity than Nature"? What is the main factor in his conditioning? Is it the nature of his character? Or is it the way he was raised by his mother?

---

[22] *Coriolanus* follows the storyline of the eponymous character as he tries – and fails – to gain political power through allegiances to the plebes, whom he once hated. Caius Marcius, a patrician and the greatest hero of the civil war, seeks to adjust to life in peace time and is nominated as a representative of the plebes. Bred to be a great warrior by Volumia, his mother, Marcius struggles in his new role by dealing with people whom he openly despises and considers inferior to his class, drawing their ire. When the neighboring Volscians wage war upon Rome, Marcius takes their capital, Corioli, single-handedly. In honor of his accomplishment, he is given the new name of Coriolanus. Tullus Aufidius, the Volscian general, vows to avenge the defeat. Coriolanus is given a great welcome back in Rome for his victory, and the Senate wishes to make him a consul. Volumnia is the most significant figure in Coriolanus' life and it is her ambition, more than Coriolanus's, that puts him on the disastrous track toward the consulship. He must, however, have popular support to be elected to this position, and two tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, conspire to reverse the plebes' opinion on him. Coriolanus denounces the tribunes and Volumnia attempts to soothe him, but when confronted with the tribunes in front of the people, their insults and accusations result in his banishment. Coriolanus angrily travels to Antium and to his enemy Aufidius, who takes him in and promises to help him get revenge against Rome, but is only using him for his own interests. Rome's armies are helpless to stop the advance, and soon Aufidius and Coriolanus are encamped outside the city walls. It is only when Volumnia pleads him to spare the city that Coriolanus begin to let go of his anger. The city hails Volumnia the savior of the city. Meanwhile, Coriolanus and the Volscians return to Antium, where the residents hail Coriolanus as a hero. Aufidius, disgusted with the failed campaign and growing jealous of Coriolanus, declares him a traitor. His failure to take Rome amounts to treachery and, in the ensuing argument, Aufidius' men assassinate Coriolanus.

According to critics, *Coriolanus* is a play known for engaging the "nature vs. nurture" debate, which is just another denomination for what is the root cause of human will. This topic emerges when we ask why Coriolanus is loved and hated by the people of Rome. Aufidius, in 4.7, muses on how Coriolanus is viewed by Rome:

LIEUTENANT

Sir, I beseech you, think you he'll carry Rome?

AUFIDIUS

All places yields to him ere he sits down.
And the nobility of Rome are his;
The senators and patricians love him too.
The tribunes are no soldiers, and their people
Will be as rash in the repeal as hasty
To expel him thence. (*Cor*. 4.7.27-33)

Rome banished Coriolanus, but he is still loved. Aufidius continues:

I think he'll be to Rome
As is the osprey to the fish, who takes it
By sovereignty of nature. First he was
A noble servant to them, but he could not
Carry his honours even. Whether 'twas pride.
Which out of daily fortune ever taints
The happy man; whether defect of judgement.
To fail in the disposing of those chances
Which he was lord of; or whether nature,
Not to be other than one thing, not moving
From th' casque to th' cushion, but commanding peace
Even with the same austerity and garb
As he controlled the war; but one of these—
As he hath spices of them all—not all.
For I dare so far free him—made him feared.
So hated, and so banished. (*Cor*. 4.7.33-48)

What is it that can make one so loved and hated at the same time? Aufidius says, at the beginning of this scene, that he does not know what witchcraft is in Coriolanus (*Cor*. 4.7.2). Why was Coriolanus banished in the first place? Whether it was, in Aufidius words, pride, defect of judgement or his nature, we cannot know. Somehow, one of these – or all of them – made him so feared and so hated that they banished him. What is the cause of Coriolanus' will – or "death wish"?

The issue of nurture vs. nature, in the play, becomes especially clear if we consider if it is Coriolanus or Volumnia the one responsible for the protagonist's demise. According to Nuttall, the fundamental discrepancy between his warrior nature and the institutions of a civil polity is related to the central pathos of Coriolanus's nature and the central tension of the play:

> Volumnia, then, has forged Coriolanus as an instrument of war. But then she encounters a problem. She needs an instrument to achieve her political ends within the city and she has built her son in a way which does not serve her purpose. It is like trying to saw with a sword. At a word he will hack and kill, but he is set to shy away from the very idea of compromise or conciliation. Yet his mother's power over him remains the strongest force in his life. In III. ii Volumnia tries in vain to get Coriolanus to sue for office and only succeeds when she gives up rational persuasion and instead remarks – quite lightly – that she will be very pleased with him if he does it (III. ii. 109). At once he does what she wants. (*A New Mimesis* 116)

Nuttall argues that "[Coriolanus'] personality was formed for him by another individual, his mother" (*A New Mimesis* 118). Volumnia is a very manipulative woman who cares less about his well-being than the shame he might cause her. In 1.3, responding to Virgilia's revulsion of her husband engaging in violence, Volumnia says: "Away, you fool! It [bloodshed] more becomes a man / Than gilt his trophy" (1.3.40-41). That is, blood is more appropriate to a man than gold in his trophy. In 5.3, when attempting to convince Coriolanus to abort the attack on Rome, she says: "If I cannot persuade thee / Rather to show a noble grace to both parts / Than seek the end of one" (5.3.121-23). This is a false argument because, if Coriolanus saves one (his family), he destroys the other (himself). But Volumnia manipulates him into giving his own life so that Rome, his family's life and specially Volumnia's reputation are spared. Coriolanus himself knows that, if he gives way to his mother's plea, he is signing his death sentence (*Cor*. 5.3.186-90). Volumnia manipulates him, and her manipulation leads him to his death. Is his death her or his fault? What

is the cause of Coriolanus death: his pride and anger – that is, his nature – or his mother's manipulative character – that is, his nurture? *As You Like It* and *Coriolanus*, a comedy and a tragedy respectively, bear two other instances of the problem of the indeterminate nature of the human will. In Shakespeare's writings, it seems to me that there is a suggestion that this question cannot be fully solved, i.e., it is not possible to attribute the formation of individual will or self exclusively to one aspect – that is, nature or nurture – and, even if we consider it a mix of both, on an individual scale, it is not possible to measure which has the prevailing influence. To cite Nuttal:

> Again I have written in a freely Transparent language, treating the character of Coriolanus as a study in possible psychology. To write and think in this way is to find oneself engaged in a dialogue with a text which proves richly responsive. A rigorously formal approach might easily prevent a reader or spectator from noticing the wholly remarkable sense Shakespeare displays of the possible formative tyranny of the parent. (*A New Mimesis* 118)

It seems that a rigorous formal approach, as Nuttall suggests, precludes the investigation of character and, as a consequence, prevents the observation of individual traits that are essential for the understanding of character.

1.1.6. The Influences in the Determination of the Will of Characters

Despite being inserted in a "debate", *Coriolanus* seems to side with the "nurture side", i.e., the "deity other than nature" which, according to Cominius, forged Coriolanus' will was Volumnia. In *Hamlet*, however, there does not seem to be any such tendency. As mentioned previously, the characters often show concern about questions like 'why do I feel like this?'; 'why does he or she behave like that?', but never manage to find a satisfactory answer. This inspires a kind of questioning that weakens the "nurture side": what if Coriolanus' nature were different, i.e., what if another character were put in his place? Would his tragedy have been avoided? A. C. Bradley uses this hypothetical swapping of characters to discuss this issue. He argues that, if Hamlet were in Othello's place, both tragedies could have taken different paths: "The heroes of the two plays are doubtless extremely unlike, so unlike that each could have dealt without much difficulty with the situation which proved fatal to the other" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 175). When Bradley says that Hamlet would have avoided the tragedy in the place of Othello (and vice-versa), he is emphasizing the nature – i.e., their temperaments and dispositions or inclinations – of the characters, who would have avoided each one's tragic situation.

Erich Auerbach, in the chapter of his *Mimesis* dedicated to Shakespeare, entitled "The Weary Prince", argues that, unlike in Greek tragedy, "in Elizabethan tragedy . . . – the first specifically modern form of tragedy – the hero's individual character plays a much greater part in shaping his destiny" (318). Hence, it can be said that the "idea of destiny in Elizabethan tragedy is both more broadly conceived and more closely linked to the individual character than it is in antique tragedy" (319). Therefore,

> fate here means much more than the given conflict. In antique tragedy it is almost always possible to make a clear distinction between the natural character of a personage and the fate which befalls him at the moment. In Elizabethan tragedy we are in most cases confronted not with purely natural character but with character already formed by birth, situation in life, and prehistory (that is, by fate) – character in which fate has already had a great share before it fulfils itself in the form of a specified tragic conflict. The latter is often only the occasion which releases a tragic situation prepared long before. This is particularly apparent in the cases of Shylock[23] and Lear.[24] What happens to them individually, is individually predestined for them; it fits the specific character of Shylock or of Lear, and this character is not only the natural character but one prepared by birth, situation, and prehistory, that is, by fate, for its unmistakable idiosyncrasy and for the tragic situation destined for it. (320)

---

[23] Shylock is the antagonist, the comic villain in *The Merchant of Venice*. Bassanio, an opportunistic young man, seeks a loan from his best friend, Antonio, a prosperous merchant, to court the wealthy Portia, not for love but for financial gain. Antonio, not having the money, decides he will borrow it from a man he despises, Shylock. He agrees to lend the money only if Antonio agrees to give up a pound of his flesh if the loan is not repaid. A subplot features Shylock's daughter, Jessica, seeking to run away from her over-possessive father and elope with her lover Lorenzo. Portia is stifled by her father's will that stipulates that she can only marry a man who correctly chooses among three caskets. Each casket contains a letter that follows a certain moral theme and each suitor must abide by the directive established in the letter. Though Bassanio succeeds in choosing the right casket, he learns that Antonio has failed to pay the loan. Shylock demands a pound of flesh from Antonio, as agreed. With Portia's help disguised as a male lawyer, Antonio is spared and Shylock's life is ruined. In an ambiguous epilogue, the three couples – Portia and Bassanio, Nerissa and Gratiano, and Jessica and Lorenzo – gather in the front of Portia's house and share words that reveal their ambivalent feelings for each other.

[24] In the plot of *King Lear*, when Lear asks his three daughters how much they love him in order to divide his kingdom, he falls for Regan and Goneril's deceitful flattery, but banishes Cordelia for her honest answer. After Lear loses his power, he is rejected by both Goneril and Regan. Cordelia, who had married the king of France, coordinates an invasion of Britain with Gloucester, who is involved in a subplot with his two sons, Edgar and Edmund. Conflicts arise and Lear begins to descend into madness. Edmund, Gloucester's bastard son, in an attempt to rise to power, betrays his father, who is saved by Edgar from an attempt of suicide. Lear is rescued by Cordelia and temporarily recovers his sanity, but, after losing the war, they are soon captured and ordered to hang by Edmund's orders. Lear is stopped from being hanged, but dies of despair shortly after carrying Cordelia's body onto stage.

What Auerbach's argument shows, if unwillingly, is that the personal features of the character are more important because, if characters were submitted to different circumstances, the consequences might have been different.

Auerbach's terminology seems slightly vague, however. For instance, what is a tragic situation anyway? A set of circumstances? Is the situation more important than the characters in it? A situation, in my view, is a moment of tension in which the possibility of action is limited. And yet, what seems to determine the outcome of a situation is not so much the possibilities themselves but the nature of the character. Auerbach does not make a clear distinction of fate. He argues that the "individual character" is the result of the "natural character" affected by external circumstances. He restricts the meaning of fate to elements that are evidently out of our control such as "birth, situation, and prehistory". But these, I argue, work *around* the natural character, since people with different "natural characters" end up with different "individual characters" under *the same circumstances* of "birth, situation, and prehistory". As I mentioned in the Introduction, the uncertainty regarding the formation of self lessens the relevance of external circumstances when we consider that individual traits are more important. Therefore, considering that individuality is more relevant in a characterological approach, I would argue that the most important role in the determination of the resulting individual character is the nature of an individual, not their external circumstances. I would also argue that a better word to refer to the nature of an individual is "will", because an individual thinks and takes action according to his or her will.

It is also possible to think of this issue in a comic environment. Since, in comedy, conflict is worked out and salvation is available to most characters, the question "What if things were different?" becomes irrelevant. Generally, the characters do not go through situations of intense distress, and since most things turn out well in comedy, the few instances of suffering that take place are not significant to the play. But what if, maintaining the set of circumstances, we ask the question: "What if a comic character were in the place of a tragic one?" For instance, what if Rosalind were in the place of Hamlet? Would a tragedy unfold in the same fashion? Or, if we invert the logic, what if Hamlet were in the place of Rosalind? A tragedy would not unfold, but would a new society crystalize around Hamlet? Let us try an exchange between comic characters: in the forest of Arden, would a new society have crystalized around Falstaff? In this kind of questioning, the external circumstances are fixed; what varies is the character to be placed in each

set of circumstances. In other words, a set of external circumstances is fixed and a set of different characters is attributed to perform a role in a scenario that would make the comedy or tragedy unfold. In my view, this reinforces the importance of individual character traits rather than external circumstances – since the latter are fixed. Again, this does not mean that external circumstances are irrelevant; it means that the individual traits of the character – over which he or she does not have total control, just like the external circumstances – are more significant.

This initial analysis of several characters from different plays is intended to show why individuality is relevant in a characterological investigation. The purpose is to provide the basics regarding individual will of different characters in a general sense. Therefore, in my view, the external circumstances are relevant insofar as they determine the range of possible or likely actions, which usually comes down to the threat of violence. Whether or not a character will decide to spill blood depends almost entirely on his nature. In this line of thought, a character with a comic nature will avert bloodshed when within a situation in which violence is a possibility.

1.2. Tragic and Comic Nature

As shown in the previous section, terms such as "fortune" and "nature" become blurred in the character's speeches. Considering the particular views of several characters, it cannot be determined if features such as "virtue" are endowed or achieved. "Will", "nature" and "self", as I discussed in the Introduction, are also notions that can become blurred. The self or nature of an individual is what determines what an individual wants. The debatable question is what is the ultimate cause of an individual's nature or self, i.e., what determines what an individual wills for. A pragmatic way of determining the will of different characters is observing how they act in similar situations.

1.2.1. The Example of Cuckoldry

As I briefly discussed in the introduction, my concern with the comic and the tragic is not related to a generic – that is, pertaining to genre – point of view. Othello is an excellent example to understand the difference between a tragic and a comic nature in character.[25] The pain of the

[25] Othello, a military general from North Africa, and Desdemona, the daughter of a Venetian nobleman, fall in love and marry in secret. Once Othello promotes Cassio to a prominent military role over Iago, Iago feels betrayed. He vows to destroy Othello and Desdemona's happiness in revenge. Iago tricks Othello into believing Desdemona was unfaithful to him. Othello cannot endure the pain of being betrayed and ends up killing Desdemona and himself afterward.

suspicion of Othello's cuckoldry is enhanced because unlike, for instance, Benedick[26] – who has a comic nature – he cannot accept the pain of his displaced heart.[27] To Othello, such pain is insurmountable, and the pain of killing Desdemona would sooth it:

> She's gone, I am abused, and my relief
> Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,
> That we can call these delicate creatures ours
> And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad
> And live upon the vapour of a dungeon
> Than keep a corner in the thing I love
> For others' uses. Yet 'tis the plague of great ones,
> Prerogatived are they less than the base;
> 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death:
> Even then this forked plague is fated to us
> When we do quicken. (*Oth*. 3.3.269-79)

Othello does not consider himself to be a god, like Coriolanus does, but they still converge in one feature: neither of them, nor any other Shakespearean tragic hero for that matter, accepts having their wills denied. Othello says he would rather be a toad than endure the pain of his displaced heart, caused by Desdemona's betrayal. He is aware that the great ones, like him, are less privileged ("prerogatived") in this regard, i.e., the base tolerate cuckoldry. Othello's nature does not allow him to accept this: his destiny is *not* to be cuckolded *ever*. This destiny, which is determined by

---

[26] In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Benedick, a consummate military commander, has sworn to cease pursuing women because of his previous relationship with Beatrice, a woman who also has given up on finding the right man. The two live for and loath each other, having a strange intimacy that few couples ever achieve. As the main plot, involving a war between two feuding brothers – Don Pedro of Aragon and Don John (the villain of the play) – unfolds, Don Pedro recognizes that, underneath their insults, Benedick and Beatrice still love each other. He manages to trick Benedick and Beatrice are in love with each other and the couple ends up marrying, but not after a sharp remark from Benedick regarding cuckoldry.

[27] Othello says in 4.2.56-63 that to do something to his heart, on which his life depends, which pumps blood through his veins is extremely painful to him. The main image here is not the heart, but that of a place where he stored his heart. The image of the heart, nonetheless, is also extremely relevant. Heart seems to be an image for the most meaningful thing that exists to him, which is intimately associated with his personal feelings and affections. Therefore, the place where he stores his heart is of utmost importance to him. He either lives by this place, or does not live at all – "Where either I must live or bear no life" (*Oth*. 4.2.57). This place where his heart is stored is also a spring ("fountain") from which his "current runs / Or else dries up" (*Oth*. 4.2.58-59). The image of the current can literally be understood as blood, but figuratively as an indispensable substance that nurtures his will. Desdemona, by betraying his faith in her, is disturbing that place by keeping "it as a cistern for foul toads / To knot and gender in" (*Oth*. 4.2.60-61). If this place where Othello stores his heart can be read as a sort of sacred place, where his most firmly and solidly established beliefs, nurtured by his affections, are held, then any possibility of meaning is lost for him when this place is disturbed.

his nature, which, in turn, originate his will, cannot be escaped, just as nobody can escape death. In his own words, Othello's destiny – which seemingly cannot be controlled[28] – is his prominent condition, made possible by his greatness as a highly successful general, which does not allow him to accept the pain of having his heart displaced. When Othello says that a man of his rank cannot accept being a cuckold, he means that it is fine for regular men to tolerate it since regular – base – men are comic. Othello claims that marriage is like a curse because the husband does not have actual control over his wife's desire. Just as he is unable to control his wife's desire, he is unable to control his destiny.

Why is Othello incapable of accepting cuckoldry? Why is his destiny, unshunnable as death, to fight the structure of reality, by which I mean that comic characters are susceptible to be cuckolds? In his understanding, his greatness precludes it. I argue that his tragic nature is a key element from which his rebellious character originates. If we look at a few comic characters, we see that they tend to "accept" cuckoldry. In *As You Like It*, for instance, Touchstone says: "As horns are odious, they are necessary . . . Well, that is the dowry of his wife, 'tis none of his own getting. Horns? Even so. Poor men alone? No, no: the noblest deer hath them as huge as the rascal" (*AYLI* 3.4.38-43). "Horns" (cuckoldry), although painful ("odious"), seem to be unavertable ("necessary"). Touchstone says that horns are not only for "poor men alone", i.e., the horns of "the noblest deer" are as big as those of the inferior one. In other words, both base men (like Touchstone) and great men (like Othello) alike are susceptible to cuckoldry. The difference is that some men accept – or "need" it, in Touchstone's own words – but others do not. In the same play, Rosalind refers to cuckoldry as a kind of "destiny", the same word used by Othello:

> ROSALIND Aye, of a snail; for though he comes slowly, he carries his house on his head; a better jointure, I think, than you make a woman. Besides, he brings his destiny with him.
> ORLANDO What's that?
> ROSALIND Why, horns; which such as you are fain to be beholden to your wives for. (*AYLI* 4.1.44-50)

Regardless of how ironic she is being here, Rosalind seems to touch a deep truth in Shakespeare, also brought up by Benedick in *Much Ado about Nothing*. Benedick advises Don Pedro to get married and expect to be cuckolded: "Prince, thou art sad, get thee a wife, get thee a wife, there is no staff more reverend than one tipped with horn" (*Ado* 5.4.114-16). Othello's misbelief in

[28] He says at the very end: "Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now" (*Oth*. 5.2.263).

Desdemona's lightness makes him extremely heavy, as Portia fears of making Bassanio: "Let me give light, but let me not be light, / For a light wife doth make a heavy husband, / And never be Bassanio so for me" (*MV* 5.1.129-31). Othello simply cannot accept Benedick's and Touchstone's wisdom regarding marriage, according to which a married man must embrace cuckoldom. Characters with a comic nature, like Benedick and Touchstone, claim to accept that their wives' "appetites" (as Othello puts it) cannot be controlled. They accept the structure of reality as it is; Othello, endowed with a tragic nature, cannot. With this in mind, I argue that the tragic operates on a comic background, i.e., tragic characters rise temporarily to prominence upon a background comprised of comic characters.

The prominence of tragic characters is intermittent (i.e., temporary) because they die in their attempts to challenge the structure of reality. Their rebellious natures do not allow them to accept the structure of reality as it is. We see this in, Romeo, Juliet, Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, Cleopatra, Coriolanus and Timon.[29] In Othello's case, after finding out that he had killed Desdemona unjustly, he declares: "in my sense 'tis happiness to die" (*Oth*. 5.2.287). Then, the pain of having his heart displaced was insurmountable, but now that pain has been replaced by that of killing Desdemona unjustly. Dying is less painful, as it is to Romeo, Juliet, and Coriolanus. Great tragic characters do not accept the established cycle of pain and attempt to impose a new one at the cost of their lives.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, there has been, according to Bloom, a "recent French fashion of denying the self" (*Shakespeare* 446), and, in this fashion, critics seize upon Othello as a fit instance of a fragmented self. We see this, for instance, in James Calderwood's commentary on *Othello*:

> But what is this true Othello? When he himself attempts to deliver such an account to his auditors, what emerges is not the image of a unique and essential self but a series of generic snapshots: The Soldier-Servant ("I have done the state some service"), The Unfortunate Lover ("one that loved not wisely but too well"), The Jealous Avenger ("being wrought, perplexed in the extreme"), then more ambiguously The Unlucky Indian or The Villainous Judean, and finally a fusion of The Infidel Turk and The Venetian Christian. Instead of a

[29] These are the main characters form seven of Shakespeare's ten tragedies. The ones missing are Titus Andronicus, which will not be discussed, and Julius Caesar.

> core-self discoverable at the center of his being, Othello's "I am" seems a kind of internal repertory company, a "we are." (*Properties of Othello* 103-04).

If Othello is only the sum of his self-descriptions, then, indeed, he could be judged as a chaotic mixture of selves. His self-referencing reveals, however, not a "we are" but a set of different images for the description of the same self or, if one prefers, a set of different images for different aspects that comprise the whole self. Nuttall argues, in *A New Mimesis*, that all "representation of reality is conventionally ordered; it is never possible in a finite work to exhaust reality; always we receive a selection only" (*A New Mimesis* 182). Thus, just as we always receive only a *selection* from reality in a given literary work, we receive only a fragment of a character's self at a given moment. This does not, however, prevent the existence of a fully integrated self. The insistence on believing that any attempt to convey an image of self is directed toward it with a notion of totality in mind is a view of the critic, not of the author. In other words, what Othello is doing when he is seemingly expressing several different selves is expressing a *selection* of his self at a given moment in time. The nature of Othello's character is going to be decided by what he does at the end. However fragmented Othello's self might seem at a first glance, his nature is still either tragic or comic.

1.2.2. The Major Division between the Comic and the Tragic in Frye's Theory

There seems to be a necessary opposition between tragedy and comedy, according to Frye. In the *Anatomy of Criticism*, he claims that there are four narrative categories of literature broader than the ordinary literary genres:

> the romantic, the tragic, the comic, and the ironic or satiric. . . . We thus have four narrative pregeneric elements of literature which I shall call *mythoi* or generic plots.
>
> If we think of our experience of these *mythoi*, we shall realize that they form two opposed pairs. Tragedy and comedy contrast rather than blend, and so do romance and irony, the champions respectively of the ideal and the actual. On the other hand, comedy blends insensibly into satire at one extreme and into romance at the other; romance may be comic or tragic; tragic extends from high romance to bitter and ironic realism. (*Anatomy of Criticism* 162)

Comedy encompasses satire and romance, and tragedy encompasses romance and irony. The two prevalent modes, therefore, are the comic and the tragic. The first essay and the first half of the

third essay of the *Anatomy* suggest that the comic and the tragic are predominant modes or forms of meaning. Frye also claims that a "sense of a historically finite culture, exploiting and exhausting a certain range of imaginative possibilities, provided the basis for the conception of modes outlined in the first essay of *Anatomy of Criticism*" (*Spiritus Mundi* 113). What Frye describes seems to form a range or spectrum, similar to the range of colors visible to the human eye. The following illustration is an attempt to make that range or spectrum clearer.

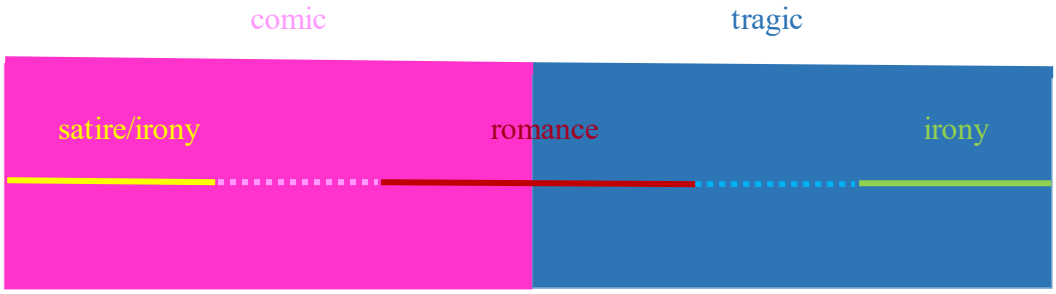


Fig. 1 The range of meaning based on Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*.

I argue that this picture is a (rough, generalized, and simplified) *range of meaning*. Let us make an analogy with the visible light spectrum:

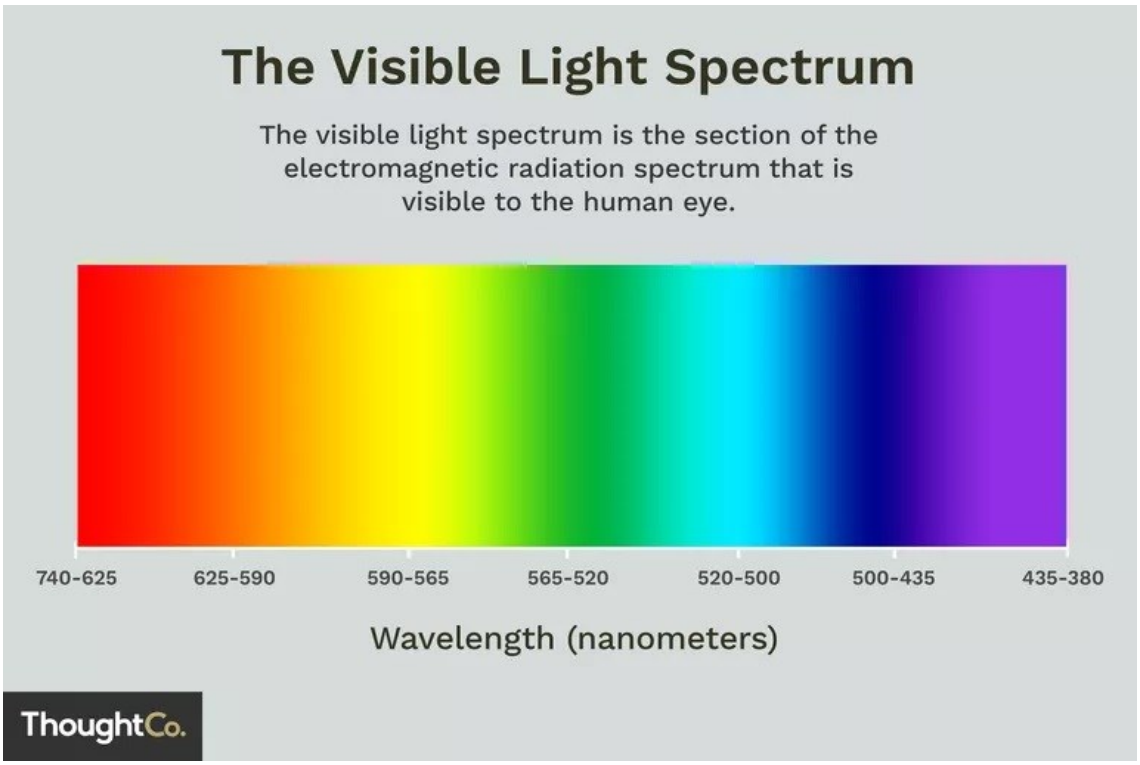


Fig. 2 The Visible Light Spectrum.

We see that, in the light spectrum, the colors visible to the human eye are limited from red to violet. In the in-between, there is an enormous range of other colors. Similarly, in my analogy, the two extremes are satiric comedy and ironic tragedy, with an enormous range of possible meanings throughout. Another thing to be noticed in the color spectrum is the difficulty to distinguish, for example, between red and orange or between orange and yellow. Likewise, as Frye, suggests, the "distinction between an ironic comedy and a comic satire, or between a romantic comedy and a comic romance, is tenuous, but not quite a distinction without a difference" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 177). The light pink and blue dotted lines in my illustration represent the area where those meanings become blurred. Nonetheless, in those regions, the comic prevails. Thus, for the "four *mythoi* that we are dealing with, . . . *Agon* . . . is the . . . archetypal theme of romance, . . . *Pathos* . . . is the archetypal theme of tragedy. *Sparagmos* . . . is the archetypal theme of irony and satire. *Anagnorisis* . . . is the archetypal theme of comedy" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 192). What I aim to show with my analogy is that the tragic and the comic, in Frye's view, encompass the other *mythoi*. Therefore, one of these senses – either the comic or the tragic – ought to prevail, even if

differentiated by sub-senses; in other words, the other senses are confined to either the comic or the tragic.

With this broader distinction in mind, let us explore what a few critics have to say about the Shakespearean tragic and comic senses. According to Frye, "all literary critics are either Iliad critics or Odyssey [sic] critics. That is, interest in literature tends to center either in the area of tragedy, realism, and irony, or in the area of comedy and romance" (*A Natural Perspective* 1). While I disagree with Frye concerning interest (since I think a critic can be equally interested in both comedy and tragedy), I agree in regard to the major division between the comic and the tragic.

Frye explains that

> the nature of the comic drive . . . emerges when the ascendant society of the early part of the play, with its irrational laws, lusts, and tyrannical whims, is dissolved and a new society crystallizes around the marriage of the central characters. It has also an individual form, an awakening to self-knowledge, which is typically a release from a humor or a mechanical form of repetitive behavior.
>
> Shakespearean romantic comedy presents the full or completed form of this movement; ironic comedy presents incomplete or divergent forms of it. . . . thus we need to have the normal or romantic design at least unconsciously in our minds to understand the parodies of it that irony supplies. (*A Natural Perspective* 118)

Because of his tendencies toward formalism, Frye would attempt to reduce all Shakespearean comedies to a set of generic features that do not always accommodate all of the comedies. For instance, there is no crystallization of a new society around a series of marriages in *Love's Labour's Lost*. In *The Comedy of Errors*, there are no marriages either, but a family reunion, similarly to what happens in *Pericles*. Nonetheless, in general, Frye's description of Shakespearean comedy is both too encompassing and rather precise. This structure of release from a constraining element and the culmination in reconciliation is the basic structure of the comic.

Still in *A Natural Perspective*, Frye argues that the "mythical or primitive basis of comedy is a movement toward the rebirth and renewal" (119). In *The Myth of Deliverance*, he explains that in "most forms of comedy, . . . at least the New Comedy with which Shakespeare was mainly concerned, . . . [t]he climax is a vision of deliverance or expanded energy and freedom" (14). As Hamilton writes in his introduction to *The Myth of Deliverance*, "[deliverance] being synonymous with 'expanded energy and freedom,' implies a heightened consciousness by which one may

actively – that is, imaginatively – shape reality rather than remain passively dominated by it" (ix). Frye's notion of *ought to be* is related to an artificial upward movement in opposition to a natural downward movement of *what is*.[30] This "vision of deliverance or expanded energy and freedom", which is one of the core traits of the comic sense, is in direct opposition to that of the tragic, which would provide a vision of destruction and restrained freedom. Frye adds that a typical comedy is one in which

> redemptive forces are set to work that bring about the characteristic festive conclusion, the birth of a new society, that gives to the audience the feeling that 'everything's going to be all right after all.' Such plays illustrate what we have been calling the myth of deliverance, a sense of energies released by forgiveness and reconciliation, . . . by evading what is frustrating or absurd in law and fulfilling what is essential for social survival. But comedy is a mixture of the festive and the ironic, of a drive toward a renewed society along with a strong emphasis on the arbitrary whims and absurdities that block its emergence. There is a much larger infusion of irony in *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well* than in, say, *As You Like It* or *Twelfth Night*. (*The Myth of Deliverance* 61)

When we have normal or romantic design of a play like *As You Like It* in mind, we can, thus, understand the parodies of it that irony supplies. *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well* have a strong sense of irony pervading them, but salvation is met in them nonetheless:

> in *Measure for Measure,* many of the central characters are brought very close to an actual confrontation with death. [In *All's Well That Ends Well*,] Helena explicitly risks her life on

[30] When discussing the novels of Charles Dickens, Frye argues that the "obstructing humours in Dickens are absurd because they have overdesigned their lives. But the kind of design that they parody is produced by another kind of energy, and one which insists, absurdly and yet irresistibly, that what is must never take final precedence over what ought to be" ("Dickens and the Comedy of Humours" 307-08). This conflict between *what is* and *what ought to be* seems to be intimately related to Frye's distinction between the comic and the tragic. Fiction is absurd because reality is absolute chaos. Fiction attempts to find order in it and to provide form to a completely chaotic world. The shaping power of fiction is absurd because real life does not have a shape. Literature is one of the types of knowledge that attempt to give shape to reality through conflict between what Frye calls "what is" and "what ought to be". This is not the same "is-ought" conflict that occurs in philosophy, although similar, since, in philosophy, the "is" refers to passions, while the "ought", to reason in general terms. In the aesthetic shaping of this conflict, the "ought", according to Bloom, refers to the human agency that struggles with the "is", "the prevailing state of things", which seeks to annihilate the "ought" (*The Western Canon* 317). The prevailing state of things is the nature of chaotic reality, which is felt by mankind as constant suffering. Thus, pain is "what is", while "what ought to be" is the desperate struggle of man to escape it or to shape it to his desire. If I may use my own terms, I argue the conflict is between what one *wants* and what one *should want*. Differently from epistemic knowledge in general, the aesthetic does not try to fill the gap between reality and morality by explaining why people want what they want, but by providing wisdom about the indefiniteness and uncontrollability of what they want.

> the success of her healing of the king, spreads a rumour that she has actually died, and thereby forces Bertram to face the possibility of a death sentence. . . . Yet, again as in *Measure for Measure,* nobody gets permanently hurt in the long run, and, in a world where the principle of 'all's well that ends well' is true, that is what matters. (*The Myth of Deliverance* 52-53)

But this kind of menace of bloodshed is not seen in every comedy. It is one of the instances of the constraining elements, such as irrational laws or repetitive behavior, from which the characters in comedy are released or delivered. Additionally, he argues that sometimes "the irrational law takes the form of a jealous tyrant's suspiciousness, as with the humorous Duke Frederick in *As You Like It* or the obsessed Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*. All four of the romances introduce a hostile father or father figure who descends from the *senex iratus* of New Comedy" (*A Natural Perspective* 74). The hostile father figure – which we also see in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – is the constraining element in the romances. Comic salvation is the central element in the romances, notwithstanding the tragic or dark shadings that may accompany comedy.

The reality of Shakespearean comedies, as we see, is not devoid of dark elements. According to Frye, the humor (in the sense of laughter) of comedy is "intimately connected with the theme of the absurd or irrational law that the action of comedy moves toward breaking" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 169). The "happy ending" of comedy, however, does not mean that there is no conflict among comic personalities. The difference between the comic and the tragic resides in way the conflict is resolved – or is not, in the case of tragedy. In one case, acceptance and reconciliation avert bloodshed. In the other, unacceptance and violence lead to bloodshed. A subtle detail that must be emphasized is that the world that engenders both the comic and the tragic is common to both, that is, the reality that prompts the two views is indifferent to both. According to Frye,

> the plots of comedy often are complicated because there is something inherently absurd about complications. As the main character interest in comedy is so often focussed on the defeated characters, comedy regularly illustrates a victory of arbitrary plot over consistency of character. Thus, in striking contrast to tragedy, there can hardly be such a thing as inevitable comedy, as far as the action of the individual play is concerned. That is, we may know that the convention of comedy will make some kind of happy ending inevitable, but still for each play the dramatist must produce a distinctive "gimmick" or "weenie," to use

> two disrespectful Hollywood synonyms for *anagnorisis*. Happy endings do not impress us as true, but as desirable, and they are brought about by manipulation. (*Anatomy of Criticism* 170)

As I discussed in the Introduction, Frye's critical principle is based on the structure of plot. The victory of an arbitrary plot over consistency of character is comedy. Tragedy, in my view, is the "victory" of consistency of character over plot; but this victory is temporary. As previously discussed, Frye emphasizes a distinction between *what is* and *what ought to be*. In this sense, what Frye seems to suggest by claiming that there is no inevitable comedy is that *what ought to be* is something that has an ascending trajectory. In other words, *what ought to be* is something that must be built and developed. This is why Frye argues that happy endings do not impress us as true, i.e., as *what is*. They must be achieved through manipulation. In tragedy, on the other hand, *what is*, rather than *what ought to be*, prevails. As Frye also suggests, the "easiest way to get at the structure of Elizabethan tragedy is to think of it as a reversal of the structure of comedy" (*Fools of Time* 21). In other words, using *King Lear* as an example, Cordelia might have complied with Lear's will in the first scene with the intention of building *what ought to be* and so avert *what is*, but Cordelia refuses to speak again and *what is* ends up prevailing.

Additionally, Frye claims that "tragedy is really implicit or uncompleted comedy . . . comedy contains a potential tragedy within itself" ("Argument of Comedy" 8, *CW* 28). This does not mean that comedy is tragedy plus time – a saying without specific authorship, which supposedly means that the suffering of tragedy is redeemed by time. Frye infers this conclusion because of the common ritualistic origins of Greek comedy and tragedy, which he discusses in the same essay. Expanding on Frye's argument, I argue that, in a play, the tragic and the comic may momentarily coexist. The tragic is intermittent, while the comic, perennial. When Frye says that tragedy is uncompleted comedy, I understand that the rise of a tragic hero is temporary. When he is gone, as when a comic villain is gone, everything goes back to normal, with a comic hero taking prominence again. Is the comic relief evidence for that? Every Shakespearean tragedy has a moment of comic relief, which, in my view, is evidence that the tragic operates upon a comic background. Additionally, comedy contains a potential tragedy within itself because a tragic hero can rise to prominence at any time, but this prominence is always brief. If it is not brief, then, it is not tragic, but comic, because the prominence of the risen hero is accepted. Shylock, for example,

is very close to the border that separates a comic villain from a tragic hero. When he is gone, all the characters revolve around the prominence of Portia.

1.2.3. Other Authors' Views on Comedy and Tragedy

Shakespeare's romances are known to present both tragic and comic features, and the two ironic comedies, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*, become somewhat disturbing when the irony is perceived. According to Bloom,

> the authentic Shakespearean litany chants variations upon the word 'nothing,' and the uncanniness of nihilism haunts almost every play, even the great, relatively unmixed comedies. As a playwright, Shakespeare seems too wise to believe anything, and while he seems to know not less than everything, he is careful to keep that knowing several steps short of transcendence. Since his eloquence is comprehensive, and his dramatic concern almost unfaltering, one cannot assign precedence even to the plays' apparent nihilism, and to their clear sense of nature's indifference, alike, to human codes and to human suffering. (*Shakespeare* 13-14)

Most of the pure comedies[31], however, also present certain dark features. Shakespeare being a highly skilled perspectivist, would scarcely take an ethical stance, i.e., would hardly side either with optimism or pessimism. And yet the general sense of salvation – conveyed through reconciliation and acceptance – is always present in the ten pure comedies, the two ironic comedies, three histories, and the last four romances.

According to Bloom, we notice "Shakespeare's own darkening as he moves from Shylock through Falstaff to Hamlet, Iago, Lear, Macbeth, Cleopatra" (*Falstaff* 68). Falstaff's darkening, thus, is only one of the symptoms of a general darkening in Shakespeare's work. In the works and characters that comprise the general comic sense, we see instances of a sort of rotten core underlying and sustaining the salvation and happiness met by the apparent exterior. As Frye explains:

> Comedy often includes a scapegoat ritual of expulsion which gets rid of some irreconcilable character, but exposure and disgrace make for pathos, or even tragedy. *The Merchant of*

[31] Shakespeare's plays are currently categorized as comedies, tragedies, histories, problem plays and romances. The four romances and the three problem plays are known for having both comic and tragic elements mingled – although, as I argued previously, two of the problem plays are ironic comedies, while one is a satire. By pure comedy, I refer to the ten plays that fit Frye's theory of salvation in Shakespearean comedy.

> *Venice* seems almost an experiment in coming as close as possible to upsetting the comic balance. If the dramatic role of Shylock is ever so slightly exaggerated . . . the play becomes the tragedy of the Jew of Venice with a comic epilogue. (*Anatomy of Criticism* 165)

The line between a comic villain and a tragic hero is very thin. If the prominence of a comic hero is accepted, it must not be accepted because of violence, specifically, bloodshed. Unwanted "harmless" violence, as we see in *The Comedy of Errors*, or a concealed desire for pain, as we see in *Measure for Measure*, do not disturb the comic sense. On the other hand, "authorized" violence, as we see in *The First Part of King Henry IV*, does disturb it. Bloodshed will always dissolve the comic sense, even if it is "agreed upon", as when we see in was in the histories. The comic aspect of some of the histories is never related to bloodshed. Falstaff is never related to violence.

Is it possible, however, to find a common trait in all of Shakespeare's tragedies? As I argued in the Introduction, if we pay less attention to plot and structure and give more attention to character, this endeavor might prove more fruitful. I follow Frye in the assertion that tragedy is the necessary opposite of comedy. While comedy is about reconciliation, redemption and acceptance, tragedy is about discord, retaliation, and unacceptance. According to Frye, what "makes tragedy tragic . . . is the presence in it of a counter-movement of being that we call the heroic, a capacity for action or passion, for doing or suffering, which is above ordinary human experience" (*Fools of Time* 12). What Frye seems to be referring to by a "counter-movement of being" and by "capacity for suffering" is the combative nature of a tragic personality, boosted by one's greatness, to which Frye seems to refer by a feature "above ordinary human experience", which invariably leads to misery. A comic nature, on the other hand, as directly opposed to the tragic, refrains from fighting off suffering. Hence, in my view, comic characters avoid suffering, but not because fighting pain is hopeless, i.e., not in the sense that pain and suffering are unavoidable and, thus, trying to fight off pain and suffering is a lost battle. The conclusion from a comic perspective, would be that we must "accept" reality as it is. Again, in my view, there seems to be some sort of *need for pain* in comic natures. This is why comic characters "accept" reality as it is, however painful it might strike them. Therefore, while tragic natures do not accept the pain that is imposed on them – and consequently attempt to impose a new form of pain – comic natures accept the pain that is imposed on them because they need, want or will it. Frye adds:

> Tragedy often ends with the survivors forming . . . a secondary or social contract, a relation among more ordinary men which will achieve enough working justice or equity to

> minimize further tragedy. In the worlds of Fortinbras and Malcolm fewer ghosts will walk; after the deaths of Romeo and Juliet there will be less lethal feuding in Verona.
>
> Sometimes the social contract that forms at the end of a tragedy . . ., as often in Shakespeare, . . . is merely an exhausted and demoralized huddle. Whatever it is, it usually expresses some limiting or falling away of perspective after the great heroic voices have been silenced. (*Fools of Time* 13)

Whatever the new social contract is, it expresses a limited perspective that does not account for the combative nature of a tragic personality. This is, again, a point of similarity between a comic villain and a tragic hero. Both of them are a nuisance or liability whose elimination allows for the foregrounding of comic order that was backgrounded during the temporary ascension of the tragic hero.

Bradley understands that tragedy is "the story of human actions producing exceptional calamity" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 16) and ending in the death of the perpetrator of those actions. Tragedy is the typical form of the mystery that consists in the fact that the soul, which is oppressed, conflicting, and destroyed, becomes the "highest existence in our view" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 23). In John Lawlor's view, in *The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare*,

> in tragic experience apparent opposites are held in balance . . . We appear to need the best of both worlds – of chance and of design, of 'the probable' and 'the necessary' – to make us feel that we have touched extremities, and thus glimpsed a system universal in scope but exact and particular in its bearings. We can then accept and approve what has had to be, 'the probable or the necessary', the interlocking of particular fact and wide-ranging fate at those points which it is for the tragic drama to reveal. . . . It is the very foundation and centre of tragic experience. (11-12)

Lawlor's understanding of tragedy emphasizes the conflict of opposites: appearance and reality, agency and patience, accident, and design, natural and supernatural. For instance, in *Hamlet*, all these dichotomies appear: Hamlet is feigning madness (appearance and reality) and suffers by trying to find an answer to his irresolution (agency and patience; accident and design) within a context in which a ghost shows up (natural and supernatural). The outward product of an inward ambivalence is ambiguity.

Conflict is, however, something also common to comedy because it is inherent to the structure of reality. Therefore, we need to look at individual character traits to locate the major

difference between the tragic and the comic. The reason conflict is not solved in tragedy, it seems to me, is due to the tragic nature of the protagonists. If the structure of reality is inherently conflicting, only those who endure it manage to solve conflicts. Tragic characters cannot solve conflicts because they are not willing to tolerate reality as it is.

According to Goddard, imaginative "literature is not criminology, and, except incidentally or for purposes of contrast, has no interest in portraying primitive, brutal, or moronic types. When rich or noble natures display atavistic traits or slip back into atavistic conduct, . . . those traits begin to assume tragic interest, for tragedy has to do with men possessing the capacity to become gods who, momentarily at least, become devils" (*The Meaning of Shakespeare* 114-15). As will be discussed in the last chapter, Macbeth is the best example of a character who possesses the capacity to become a god but turns into a devil.

According to Bloom, "Shakespeare's greatest men and women are pragmatically doom-eager not because of their relation to state power but because their inner lives are ravaged by all the ambivalences and ambiguities of familial love and its displacements" (*Shakespeare* 488). Additionally, tragedy "at its most exorbitant, whether in Athens or at the Globe, must be domestic tragedy, or tragedy of blood in both senses of blood. We . . . come away from a reading or performance of *King Lear* murmuring to ourselves that the domestic is necessarily a tragedy" (*Shakespeare* 492). Finally, "Lear's passion, Macbeth's imagination, . . . Hamlet's infinite consciousness precede accomplishments and outlast events" (*Shakespeare* 579). Excellence in any kind of craft or activity, regardless of the type of result is aimed, i.e., practical (with profit in mind) or purely intellectual, is what configures greatness from a pragmatic perspective, however morally questionable an individual might be.

In Tom McAlindon's view, "Shakespearean tragedy is centrally concerned with the destruction of human greatness embodied in individuals endowed with 'sovereignty of nature' (*Cor.*, 4.7.35): men whom almost everyone instinctively calls 'noble'. What constitutes true nobility in action invariably proves problematic for the hero" (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 111). Nobility in action is a way to phrase the greatness of a tragic hero. It invariably proves itself problematic for one with a tragic nature because a character with such nature imposes one's will. Possessing features that endow them with greatness, tragic characters rise to prominence and invariably fall in the process. Greatness alone, however, is not what makes a character tragic. The core feature, I argue, of a tragic nature, is unacceptance. Therefore, by not accepting defeat, a tragic

personality, aware of one's greatness, attempts to impose one's will, and invariably falls. According to Nuttall, the

> element of the great person destroyed is not universal in tragedy but it is insistently repeated, over and over again. A sad ending is not essential for Greek tragedy but it became so for later tragedy – and by far the greater number of Greek tragedies involve the destruction of the protagonist. The area of 'overlap' is in fact immense. If I am to be pedantic, I will say that this book is about those tragedies which depict the destruction of great persons (that is, most of them). (*Why does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* 66)

Although it is very difficult to define a common element to all tragedies ever written, the task is less far-fetched when discussing only one author. It seems reasonable to say that every Shakespearean tragedy depicts the destruction of a great character.

1.2.4. Is the Nature of Characters Fateful?

Despite no individual character exercising full control over his or her will, fate is a notion usually discussed in tragedy. The reason for this seems to be that tragic characters, being unable to tolerate the suffering they undergo in their plays, question the cause of it. Comic characters, on the other hand, with a better capacity to tolerate suffering (which is also present in comedies, although to a smaller extent) do not question its causes and may even mock it – as I showed Rosalind and Celia doing previously. The characters of both comedy and tragedy are subject to a common reality; what differentiates the effect of reality is the nature of character. Can we call this reality fate? In *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Bradley attempts to provide a definition of fate:

> What, then, is this 'fate' which the impressions already considered lead us to describe as the ultimate power in the tragic world? It appears to be a mythological expression for the whole system or order, of which the individual characters form an inconsiderable and feeble part; which seems to determine, far more than they, their native dispositions and their circumstances, and, through these, their action; which is so vast and complex that they can scarcely at all understand it or control its workings; and which has a nature so definite and fixed that whatever changes take place in it produce other changes inevitably and without regard to men's desires and regrets. And whether this system or order is best called by the name of fate or no, it can hardly be denied that it does appear as

> the ultimate power in the tragic world, and that it has such characteristics as these. (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 30)

Let us briefly discuss Bradley's definition. He says that it is fate, far more than the individuals themselves, which seems to determine their native disposition and circumstances. Let us assume that, by "circumstances" Bradley is referring to external circumstances, while by "native dispositions" to internal human features. Let us take fear, for example. Fear would be, in Bradley's terms, part of the "native disposition", which belongs to the inclinations and temperament of the individual. Such features are internal human characteristics. The problem resides precisely in to what degree such characteristics, such as fear, can be controlled by the individual. The solution I propose is not in determining, by means of a measurement tool, how much each individual can control their fear in specific circumstances. The solution is understanding this issue *poetically*, which is what Bradley suggests, since he deems fate as a "mythological expression". In this sense, external circumstances are not completely irrelevant, but they play a less important role when compared with human dispositions because there is no possibility of individual agency over them. An image of something that, in Bradley's terms, is "so vast and complex" that its workings can scarcely be understood or controlled, is a very fitting one not only for external circumstances, but especially, I argue, for native human dispositions as well.

According to Garber, what "is often described as the timelessness of Shakespeare, the transcendent qualities for which his plays have been praised around the world and across the centuries, is perhaps better understood as an uncanny timeliness, a capacity to speak directly to circumstances the playwright could not have anticipated or foreseen" (*Shakespeare After All* 15). By "circumstances the playwright could not have anticipated or foreseen", Garber seems to be referring to those that arise from situations that usually cause anxiety in real life. If this is indeed what Garber is referring to, she forgets the relevance of character because it is the nature of character that defines anxiety according to circumstance. Of course, fate can be discussed in terms of external circumstances, but this particular notion is not my main interest, which is in a sort of "internal fate", which relates to will, and not in an external sort, which relates to circumstances. *Othello*, once again, provides examples to make this difference clearer.

Discussing Iago, Bradley states that his skill "was extraordinary, but so was his good fortune. Again and again a chance word from Desdemona, a chance meeting of Othello and Cassio, a question which starts to our lips and which anyone but Othello would have asked, would have

destroyed Iago's plot and ended his life" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 182). A word, a meeting, a question not asked: these are examples of external circumstances. Bradley briefly makes this differentiation by claiming that fate "works itself out alike in the external conflict and in the hero's soul" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 181). According to Bradley, "*Othello* . . . is more bound down to the spectacle of noble beings caught in toils from which there is no escape . . . and the part played by accident in this catastrophe accentuates the feeling of fate" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 181). And yet, as I said, my main interest is, in Bradley's terms, in the conflict of the "hero's soul". More specifically, in inclinations and temperament of characters. In the comedies, a notion of fate is also present. The difference is that, in comedy, the characters are not affected by bad consequences, that is, they manage to find redemption if their inner traits are unfortunate for them or for others.

Bradley's account on fate does not end there however. Immediately after the last citation, this follows:

> But the name 'fate' may be intended to imply something more—to imply that this order is a blank necessity, totally regardless alike of human weal and of the difference between good and evil or right and wrong. And such an implication many readers would at once reject. They would maintain, on the contrary, that this order shows characteristics of quite another kind from those which made us give it the name of fate, characteristics which certainly should not induce us to forget those others, but which would lead us to describe it as a moral order and its necessity as a moral necessity. (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 30-31)

In my view, however, an aesthetic understanding of fate ends with the previous citation because it is "indifferent to human weal" and to "the difference between good and evil or right and wrong". The readers to whom Bradley refer who reject such a view understand a poetic notion as fate, not aesthetically, but ethically. Such readers believe that this necessity for a moral order is something to be ethically realized, i.e., they moralize over the intuitive perception that the necessity for a moral order is part of human nature. In other words, an aesthetic understanding realizes that the necessity for a moral order is part of human nature, but does moralize over it. Therefore, if we understand fate aesthetically or poetically, we *avoid* an ethical judgement that would insist that the fate of a tragic character is an instruction on how we should behave in real life.

In conclusion, characters are going to meet either salvation or destruction when facing dramatic situations because they act according to individual character will, which, according to Othello (as discussed in beginning os this section), is a destiny unavoidable like death, and a fate

that cannot be controlled. Rosalind may mock this notion, but she still cannot escape the lack of power over her own will. Comic characters meet salvation because their wills accept or find a way to deal with reality. The will of tragic characters, on the other hand, lead them to destruction because they do not accept reality as it is and attempt to establish a new cycle of pain. The purpose of the first chapter, in fact, was to show that essential characteristics (in this case, the comic and the tragic) can coexist with a range of several distinguishing features. In the next chapters, I will provide a discussion of the comic and the tragic in the plays.

Chapter 2. The Comic Sense in *The Merchant of Venice*: The Mystery of Choice

> [T]he lottery of my destiny
> Bars me the right of voluntary choosing.
> –William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 2.1.15-16

My goal with this chapter is to show that, in *The Merchant of Venice*, there is a notion of hiding. This meaning is related to salvation (or deliverance) in the sense that concealment helps in avoiding the emergence of new conflicts, which, in turn, avoids violence and destruction. This sense of hiding helps maintaining the *status quo* in a relatively stable manner. If a conflict is avoided, salvation is met, and life goes on in its current peaceful course. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia avoids destruction by tricking Shylock. The real reason why Portia helps Antonio, however, is never revealed, i.e., it is kept hidden; however, salvation is achieved because of Portia's actions. Nowadays, many of the discussions regarding *The Merchant of Venice* revolve around the portrayal of Shylock. As Frye argues, if "the dramatic role of Shylock is ever so slightly exaggerated, as it generally is when the leading actor of the company takes the part, it is upset, and the play becomes the tragedy of the Jew of Venice with a comic epilogue" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 165). And especially in the post-Holocaust era, any fictional depiction of Jewish people can be a delicate matter. The conflict between Antonio and Shylock, however, seems to be immersed in a deeper issue to which I want to call attention, which is the mystery of human will.

2.1. The Aura of Mystery

The problem of will seems to be one of the central concerns in *The Merchant of Venice*. The play opens with Antonio musing on his own condition of being sad for no reason. In the second scene, Portia meditates on choice. In the third scene, Shylock reveals his "ancient grudge" toward Antonio. There seems to be a suggestion that the wittiest character in the play, Portia – who will mediate their conflict in the fourth act – through her speech in the second scene, is alluding to both Antonio's and Shylock's conditions, i.e., their melancholy and anger, respectively. If Portia is right, none of them (including herself) can choose their condition. In *The Merchant of Venice*, there seems to be a general sense of hiding; in other words, reason and motivation for the

characters' actions are omitted. The exposure of the real motivation of the characters is avoided, voluntarily or not.

The Merchant of Venice suggests that human choice is wrapped in mystery. There is a mystery, bordering absurdity, regarding the way Portia is supposed to be chosen by a suitor. Portia's father, on his deathbed, had established that her suitors would be offered three chests with riddles inscribed on them from which to choose. According to Nerissa, if "he should offer to choose, and choose the right casket, you should refuse to perform your father's will if you should refuse to accept him" (1.2.75-77). There is, however, a tradeoff to the suitors: if they choose wrongly, they are doomed to never court a woman again:

PORTIA You must take your chance,
And either not attempt to choose at all
Or swear before you choose, if you choose wrong,
Never to speak to lady afterward
In way of marriage: therefore be advised. (2.1.38-42)

In the words of one of the suitors:

ARRAGON I am enjoined by oath to observe three things:
First, never to unfold to anyone
Which casket 'twas I chose; next, if I fail
Of the right casket, never in my life
To woo a maid in way of marriage; lastly,
If I do fail in fortune of my choice,
Immediately to leave you and be gone. (2.9.9-15)

This ceremony of choice is absurd for two reasons. First, even if Portia were coerced to marry someone against her will, it would at least make some sense if it were for a material reason, such as the acquisition of money, land, or any other kind of goods, but making a choice based on a riddle is absurd. Second, the suitors are doomed to never engage in courtship again. Would it not make more sense if they agreed to pay some kind of fine had they chosen wrongly? According to Frye, in Shakespearean comedy, there is a "rhythmic movement from normal world to green world and back again. In *The Merchant of Venice* the second world takes the form of Portia's mysterious house in Belmont, with its magic caskets and the wonderful cosmological harmonies that proceed

from it in the fifth act" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 182-83). The absurdity of this ritualistic ceremony seems to resonate in the mystery of the house of Belmont.

> In the second scene of the play, Portia muses on the issue of will:
>
> If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions; I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper[32] leaps o'er a cold decree – such a hare is madness the youth, to skip o'er the meshes of good counsel the cripple. But this reasoning is not in the fashion to choose me a husband. O me, the word 'choose'! I may neither choose who I would, nor refuse who I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one, nor refuse none? (1.2.11-22)

The first sentence of Portia's speech questions why people do not do what they know what is best. Why do people follow their gut, their feelings, even when they know that this decision is going to cause bad consequences? It is easier to give advice than to follow it because hot temper overrides the cold reasoning of the brain, i.e., the sexually aroused, hot-tempered hare always escapes the cold meshes of the counsel of the cripple. Next, Portia remarks: "this reasoning is not in the fashion to choose me a husband". "Choose", in this line, seems to have the meaning of "finding" or "getting" rather than actually making a choice, but it prompts her to say next: "O me, the word 'choose'!" This refers to two distinct, albeit related, things. First, she is questioning if, considering that we "choose" like mad hares, we really have freedom of choice. Second, she is lamenting the constraint her father imposed on her, both of which will ensue in the next sentences. The first part of her speech is a reflection on the extent of control we have over our freedom of choice, which culminates in the exclamation regarding the nature of choice: "O me, the word 'choose'!". The relevance of this to the plot is that many of the characters are immersed in struggle of choice, as I will explain in detail shortly. Additionally, her meditation on the act of human choice will resonate in the scene in which Bassanio chooses the casket. In that scene, she covertly reveals to him the right casket through a song.

---

[32] "[A]rdent temperament. The temper, or disposition, was due to the individual's admixture of the four fluids, or humours, in his body; the blood was a hot humour" (NCS 78). The theory of humors is from medieval times.

To Portia's speech, Nerissa replies: "Your father was ever virtuous; and holy men at their death have good inspirations. Therefore the lottery that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver, and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will no doubt never be chosen by any rightly but one who you shall rightly love" (1.2.23-27). Again, the mysterious aura of Belmont emerges. Portia's father devised the lottery of her destiny – which is to be decided by a suitor – on his deathbed, where he had "good inspirations", such "as those of the dying John of Gaunt: 'Methinks I am a prophet new inspir'd' (*R2* 2.1.31)" (NCS 78). He devised "meanings", i.e., three inscriptions that, in a sense, take the form of riddles. The one who deciphers the meaning of the riddles is the one who will make the correct choice. There is no room for multiple interpretations here. There is only one right choice. The mysterious aura of Portia's house in Belmont endows her father with the power of an oracle or a deity who controls his daughter's fate. It is not surprising that he devises exactly three inscriptions for three caskets.

Laura Shamas, in *"We* Three*"*, a book dedicated to the witches in *Macbeth*, details key classical antecedents incorporated in the witches. The title of her book calls attention to the relevance that "threeness" is going to have in that play. Of course, the symbolism of the threeness and the preternatural aspect is not as strong in *The Merchant of Venice* as it will be in *Macbeth*; it still subtly pervades *The Merchant of Venice* and its purpose is to enhance the sense of mystery conveyed through ellipsis. Portia's father seems to be an instance of otherworldly destiny associated with threeness. On his deathbed, he is "inspired", as if by one of the muses, to devise a ceremony involving *three* caskets. Lancelot overtly mentions the fates, destinies, or *sisters three* – to which he refers as "branches of learning" – when attempting to trick his father into thinking he was dead: "Talk not of Master Lancelot, father, for the young gentleman, according to fates and destinies, and such odd sayings, the sisters three, and such branches of learning, is indeed deceased, or as you would say in plain terms, gone to heaven" (2.2.49-53). Later, in the same scene, he claims to read his fortune on the palm of his hand: "[*Looks at palm of his hand*] . . . here's a simple line of life . . . And then to 'scape drowning thrice" (2.2.134-37). In this enigmatic small speech, Lancelot reads on his hand that he is to escape drawing *three* times.[33]

[33] There are other punctual instances in which threeness calls attention,[33] but these are the ones specifically related to mystery.

Lancelot is struggling whether or not to abandon Shylock. His conscience advises him to stay, but his fiend advises him to leave. He is struggling to choose between his conscience and his fiend:

> Certainly, my conscience will serve me to run from this Jew my master. The fiend is at mine elbow and tempts me, saying to me . . . 'Good Lancelot Gobbo, use your legs, take the start, run away.' My conscience says 'No: take heed, honest Lancelot, take heed, honest Gobbo . . . do not run, scorn running with thy heels.' . . . my conscience says 'Lancelot, budge not!' 'Budge!' says the fiend. 'Budge not!' says my conscience. 'Conscience', say I, 'you counsel well.' 'Fiend', say I, 'you counsel well.' To be ruled by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master who . . . is a kind of devil; and to run away from the Jew, I should be ruled by the fiend who . . . is the devil himself. Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnation, and, in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience to offer to counsel me to stay with the Jew. The fiend gives the more friendly counsel. (2.2.1-23)

His reason for leaving Shylock is that he thinks Shylock is the devil incarnate. This is what Shylock has to say about Lancelot: "The patch is kind enough, but a huge feeder, / Snail-slow in profit, and he sleeps by day / More than the wildcat" (2.6.44-46). Lancelot is a slow worker and sleeps too much. Lancelot says that Shylock is the devil, and Shylock says that Lancelot is sluggish. Who is right?

Lancelot might not fiercely hate Shylock as Antonio does, but still considers leaving him and struggles with his conscience about it. Jessica, Shylock's daughter, also feels guilty about leaving him:

> Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
> To be ashamed to be my father's child!
> But though I am a daughter to his blood
> I am not to his manners. (2.3.14-18)

It is noteworthy that she feels guilty about not liking her own father, just as Hamlet feels guilty about not being interested in revenge. She also does not seem to hate Shylock as fiercely as Antonio – after all, she feels guilty – but, if we are to point out a reason why she does not like him, it seems to be the same one for which Antonio hates Shylock – his miserly manners, the way he deals with his money and his goods.

Lancelot says that the sisters three, who have knowledge of death, pertain to certain "branches of learning" (2.2.51). Shortly afterward, Lancelot learns from the palm of his hand how many wives he is supposed to have. Does Lancelot have some kind of connection to those branches of learning he mentions? The inscription of the silver casket says that its chooser will always have a fool's head (2.9.67-70). The prince of Arragon leaves Portia's house a double fool: "With one fool's head I came to woo, / But I go away with two" (2.9.74-75). Nerissa's remark ensues: "The ancient saying is no heresy: / 'Hanging and wiving goes by destiny' (2.9.81-82). We do not choose when and how we die, but can we at least choose whom and how we love? Can we choose whether or not to be fools? Or are we just like hares? As Portia would say: "O me, the word 'choose'!" At the end of the play, Lorenzo says of Nerissa and Portia as if they had magical or preternatural powers: "drop manna[34] in the way / Of starvèd people" (5.1.293-94). The play is realistic in the sense that there are no patent fantastic elements, like the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or the spirits in *Macbeth*. But the enigmatic aspect of Portia's house in Belmont, along with some of Lancelot's remarks, give the play a certain touch of mystery. Magic seems to subtly pervade the world of *The Merchant of Venice*, and the mystery of human choice is also related to it.

2.2. Animalistic Imagery

Another element that enhances the aura of mystery is the references to animalistic features in both Portia's and Shylock's cosmological views.[35] Animalistic imagery is a relatively recurrent subject-matter in Shakespeare's work. Macbeth, for example, says that specific qualities, in people, are comparable to features specific to breeds of dogs:

> Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men,
> As hounds, and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
> Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves are clept
> All by the name of dogs. The valued file
> Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,
> The housekeeper, the hunter, every one
> According to the gift which bounteous nature
> Hath in him closed, whereby he does receive

[34] Manna is "the food from heaven which sustained the Israelites in the desert (Exod. 16.15)" (NCS 178).
[35] I will discuss Shylock more specifically in the next sections.

Particular addition from the bill

That writes them all alike. And so of men. (*Mac*. 3.1.91-100)

We can distinguish each dog based on the natural gifts that separate and make it different from the general qualities that define a dog. It's the same with men. In *Coriolanus,* the protagonist, addressing the citizens of Rome, compares them to animals:

He that will give good words to thee will flatter

Beneath abhorring. What would you have, you curs

That like nor peace nor war? The one affrights you.

The other makes you proud. He that trusts to you,

Where he should find you lions finds you hares,

Where foxes, geese. (*Cor*. 1.1.164-69)

And, in *King Lear*, the main character associates sexual depravity with animalistic instincts:

What was thy cause?

Adultery?

Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery? No,

The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly

Does lecher in my sight.

Let copulation thrive

. . .

Behold yon simp'ring dame,

Whose face between her forks presages snow,

That minces virtue, and does shake the head

To hear of pleasure's name.

The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't

With a more riotous appetite.

Down from the waist they're centaurs (*Lear* 4.6.105-20)

In *As You Like* It, Rosalind suggests that there is a natural behavior common to young boys and girls, i.e., "cattle of this color": "At which time would I, being but a moonish youth, grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles; for every passion something, and for no passion truly anything, as boys and women are, for the most part, cattle of this colour" (*AYLI* 3.3.337-42).

The thing about animal metaphors is that the most evident feature of an animal is highlighted, although there can be different features highlighted at different times. For instance, in Portia's case, she highlights the sexual activity of rabbits, while Coriolanus highlights weakness of the dogs in comparison to a lion. Human beings cannot be reduced to animals because of the human brain, but even such reduction is able to prompt a reflection. In Portia's cosmological view, human beings choose sexual partners like hares, and even though that is not to be taken in absolute terms, it ought to be considered. In *Timon of Athens*,[36] Timon's cosmological view is the most encompassing in regard to animalization:

> A beastly ambition, which the gods grant thee t'attain to. If thou wert the lion, the fox would be – guile thee; if thou wert the lamb, the fox would eat thee; if thou wert the fox, the lion would suspect thee, when peradventure thou wert accus'd by the ass; if thou wert the ass, thy dulness would torment thee, and still thou liv'dst but as a breakfast to the wolf; if thou wert the wolf, thy greediness would afflict thee, and oft thou shouldst hazard thy life for thy dinner; wert thou the unicorn, pride and wrath would confound thee and make thine own self the conquest of thy fury; wert thou a bear, thou wouldst be kill'd by the horse; wert thou a horse, thou wouldst be seiz'd by the leopard; wert thou a leopard, thou wert germane to the lion, and the spots of thy kindred were jurors on thy life. All thy safety were remotion, and thy defence absence. What beast couldst thou be that were not subject to a beast? And what a beast art thou already, that seest not thy loss in transformation! (*Tim*. 3.4.328-47)

How much does our brains' capacity for languages make us different from animals, if we choose like them? Bloom argues that Shylock "empties out" his self in the speech about humors (*Shakespeare* 187). Both Shylock's and Portia's cosmological views are reductive; they emphasize negative aspects of human nature, but their cosmological views hold a pragmatic truth, nevertheless.

[36] Timon is an Athenian aristocrat who does not mind giving away money to his friends. When his creditors come calling, however, Timon has no resources to pay them. When his friends abandon him, Timon retreats to the wilderness. During his time in the woods, Timon bitterly muses on how disgraceful and unjust life is. Timon winds up involved with Alcibiades' plot to wreck Athens in revenge, but before it happens, Timon dies offstage (the only death in this tragedy), leaving the cause of his death – either emotional stress or suicide – in the open.

2.3. Hares and Humors: An Elliptical Explanation for Human Will

In Shylock's response (to be discussed later) as to why he does not accept money as payment instead of Antonio's pound of flesh, he associates animals to humors. Although Portia pragmatically destroys Shylock, their cosmological views complement one another, that is, Portia's hare is complemented by Shylock's humors. Portia's animalistic cosmological view, expressed in the image of the hare complements Shylock's cosmological view of humors; however, despite their cosmologies complementing each other, Portia and Shylock could never be friends, and Shylock has to pay for Portia's group to thrive. A hare (like humors) is an image for lack of choice. When we act like hares or as if we are controlled by humors, we act *automatically*. In other words, we do not employ a thinking process of weighing actions and consequences or how to change a course of action to achieve a desired outcome. It is in the absence or omission of this process of reasoning that ellipsis takes form through the images of animals or humors.

René Girard believes that the "ironic depth in *The Merchant of Venice* results from a tension not between two static images of Shylock, but between those textual features that strengthen and those features that undermine the popular idea of an insurmountable difference between Christian and Jew" ("To Entrap the Wisest" 107). But *The Merchant of Venice* is not ironic. The play contains instances of irony, but the whole play is not in all-encompassing ironic mode, as Girard seems to assume. A suspicion, however, might arise during the trial scene:

BASSANIO Antonio, I am married to a wife
Which is as dear to me as life itself;
But life itself, my wife, and all the world,
Are not with me esteemed above thy life.
I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all
Here to this devil, to deliver you.
PORTIA Your wife would give you little thanks for that
If she were by to hear you make the offer.
GRATIANO I have a wife who I protest I love;
I would she were in heaven, so she could
Entreat some power to change this currish Jew.
NERISSA 'Tis well you offer it behind her back;
The wish would make else an unquiet house.

SHYLOCK These be the Christian husbands! (4.1.278-91)

Portia and Nerissa are wearing disguises in this scene. At that moment, Bassanio and Gratiano reveal to not love, or at least not to love enough, their recently married wives. The moment is ironic because Bassanio and Gratiano do not know that Portia and Nerissa are aware of that. The whole play, however, is not in an ironic mode like *Measure for Measure* (to be discussed in the next section) because of Shylock's villainy. Despite his ironic remark regarding the Christian husbands' hypocrisy, his villainy is still prevalent. Shylock might not be the perfect archetype of the comic villain because of his ambivalence, but salvation is met because he is prevented from shedding blood. If his "destruction" through conversion and expropriation as final acts of revenge, were necessary, it is another story. Is Portia a hypocrite since she demanded mercy from Shylock – in the passage used as epigraph for this chapter – but, in the end, took revenge on him? Bloom states that she "is at worst a happy hypocrite, far too intelligent not to see that she is not exactly dispensing Christian mercy" (*Shakespeare* 178). She might be both, but the truth is that she avoids bloodshed altogether.

Omission is also observed in some of the character's sexuality. As Coppélia Kahn points out, rather

> than concluding with a wedding dance as he does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Much Ado About Nothing*, a wedding masque like that in *As You Like It*, or a combination of family reunion, recognition scene, and troth plighting as in *Twelfth Night*, he ends *Merchant* with a combat of wits between men and women, a nervous flurry of accusations and denials, bawdy innuendos and threats of castration, which make up the final episode of a subplot rather than rounding off the main plot by celebrating marriage. Commonly referred to as "the ring plot," this intrigue may seem trivial, but is actually entwined with the main courtship plot from the middle of the play, and accomplishes more than one darker purpose on which the romantic moonlight of Belmont does not fall. (19-20)

Kahn also indicates that

> the ring plot emphasizes sexual differences more than it undercuts social and moral ones. It portrays a tug of war in which women and men compete—for the affections of men. Bassanio's final lines recapitulate the progression from homoerotic bonds to the marital bond ironically affirmed through cuckoldry which the action of the ring plot implies:

> Sweet doctor, you shall be my bedfellow,—
> When I am absent then lie with my wife.
> (5.1.284–85)

Similarly, the very last lines in the play, spoken by Gratiano, voice the homoerotic wish, succeeded by the heterosexual anxiety:

> But were the day come, I should wish it dark,
> Till I were couching with the doctor's clerk.
> Well, while I live, I'll fear no other thing,
> So sore, as keeping safe Nerissa's ring.
> (5.1.304–7) (26)

This sexual ambiguity enhances the ambivalence in the play. Bassanio, Gratiano and Lorenzo do not seem to love their wives. Bassanio, for instance, often seems more interested in Antonio than Portia, and Lorenzo, seems more interested in Shylock's money than Jessica. Portia, Nerissa, and Jessica perceive these nuances and are not satisfied, as we see in the final scene, but still do not act vengefully. The homoerotic desire between Antonio and Bassanio seems to be the major cause of Portia's dissatisfaction. After Lorenzo and Jessica leave, aware that they will inherit Shylock's money after his death, the play ends ambiguously with Portia calling everyone for a sit-down, presumably, to sort things out: "Let us go in, / And charge us there upon inter'gatories, / And we will answer all things faithfully" (5.1.297-99). It is noteworthy that, just like she puts Bassanio on the rack in 3.2, now she gathers everyone for an "interrogatory", as if she were able to reveal the truth through pain, but the audience will never know if everything will be fine after this. The ambivalence in *The Merchant of Venice* is at its peak, as it will also be in *Macbeth.*

Bassanio also has a struggling conscience. In 3.2, the scene in which he chooses the casket, begins with Portia saying she is afraid he will choose the wrong casket. After her long speech, BassanIo says (seemingly impatiently): "Let me choose, / For as I am, I live upon the rack" (3.2.24-25). Bassanio seems to wish to speed up the choosing ceremony because it is as if he were being tortured – the rack is an "instrument of torture used, especially in cases of suspected treason . . ., to stretch someone out cruelly until he or she confessed" (OS 165). Is the time he spends with Portia unpleasant or is he thinking about Antonio? Portia suspects Bassanio's unfaithfulness and

replies: “Upon the rack, Bassanio? Then confess / What treason there is mingled with your love” (3.2.24-27). Portia suspects that he is at least as sexually interested in Antonio as he is in her. The evidence for this is that, later in the scene, after the letter informing that Antonio’s ships had wrecked, Portia also perceives a change in Bassanio’s complexion: “There are some shrewd contents in yond same paper / That steals the colour from Bassanio’s cheek” (3.2.42-43). Bassanio acknowledges that Antonio’s life is in great danger; Bassanio is also struggling with a choice, his love split between Antonio and Portia.

Another key question regarding will is: why does Portia help Antonio? Her reason is as vague as any:

> I never did repent for doing good,
> Nor shall not now; for in companions
> That do converse and waste the time together,
> Whose souls do bear an egal yoke of love,
> There must be needs a like proportion
> Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit;
> Which makes me think that this Antonio,
> Being the bosom lover of my lord,
> Must needs be like my lord. (3.4.10-18)

She claims to be helping Antonio because he is as good as Bassanio, but, as we just have seen, Bassanio is not exactly “good” because there is unconfessed treason mingled with his love. Antonio himself is scarcely “good”, because, as I will discuss later, he shares a structural hatred with Shylock. The only concrete reason here for Portia providing her husband’s friend’s aid is that she is simply protecting her own group or party whether or not they are “good”. In conclusion, there is no arguable reason or rational justification for Portia helping Antonio other than protecting her own party, i.e., Portia herself does not know exactly why she choses to help Antonio.

The subject of choice in the play is related to its own mystery. In other words, the reasons for which we make choices are unknown to ourselves. Portia’s father’s design seems to have preternatural origins. This aura of mysticism is enhanced by the song accompanying Bassanio’s reflections:

> Tell me where is fancy bred,
> Or in the heart, or in the head?

How begot, how nourishèd?

. . .

It is engend'red in the eye,

With gazing fed, and fancy dies

In the cradle where it lies.

Let us all ring fancy's knell.

I'll begin it – Ding, dong, bell. (3.2.63-71)

There is controversy among critics as to the purpose of the song (AS 80; OS 168). In my view, Portia is aware that Bassanio, especially considering his unconfessed treason, is going to choose wrongly. She says: "I am locked in one of them [caskets]: / If you do love me, you will find me out" (3.2.40-41). But what if, since he also loves Antonio, Bassanio does not fully love her? Portia, as mentioned, seems to notice his wavering feelings toward her and asks him to confess his "treason". She is also aware that fancy dies quickly. What also dies quickly is the "madness" in sexually aroused hares, as she herself explained in she first speech. Thus, she seems to be worried that, if Bassanio does not truly love her, he is going to choose based on fancy, like a hare. And so, she sings him the song in order to give him a hint.

The gold casket reads: "Who chooseth me, shall gain what many men desire". Its contents: "All that glisters is not gold" (2.7.65). The silver one reads: "Who chooseth me, shall get as much as he deserves". Its contents: "There be fools alive iwis[37] / Silvered o'er"[38] (2.9.67-68). The lead one: "Who chooseth me, must give and hazard all he hath". Its contents: "You that choose not by the view / Chance as fair, and choose as true" (3.2.131-32). The contents of gold and silver caskets reveal that fancy, good-looking but quick-lived, is deceiving. In the song, fancy "is engend'red in the eye, / With gazing fed, and fancy dies / In the cradle where it lies". It either dies in its infancy or in the cradle of the eye where it lies (NCS 128). Bassanio does not even read the inscriptions. After his speech, he without hesitation chooses the lead one, as his remark shows immediately after the song: "So may the outward shows be least themselves: / The world is still deceived with ornament" (3.2.73-74). Is Bassanio truly wise and fully aware that looks are deceiving? Or did he catch the hint in Portia's song?

---

[37] "[A]ssuredly" (NCS 118).

[38] That is, there certainly are fools covered in silver. Silver could mean either gray hair or silver ornaments. The latter meaning seems more precise (NCS 118).

In conclusion, the governing trope of the play is ellipsis. The sense of mystery, lack of choice, or omission as to how we choose is conveyed by the images of the hare and the humors. According to Bloom, "Portia, the play's center, is far more complex and shadowed than ever I have seen her played as being" (*Shakespeare* 177). Portia's reason for helping Antonio is not ironical, but elliptical. Antonio's relationship with Bassanio is elliptical, that is to say, that most of it is omitted. Details of Jessica's and Lancelot's relationships with Shylock – which would shine more light on their hatred toward him – are omitted. Lancelot himself is a sort of elliptical character, owing to all the mysticisms with which he is associated. Portia's father's reason for getting Portia a husband through the riddles is omissive. The ruin of Antonio's fortune (in the shipwreck) is omissive. We know that Tubal informs Shylock that Antonio would not be able to pay him and we assume that Tubal wanted Antonio dead since, at the end, Antonio informs us that his riches were not ruined, but that is an assumption. We cannot know the real reason; hence, it is elliptical. Finally, Shylock's answer – which I will discuss in the next section – is also elliptical, i.e., his "I am content" omits his sudden change of heart. The endings of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure* are similar, but each one reinforces the governing trope of each play. Garber also points out that *The Merchant of Venice* is not "festive"[39] and filled with tragic elements:

> Written in 1596-1598, *The Merchant of Venice* is one of a group of major comedies of Shakespeare's middle period, sometimes called "great" or "festive" comedies, a group that also includes *Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night.* The term "festive" refers not so much to the plays' presumptive joyousness as to their thematic links and plot links to seasonal festivals from May Day to Christmas and Twelfth Night, and it is noteworthy that in each of these plays, especially *Merchant*, there is much that actively resists joyful celebration. (Both Portia and Antonio are melancholy at the opening of the play; Shylock detests stage plays and music; threats of death and loss predominate through much of the dramatic action; and the ending of the play, at least in most productions, is at the best bittersweet, if not entirely bitter.) Again, this is not uncharacteristic of Shakespearean comedy, which always seems to hold death at bay just outside its borders, and tends to postpone the promised weddings, reunions, and consummations, the hallmarks of traditional stage comedy, to some notional "sixth act" beyond the playing time of the

[39] Cf. L. C. Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*.

> play. . . . Perhaps what strikes an audience first about *The Merchant of Venice* is that its two opening scenes present two melancholy people, people who seem to have everything the riches of the world can afford, and who are, nonetheless, unhappy. (*Shakespeare After All* 367-68)

In short, Garber points out a certain melancholy or uncomic atmosphere surrounding the play. The atmosphere is not uncomic; it is that of mystery, and mystery usually involves ambiguity, which, in turn, implies confusion. Mystery and ambiguity, however, need not be necessarily negative; it depends on perspective. In the *Merchant of Venice*, mystery brings about a sense of concealment, which resonates with its comic sense.

2.4. Shylock and Antonio's Mutually Structural Hatred

Antonio is a melancholy character, a condition which, by the way, he has not chosen, but is he suicidal? According to Bloom, "Bassanio, we have to assume, is bisexual, but Antonio clearly is not, and his homoeroticism is perhaps less relevant than his sadomasochism, the doom-eagerness that could allow him to make so mad a contract with Shylock" (*Shakespeare* 179). Antonio accepts giving up a pound of his flesh, to be cut near his heart, to Shylock if he is not able to pay Bassanio's debt. This is Shylock's bond and, apparently, Antonio's consensual death wish. He reveals his melancholy at the opening of the play. In his exact words, he says he is sad for no good reason:

> I know not why I am so sad.
> It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
> I am to learn. (1.1.1-5)

He scarcely struggles to confront Shylock during the trial:

> I do beseech you
> Make no moe[40] offers, use no farther means,
> But with all brief and plain conveniency
> Let me have judgement, and the Jew his will. (4.1.80-83)

Death is convenient to him. The only thing that seems to concern him is Bassanio's love: "Pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay his debt, and then I care not" (3.3.35-36). It seems that if he

[40] "[M]ore (in number)" (AS 107).

can somehow confirm Bassanio's love for him, he is, in a way, free. When Portia, during the trial, asks him if he has anything else to say, he asks for Bassanio's hand:

I am armed and well prepared.

Give me your hand, Bassanio. Fare you well.

. . .

For herein Fortune shows herself more kind

Than is her custom: it is still her use

To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,

To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow

An age of poverty; from which ling'ring penance

Of such misery doth she cut me off. (4.1.260-68).

Fortune is kind because she puts him out of his misery. In the last scene, he says that he would put himself again in harm's way for Bassanio:

I once did lend my body for his wealth,

. . .

I dare be bound again,

My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord

Will nevermore break faith advisedly." (5.1.249-53)

He took the bond with Shylock knowing his life was in danger, did not insist too much in confronting him into giving up the bond and now he is doing it again. Antonio seems to borrow money from Shylock, in part, because he loves Bassanio, but he also does it largely because he does not see much meaning in life anymore.

If we recall Antonio's first words about his melancholy, he says that he does not know how he "caught it, found it, or came by it, / What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born". He obviously did not choose to be melancholy. Is he choosing to be suicidal, or even did he choose to hate Shylock? According to Bloom, "Antonio, as so many critics observe, is Shylock's mirror image, bonded with him in mutual hatred, and no more cheerful than Shylock is" (*Shakespeare* 177). During the trial, when being confronted, Shylock says that he has no good reason for "choosing" his bond over three times the value of Antonio's debt:

You'll ask me why I rather choose to have

A weight of carrion flesh than to receive

Three thousand ducats. I'll not answer that –

But say it is my humour: is it answered? (4.1.40-43)

Humor here is "probably the older meaning 'fixation of character' rather than 'whim', since Shylock goes on to speak of true phobias" (NCS 148). Shylock wants his revenge like a hot-tempered hare wants to copulate. The phobias referred to by M. M. Mahood, the editor of NCS edition, are in the following lines:

What if my house be troubled with a rat,
And I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats
To have it baned? What, are you answered yet?
Some men there are love not a gaping pig;
As there is no firm reason to be rendered
Some that are mad if they behold a cat;
And others when the bagpipe sings i'the nose
Cannot contain their urine: for affection
Masters oft passion, sways it[41] to the mood
Of what it likes or loathes. Now for your answer:
Why he cannot abide a gaping pig,
Why he a harmless necessary cat,
Why he a woollen bagpipe, but of force
Must yield to such inevitable shame
As to offend, himself being offended:
So can I give no reason, nor I will not,
More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing
I bear Antonio, that I follow thus
A losing suit against him. Are you answered? (4.1.44-62)

[41] The final form of lines 51-52 is problematic. The AS edition reads: "for affection / (Master of passion) sways it". The OS edition reads: "for affection, / Mistress of passion, sways it". In the end, the general meaning is not considerably affected, and it could be phrased as: affection holds power over passion. There remains a distinction to be made between affection and passion. According to Mahood, there was a "distinction made in Elizabethan psychology between 'affection' and 'passion'. Affection is a strong sensuous response, either of attraction or revulsion, which is thought of as arousing passion – that is, disturbing the mind. . . . Given this distinction, it is just possible to make sense of lines 51-2 as they stand, by taking 'Masters of passion' to refer to the various affections, or antipathies, that Shylock has listed" (NCS 179). The point Shylock is trying to make seems to be that that affection, that which controls the disturbance of the mind, is guided by liking or loathing.

Shylock "chooses" his bond because it is as if he were paying to have something he hates eliminated. It is our affection, he states, that controls our states of mind, and our affections are ruled by that which we like or loathe. The answer to the question why he "chooses" his bond over the money is that he hates Antonio. In conclusion: "By my soul I swear / There is no power in the tongue of man / To alter me. I stay here on my bond" (4.1.236-38). There is no kind of reasoning that would annul his hate. In Portia's terms, the meshes of a crippled counsel – reasoning – cannot catch a leaping hare – hate. The question Portia poses in the beginning of the play, nonetheless, remains: why knowing what is the right thing to do is easier than actually doing it (1.2.11)?

There is, however, a mystery in the trial scene, even bigger, perhaps, than that of Portia's question. During the trial, Bassanio seems to become very emotional and says:

> Antonio, I am married to a wife
> Which is as dear to me as life itself;
> But life itself, my wife, and all the world,
> Are not with me esteemed above thy life.
> I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all
> Here to this devil, to deliver you. (4.1.278-83)

Portia seems to get upset (as we see in her comment that immediately follows Bassanio's lines) and the sequence ensues, in which she does not seem to mind Antonio's death anymore:

> PORTIA A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine,
> The court awards it, and the law doth give it.
> SHYLOCK Most rightful judge!
> PORTIA And you must cut this flesh from off his breast;
> The law allows it, and the court awards it.
> SHYLOCK Most learned judge! A sentence: come, prepare. (4.1.295-300)

But she almost immediately changes her mind: "Tarry a little" (4.1.301). Portia seems to have gotten upset with Bassanio's comment on his love toward Antonio, and, angry, she would temporarily agree with Shylock. But just when Shylock is about to butcher Antonio, she has a sudden change of heart. Shortly after, there comes Shylock's "I am content". What is it with these abrupt changes? Portia's case does not render her an implausible character. Portia, being smart as she is, probably changes her mind by quickly acknowledging that Antonio is too "good" a man to be killed. "Good" here in the sense that Shylock uses it:

SHYLOCK Antonio is a good man –

BASSANIO Have you heard any imputation to the contrary?

SHYLOCK Ho no, no, no, no: my meaning in saying he is a good man is to have you understand me that he is sufficient. (1.3.11-14)

By good, "Shylock means 'financially sound', but in a conflict of values typical of the play Bassanio takes the word to mean 'honourable' . . . [sufficient means] . . . security enough in normal circumstances" (NCS 83); "'good' and 'sufficiency' have become synonymous for Shylock" (AS 22). Portia says that she would never "repent for doing good" (4.3.10). She probably realizes that Antonio would keep being a "good" friend to her husband – which is actually confirmed by Antonio's lines in the last scene, quoted above. In this sense, Portia is "choosing" to help Antonio, like a hare "chooses" to mate.

Shylock's case is different because his acceptance renders him an unplausible character. Bloom argues that "Shylock's conversion . . . [destroys] the plausibility of Shakespeare's comic villain as a character" (*The Merchant of Venice* vii) since the proud and fierce Jew "scarcely would have preferred Christianity to death" (*The Merchant of Venice* 2). Additionally,

> Shylock's acceptance of enforced Christianity is a . . . severe implausibility and one that distracts from dramatic or even theatrical effect. Indeed, as drama Shylock's "I am content" is necessarily a puzzle, not akin, say, to Iago's "From this time forth I never will speak word." Iago will die, under torture, in absolute silence: a dramatic death. We anticipate that Shylock the broken new Christian will live in silence: not a dramatic life. Is it that Shakespeare wished to repeal Shylock, as it were, and so cut away the enormous pathos of the character? We have seen no weaknesses in Shylock's will, no signs indeed that he can serve the function of a comic villain, a new Barabas [from Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*]. No red wig and giant nose will transform the speaker of Shylock's 360 dark lines into a two-dimensional character. Shylock, however monstrous his contemplated revenge, is all spirit, malign and concentrated, indifferent to the world and the flesh, unless Antonio be taken to represent both for him. Displaced spirit and so villain as he is, Shylock confronts in the heroically Christian merchant of Venice his tormentor and his double, the play's best Christian, who demonstrates the authenticity of his religious and moral zeal by his prowess in spitting at and cursing Shylock. I intend no irony there, and I fear that I read Shakespeare as he meant to *be* read. (*The Merchant of Venice* 3-4)

In Bloom's view, Shylock's acceptance of conversion is a distraction from dramatic effect. In my view, attempting to imbue Shylock with too much pathos is an inaccurate reading. Avoiding seeing Shylock as a comic villain because he is a Jew is a path that leads to a weak misreading. Shylock is supposed to be understood as a comic villain, much less ambivalent for Shakespeare's audiences than to our current standards, and whose elimination has a necessary positive outcome. To Bloom, Shylock's acceptance of conversion is the most egregious aesthetic flaw in Shakespeare because he loses coherence as a character (*The Merchant of Venice* 5).

Indeed, there seems to be something missing in Shylock's "I am content" since he would rather die than become a Christian because his business is his life:

take my life and all, pardon not that:
You take my house when you do take the prop
That doth sustain my house; you take my life
When you do take the means whereby I live. (4.1.370-73)

Could it be that Antonio, being suicidal, and Shylock, as Bloom argued, being his mirror image, bonded with him in mutual hatred, is also bonded with him in self-destructive impulses – since Christianity is worse for him than death? Or did Shylock finally repent? None of these answers are, to me, satisfactory. My hypothesis is that, if Shylock's acceptance is neither an aesthetic flaw nor its inadequacy is due to an unlikely missing stage direction, then, it could be related to the play's ruling image of lack of choice. The only fitting explanation I can find to Shylock's "I am content" is that he does not have a choice, which is as elliptical as Shylock's own answer. This is reasonable because, considering the grudge Shylock holds against Antonio, it is plausible that he would do anything to aggravate him: "If I can catch him once upon the hip, / I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him" (1.3.37-38).

According to Bloom, "Antonio, as so many critics observe, is Shylock's mirror image, bonded with him in mutual hatred, and no more cheerful than Shylock is" (*Shakespeare* 177). The mutual hatred between Antonio and Shylock is the central conflict in *The Merchant of Venice*. But what does Shylock really hate about Antonio? Antonio's way of doing business allegedly bothers Shylock more than religious belief:

I hate him for he is a Christian;
But more, for that in low simplicity
He lends out money gratis, and brings down

The rate of usance here with us in Venice. (1.3.33-36)

"Shylock prefers 'usance' to 'usury'" (NCS 84), which seems to suggest that the connotations that Shylock attributes to money-lending go beyond the usual pejorative sense. Money-lending, to Shylock, seems to be more than a mere activity that provides income:

He hates our sacred nation, and he rails
Even there where merchants most do congregate
On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift
Which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe
If I forgive him! (1.3.39-43)

"'Interest' was a better name than 'usury', but by no means as fair sounding as *thrift*, the pursuit of which was a virtue in the eyes of citizens" (AS 24). It seems that money-lending, to Shylock, is a way of life. Does Antonio hate Shylock's tribe because of their religious beliefs? Shylock claims to hate Antonio because he is Christian and also claims that Antonio hates Jews ("our sacred nation"), but when the threat of bloodshed arises, Antonio provides a more concrete reason as to why Shylock hates him:

He seeks my life, his reason well I know:
I oft delivered from his forfeitures
Many that have at times made moan to me;
Therefore he hates me. (3.3.21-24)

By delivering those in Shylock's forfeitures, that is, by helping those in debt, Antonio reduces the rate of interest in Venice, thus, affecting Shylock's earnings, for which Shylock, according to Antonio, hates him. Antonio, however, says nothing about why he hates Shylock. Does Antonio help those in Shylock's debt because he is a good Christian or because he hates Shylock and wants to harm him? Who hated first, Shylock or Antonio? Any attempt to answer these questions is fruitless. The only unambiguous conclusion that can be drawn is that money-management is a stronger cause of hate between the two. Shylock says that he hates Antonio, but he also exposes the history between them, according to which Antonio has always loathed him for his usance. From this history, what can be acknowledged is that both men always felt mutual hatred because of the way each one deals with money. There is physical abuse and patent aggression from Antonio toward Shylock: "You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, / And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine, / And all for use of that which is mine own" (1.3.103-05). To this, Antonio replies: "I

am as like to call thee so again, / To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too" (1.3.122-23). But this kind of aggression is not enough to engender structural hatred[42] from Shylock's part, considering the nature of his character. As I have just explained, the real reason as to why Shylock hates Antonio is his interference in the rate of interest in Venice. Antonio scarcely feels any guilt for humiliating Shylock. What is relevant is that all the characters hate Shylock, and he hates back.

In this war of hatred, the winner is not the one with more money, but the one who can manipulate power to their advantage. Portia wittily saves Antonio using a peripeteia.[43] But Shylock, in my view, is the winner in the contest of representing reality:

BASSANIO Do all men kill the things they do not love?

SHYLOCK Hates any man the thing he would not kill? (4.1.66-67)

However grim or even biased this might sound, Shylock seems to win the struggle against Bassanio regarding the better understanding of reality here. The fantasy of eliminating that which one hates is a trait of human nature. As Bloom remarks, "Antonio's anti-Shylockism and Shylock's anti-Antonioism are parallel instances to the madness of those who lose control when they encounter a gaping pig, become insane at seeing a harmless necessary cat, or involuntarily urinate when the bagpipe sings" (*Shakespeare* 187). According to Bloom, unreasonable, sheer hate is madness, but it may be just an essential trait of human nature. The mutual hatred between Antonio and Shylock seems to reside in their very ways of life. Shylock values the hoarding of money and goods:

Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that:

You take my house when you do take the prop

That doth sustain my house; you take my life

When you do take the means whereby I live. (4.1.370-73)

Usance is just something which Antonio naturally abhors, and the opposite is true for Shylock, i.e., he hates that Antonio does not value money and goods. In Bloom's view, the

---

[42] By "structural hatred", I mean a kind of hatred that emerges without any triggering cause, such as an act of aggression. In this sense, if one nurtures structural hatred for another, one simply hates the mere fact that the other exists, and Shylock's existence is dependent on money-lending, his way of life.

[43] According to William Greene, peripeteia (περιπέτεια), "ordinarily translated as 'reversal of fortune' or 'reversal of situation' really conveys a more precise meaning: it is the outcome of an action which is the opposite of what was intended" (92). This description fits Portia's trick perfectly because what was intended was that Shylock would have taken a pound of flesh from Antonio, but ends up backing off.

> antipathy between Antonio and Shylock transcends Jew baiting; Gratiano is an instance of that Christian sport, but Antonio cannot be let off so easily. His ambivalence, like Shylock's, is murderous, and unlike Shylock's, it is successful, for Antonio does end Shylock the Jew, and gives us Shylock the New Christian. . . . It is horrible to say it, but the broken New Christian Shylock is preferable to a successful butcher of a Shylock, had Portia not thwarted him. What would be left for Shylock after hacking up Antonio? What is left for Antonio after crushing Shylock? In Shakespearean ambivalence, there can be no victories. (*Shakespeare* 190)

From a pragmatic perspective, it could be said that Shylock and Antonio hate each other simply because they acknowledge each other's existence. The hate they feel for each other is primordial. Their hatred, as Bloom observes, is a diversion of self-hatred, and such hatred also provides excitement since it is ambivalent. In a sense, it provides meaning for their lives, i.e., they would not have much left if they did not have each other to hate. Shylock and Antonio are therefore the best example of primeval mutually ambivalent hatred.

With respect to hatred in another of Shakespeare's plays, *Othello*, regarding Iago's hatred of Othello, Bloom alludes to Satan's "sense of injured merit" (1.98) in *Paradise Lost*:

> Iago assures his gull, Roderigo, that he hates Othello, and he states the only true motive for his hatred, which is what Milton's Satan calls "a Sense of Injured Merit." Satan (as Milton did not wish to know) is the legitimate son of Iago, begot by Shakespeare upon Milton's Muse. Iago, long Othello's "ancient" (his ensign, or flag officer, the third-in-command), has been passed over for promotion, and Cassio has become Othello's lieutenant. No reason is given for Othello's decision; his regard for "honest Iago," bluff veteran of Othello's "big wars," remains undiminished. Indeed, Iago's position as flag officer, vowed to die rather than let Othello's colors be captured in battle, testifies both to Othello's trust and to Iago's former devotion. Paradoxically, that quasi-religious worship of the war god Othello by his true believer Iago can be inferred as the cause of Iago's having been passed over. (*Shakespeare* 434)

The problem about this comment is that Bloom precisely locates the single cause of Othello's rejection of Iago. Iago informs us that there could be at least another reason for his hatred, the suspicion of cuckoldry (*Oth.* 1.3.369-70; *Oth.* 2.1.279-80). The attempt to locate with precision the source of Iago's hatred could become so problematic that even his alleged reason – being

passed over for promotion – can be doubted, as T. H. Howard-Hill points out in "U and Non-U: Class and Discourse Level in *Othello*" (although it is the most plausible reason that is overtly exposed in the text):

> we cannot doubt the priority of Iago's hatred of Othello to his attempt to be promoted (if in fact that occurred at all) because Roderigo refers to an earlier occasion when Iago "toldst me thou didst hold him in thy hate" (I,i,7). Cassio's promotion is brought in to provide a circumstance that will assure Roderigo that he hates Othello for a good reason and therefore may be trusted to work against his commander for Roderigo's benefit. (110)

Iago declares twice that he repeatedly told Roderigo that he hated Othello for a long time (*Oth.* 1.1.7; 1.3.350) and overtly declares in two soliloquies that he hates Othello: "I hate the Moor" (*Oth.* 1.1.53; 1.3.368). In my view, the precise reason for Iago's hatred, pragmatically, loses relevance. What matters is that Iago has a structural hatred for Othello, regardless of the reason (which is omitted anyway) and their history. According to Stephen Greenblatt, when "Iago starts adding to the reasons he hates Othello, the accumulation of motives, each pulling in a different direction, begins to mystify the deep source of his grudge" (*Shakespeare's Freedom* 62). Iago having telling Roderigo many times in the past that he hates Othello is a suggestion that the passing over might be an excuse. Iago's hate for Othello is primeval.

Desdemona is allegedly charmed by Othello's endurance. But if endurance is the one feature that charms her, what if Iago were in Othello's place? Would Desdemona be charmed by or love him like she loves Othello? Iago is a skilled warrior, as Cassio tells us: "He speaks home [bluntly], madam; you may relish him more in the soldier than in the scholar" (2.1.161-62). But Othello does not choose Iago as his second in command; he chooses Cassio. Coincidentally, Desdemona seems more apt to choose Cassio as a lover than Iago in any circumstance. In a dialogue that precedes the lines by Cassio I just quoted, Desdemona asks Iago to praise her and rebukes his failed attempt: "O, most lame and impotent conclusion! Do not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy husband. How say you, Cassio, is he not a most profane and liberal counsellor?" (2.1.158-60). Then, after Cassio's commentary (quoted previously), Iago observes that the two (Desdemona and Cassio) get along: "*[Aside]* He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said; whisper. With as little a web a s this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do" (2.1.163-65). Iago is rejected by Desdemona, who, in the next minute, is touching Cassio's hands. Desdemona's feeling for Iago is the same feeling of Hermia for Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream. Desdemona hates Iago. The difference between Hermia and Desdemona's feeling is of degree, not nature. Hatred, regardless of degree, is a primeval element of human nature according to characters in Shakespeare's plays.

Iago's hatred for Othello may not be as cheap as Antonio's hatred for Shylock. Antonio's charitable intent, his reason for hindering Shylock every way he can, is very unconvincing. Shylock, at least, is honest and declares that Antonio's actions aim to lower the interest rates in Venice, which would undermine his livelihood. Shylock just hates him back: "The villainy you teach me I will execute" (3.1.56). Iago has a stronger reason for hating Othello, which is, we suppose, being passed over for promotion, i.e., it is less gratuitous than that of Antonio for Shylock. Bloom attempts to explain Othello's preference for Cassio by arguing that Iago had worshipped Othello as a god in the past. Cassio, being more sensible than Iago, would have gained Othello's trust since Iago's worship – of Othello as a war god – would not be fit for a military strategist (*Shakespeare* 434). But the play lacks substantial evidence for Bloom's argument. The preference of both Othello and Desdemona for Cassio is, in my view, structural, i.e., they like Cassio and hate Iago for what each man is. Iago's hatred for Othello, although less gratuitous than Antonio's, is still a primeval sensation – just like the search for sexual success and the aversion to death.

According to Greenblatt, in *King Lear*, "though he commits appalling crimes, Edmund is not actually a hater, in the way that Shylock is. He connives against his brother and his father not because he hates either of them—if anything, he holds them in a kind of perversely affectionate contempt—but rather because he refuses to stay in the collective category assigned to him by his fate" (*Shakespeare's Freedom* 60). As I discussed, Shylock's hatred is not gratuitous in the sense that it is not deliberate. Shylock's hatred is reactive to Antonio's inceptive hatred, but if Edmund, as Greenblatt suggests, "refuses to stay in the collective category assigned to him", i.e., bastardy it is because he hates something. If we attempt to pinpoint reasons for hatred, we end up scratching the surface, that is, we end up focusing on elements that seem to just function as an excuse or pretext. The most important thing – besides admitting that we all have the capacity to hate, as we see in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *King Henry V* –[44] is that, even if all cases of hatred be not

[44] As discussed in the Introduction, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the conflict among the four young lovers escalates and they deliver harsh insults to each other, the word "hate" and derivations being common. Furthermore, I side with McAlindon when he claims that Shakespeare took for granted the notion that of cave-keeping evils are inherent to every human being (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 110-11), which I also discussed in the introduction. I also reproduce the passage from Lucrece on which McAlindon bases his claim: "In men as in a rough'-grown grove remain / Cave-keeping evils that obscurely sleep" (*The Rape of Lucrece*" 1249–50). Additionally, in *King Henry V*, cf. Henry's

structural (Shylock's and Laertes' cases for instance are not), many of them are. We cannot find a rational source for Antonio's hatred for Shylock, in my view, because he hates Shylock for what he is, and not for the consequences of what he does, which would be the worsening of the lives of those who borrow money from Shylock. When I discuss Edmund, in *King Lear* (in the next chapter), I will attempt to show how his anger seems to come from a hatred for the structure of reality itself rather than for his condition of bastardy. This is, in philosophical terms, an ontological matter.

This mystification of Iago's hatred for Othello Greenblatt refers to is another way to phrase what I am insisting on: to attempt to find causes for ontological – or structural – hatred is not, from a pragmatic perspective, a fruitful endeavor. What I argue, therefore, is that the hatred Antonio nurtures for Shylock, Edmund, for bastardy, Iago, for Othello, simply *is*. No psychological investigation would help in this regard because the root is not identifiable in the first place. And even if it were, it could not be removed anyway because it is ontological, i.e., what they hate is the structure of reality, which does not mean that, in some cases, hatred does not have a cause, like for instance, Laertes' hate for Hamlet, Macduff's for Macbeth or even Shylock's for Antonio. In these cases, there are quite plausible causes for hatred. According to Bloom, in

> our post-Holocaust universe, how can we accommodate Shylock's "I am content," too broken for irony, too strong for any play whatsoever? That question, I think, is unanswerable and does not belong to literary criticism anyway. What is essential for criticism is to ask and answer the double question: Why did Shakespeare so represent his stage Jew as to make possible the romantic interpretation that has proceeded from Hazlitt and Henry Irving right through to Harold C. Goddard and innumerable actors in our century, and having done so, why did the playwright then shatter the character's consistency by imposing on him the acceptance of the humiliating forced conversion to that religion of mercy, the Christianity of Venice? (*The Merchant of Venice* 3)

Regarding the conflict between Antonio and Shylock in the play, Bloom states that

> The antipathy between Antonio and Shylock transcends Jew baiting; Gratiano is an instance of that Christian sport, but Antonio cannot be let off so easily. His ambivalence,

---

speech at *H5* 3.3.7-43, in which he reveals the concealed human capacity for hatred, violence and destruction. By observing a few of Shakespeare's characters, therefore, I deduce that violence and the capacity to hate is inherent to human nature.

> like Shylock's, is murderous, and unlike Shylock's, it is successful, for Antonio does end Shylock the Jew, and gives us Shylock the New Christian. Freudian ambivalence is simultaneous love and hatred directed toward the same person; Shakespearean ambivalence, subtler and more frightening, diverts self-hatred into hatred of the other, and associates the other with lost possibilities of the self. . . . It is horrible to say it, but the broken New Christian Shylock is preferable to a successful butcher of a Shylock, had Portia not thwarted him. What would be left for Shylock after hacking up Antonio? What is left for Antonio after crushing Shylock? In Shakespearean ambivalence, there can be no victories. (*Shakespeare* 189-90)

Antonio and Shylock's self-hatred are directed toward one another. In this sense, if one of them dies, the other loses his *raison d'être*. Shylock's conversion can be understood as a form of salvation since it seems to be the least worst scenario. Antonio demands that Shylock give half his belongings to his newly-wed daughter and be converted to Christianity (4.1.377-83). Shylock accepts, saying: "I am content" (4.1.389). Shylock's soul-crushing conversion seems to be preferable to the destruction that would ensue had his revenge against Antonio taken place. As Bloom reminds us, we "need always to keep reminding ourselves that he is a comic villain" (*The Merchant of Venice* 1). He is hated by the all the other characters, including his own daughter. Shylock, according to Bloom, "is one man against a city" (*Shakespeare* 190). Therefore, his conversion, especially to Shakespeare's audience at the time, is to be perceived as deliverance rather than destruction, even though there be some pathos in Shylock, since half his belongings, earned through work, are taken from him, as well as his undergoing forced conversion. And although Antonio strikes us as a philanthropist (since he redirects Shylock's payment from him to Jessica), we must not forget that Jessica and her husband are part of Portia's group, to which Antonio belongs. Bloom argues that Portia's "quality of mercy cheerfully tricks Shylock out of his life's savings in order to enrich her friends" (*Shakespeare* 177). But there is also the disheartening disappointment of Antonio. We know that he is sexually interested in Bassanio, but the relationship cannot be consummated. In the end, both Antonio and Shylock end up paying for the happiness of the young group of characters. Bassanio, although he feels guilty, uses Antonio both financially and sexually – as he himself says: "I once did lend my body for his wealth" (5.1.249) – and Portia uses Shylock to enrich their group of young folks. Salvation comes at a (dark) cost.

Bloom also argues that "Shakespeare's Shylock, proud and fierce Jew, scarcely would have preferred Christianity to death" (*The Merchant of Venice* 2). Is Shylock's conversion worse than death? What is the significance of faith? Spiritually, in the sense of providing meaning for actions, faith is relevant. It is a psychological mechanism that seems to maintain mental or psychic stability, but what is its objective relevance? Antonio and the others do not seem to hate Shylock because of his religious faith, but for his attitude toward money. Is the conversion spiritually, i.e., subjectively, relevant? Is Shylock going to change his actual faith by outwardly acting like a Christian? Lancelot seems to answer this question best with a sharp irony: "we were Christians enow before, e'en as many as could well live one by another. This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs; if we grow all to be pork eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money" (3.5.16-20). As Bloom explains, "Shylock is massively, frighteningly sincere and single-minded. He never acts a part: he *is* Shylock. Though this endows him with immense expressive force, it also makes him dreadfully vulnerable, and inevitably metamorphoses him into the play's scapegoat . . . Portia is the privileged ironist of *The Merchant of Venice*, but she becomes a brutal ironist at Shylock's expense" (*Shakespeare* 183). I think that this characteristic of scapegoating is what approximates comic villains, and specially Shylock, to tragic heroes: "Comedy often includes a scapegoat ritual of expulsion which gets rid of some irreconcilable character, but exposure and disgrace make for pathos, or even tragedy. *The Merchant of Venice* seems almost an experiment in coming as close as possible to upsetting the comic balance" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 165). Shylock's ambivalence puts him right on the blurred border existing between a comic villain and a tragic hero, but, in the end, his villainy does not prevail and salvation is achieved while bloodshed is avoided.

The mutually structural hatred between Antonio and Shylock resembles Portia's reason for helping Antonio: they cannot be rationally justified. The aura of mystery prevails in the play to the point that the characters cannot understand why they feel and act the way they do. They choose, according to Portia, like hares.

2.5. Concealing Sexual and Economic Interests

Despite all the tragic elements, such as a certain melancholy tone pervading the play and the hatred between Shylock and Antonio, I argue that the play is a pure comedy. According to Goddard, on 22, July 1598**,** James Roberts published the play in the Stationers' Register with an

alternative name: *The Marchaunt of Venyce or otherwise called the Jewe of Venyce*: "Here is testimony that already in Shakespeare's own day the public was puzzled by the title of the play and had substituted for, or added to, the author's another title more expressive of what seemed to be its leading interest and central figure" (*The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Vol. 1 90). As Bloom explained, however, the central conflict of the play is that between Shylock and Antonio, which is solved, as I explained, by Portia through a peripeteia. Thus, "Shakespeare's comedy is Portia's play, and not Shylock's" (*Shakespeare* 197). Laurie Maguire states that "*Merchant of Venice* is a deeply uncomedic comedy, and the disturbing tone is partly linked to the characters' financial focus" (147). Moreover, the "last scene is unusually private and antisocial. It is also indifferent to preceding events: the characters indulge in bawdy jokes, oblivious to the fact that they have just destroyed a man. The final impression is one of individuals rather than society, and of flawed individuals at that" (149). What the play does, however, is precisely to conceal this – even if that concealment be not perfect and provide a few glances of the insides here and there – so as to maintain it as a pure comedy. Therefore, I would argue for the opposite conclusion regarding the final scene, which enhances the sense of concealment. I have argued that concealment is part of the comic sense precisely because of the reasons indicated by Maguire. At best, the play is an uncomic comedy, but I still insist that it is a pure comedy.

Other critics see the play not exclusively as either a comedy or a tragedy, but as a tragicomedy. Carlos Ludwig argues that

> The final act's effacing effect creates feelings of discontent and anxiety in the audience, in the readers and in the characters of the play. Thus, such feelings are not fortuitously produced. Shakespeare actually created ambiguities that puzzle the audience and unleash disquieting and anguishing feelings after someone sees or reads the play. At the end of the play, the audience may feel constrained and uneasy of what happened to Shylock. Such feelings are the obscure uneasiness we may feel, because, at first, we laugh at Shylock's comic repetitive talking and then, reversibly, we eye-witness the cruelties that the Christians had impinged on him. (85)

This happens not because the play has tragic traits, but because of a sense of mystery. As Ludwig argues, there are ambiguities that puzzle the audience, but these do not necessarily evoke a tragic meaning. Portia's reasons for helping Antonio remain a mystery, which is a sense that is reinforced by the setting of the last scene. The only concrete evidence the play provides is the material gain

Portia's group is awarded by taking down Shylock, who loses all his riches, which are transferred to the members of her party. It would make more sense if Portia had let Antonio be killed since he is her sexual rival, but then she would not be able to take Shylock's money. Portia gets Shylock's money for her and her party while having to put up with the tradeoff of having Antonio around Bassanio. Salvation is achieved because violence is avoided, but the causes of that salvation are murky and questionable at best. That is why, I argue, the prevailing sense of mystery conceals the negative impressions. Furthermore, Ludwig contends:

> The greatest problem of the play that makes uneasy to analyze it as a drama is the fifth act, with its effacing devices and the total forgetfulness of the cruelties that the Christians inflicted upon Shylock. The last act's effect is rather conflicting. The talking about love and romance, music and stars, the reconciliation of the couples Portia and Bassanio, Nerissa and Gratiano, who have just quarreled about their giving away their rings are over-determining elements which foreclose the sour effects of the fourth act. . . . Against Shylock's isolation and exclusion is necessary a comic and pretended happy ending to efface the play's sour effects. However, such closure is not dramatically convincing, since the play provokes a sort of bitter feeling at its end, which we try to reject or assimilate. This feeling provoked by such occlusion is disquieting and disturbing. However, some other elements point to sadness and discontent in the last act. Antonio ends the play completely alone. Like Shylock, he continues to be a sort of outcast of the play, a social outcast who is not happy. Likewise, Jessica remains sad and discontent in the final act. The opposing elements – festivity and sadness – have annihilating effects in the audience and the reader. The play's aesthetic effect is thus rather conflicting and anguishing. (85)

These elements, I argue, are meant to enhance the sense of concealment. Shylock's conversion may have been perceived as a negative event even by Shakespeare's audience, but the effect of the final scene soothes that negative effect through concealment rather than confounding the final meaning of the play, which is comic. Ambiguity can convey both negative and positive meanings. It is usually given a negative connotation because it is associated with confusion, but that depends on perspective. If one wants to be concealed or to conceal something, ambiguity has a positive meaning. Bloodshed had just been averted after all. The comic traits prevail over the tragic ones. The greatest problem of the play is not, as Ludwig suggested, the final scene, but, as Bloom argued, Shylock's consent.

As Bloom indicates, however, this play is "a profoundly anti-Semitic work" (*Shakespeare* 171). It is so because Shylock is predominantly a comic villain. He is hated by the other characters, and this hatred finds resonance with the audience. The most accurate way is to see Shylock is as an ambivalent figure, neither "entirely a comic villain [n]or only a figure of tragic pathos" (*Shakespeare* 175). I argue, however, that to see Shylock exclusively as a figure of tragic pathos is more of a misunderstanding than to see him only as a comic villain. Shylock is hated not (only) because it was acceptable to hate Jews during Shakespeare's time, but because he is a miser, and miserliness is an aspect of character that is commonly displeasing. We are not supposed to judge either Shylock or the audience of Shakespeare's time for hating him because miserliness is a displeasing aspect of character, whether or not it is associated with Jews. If Shylock were a figure of pathos, *The Merchant of Venice* would be in the ironic mode since the hatred the other characters nurture for him would be condemnable. Hamlet's brief "theory" of mimesis says that the purpose of acting is to show the men and women in the audience their own features, that is, "to hold . . . the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (*Ham*. 3.2.18-20). What Hamlet intends by arranging a play is to make Claudius externalize his guilt for having killed his brother, Hamlet's father, thus, allowing Hamlet to confirm that he was the murderer. *The Mousetrap*, Hamlet's play, is ironic. *The Merchant of Venice* is not ironic because Shylock is intended as a comic villain. That is to say that *The Merchant of Venice* does not aim to evoke guilt in the audience for Shylock's humiliation. If Shylock is intended as a figure of some pathos – since hating Jews was not condemnable as it is nowadays – the audience is not supposed to feel guilty for hating him.

Staging *The Merchant of Venice* nowadays is problematic because of its anti-Semitism. But the problem with this play becomes worse when we specifically consider that Shylock is not allowed a conclusion. Shakespeare gets rid of him with his "I am content", leaving an impression that something is missing. Is there an intention behind Shylock's resignation? Is there missing text or even a missing stage direction? Did Shakespeare plan a different conclusion for Shylock and changed his mind at the last minute? This is the kind of intention obviously cannot be fully recovered, but the portrayal of Shylock as a comic villain, which derives from a common hatred toward Jews in England during the Elizabethan term, can be recovered, and a denial of this is an ideological reading. As James Shapiro explains, ignoring the dark aspect of *The Merchant of Venice*, the hate of Jews, is worse than staging it:

> I have tried to show that much of the play's vitality can be attributed to the ways in which it scrapes against a bedrock of beliefs about the racial, national, sexual, and religious difference of others. I can think of no other literary work that does so as unrelentingly and as honestly. To avert our gaze from what the play reveals about the relationship between cultural myths and peoples' identities will not make irrational and exclusionary attitudes disappear. Indeed, these darker impulses remain so elusive, so hard to identify in the normal course of things, that only in instances like productions of this play do we get to glimpse these cultural faultlines. This is why censoring the play is *always* more dangerous than staging it. *The Merchant's* capacity to illuminate a culture is invariably compromised when those staging it flinch from presenting the play in its complex entirety, which is what occurred when Nazi directors, in the fifty or so productions they staged between 1933 and 1945, omitted the intermarriage of Jessica and Lorenzo, and which also occured when the British director Barry Kyle in a 1980 production in Israel was persuaded to omit Shylock's acceptance of conversion to Christianity, since it was so disturbing for Jewish audiences. . . . One thing remains certain: as long as anxieties about racial, national, sexual, and religious difference continue to haunt the way we imagine ourselves and respond to others, Shakespeare's words will remain "not of an age, but for all time. (*Shakespeare and the Jews* 228-29)

Nuttall argues that literature "can represent reality, but it can also invent, cheat, play, enchant. These, however, are not mere unconnected parallels. Text is texture. Representing, inventing, cheating, playing, enchanting are variously and unpredictably interwoven. They all, always, involve meaning, and meaning is never wholly private to the individual, never radically independent of the public world" (*New Mimesis* 192). Ignoring the anti-Semitism of *The Merchant of Venice*, as Shapiro suggests, is a form of censorship. Attempting to read the play ironically is a form of censorship, a weak misreading that ignores the public intentions of the text. In other words, to ignore that the play is anti-Semitic is a form of censorship which ensues from a weak reading. The perception of Jews in Elizabethan England of the 15th and 16th centuries seems to be something like the perception of communists in America during the cold war – an age that is closer to us and so facilitates understanding. The point here is that nothing would have prevented the audience from feeling sorry for Shylock to some extent, but the general perception of Jews would, in a way,

allow for his humiliation, just like a communist would be considered an evil person in America during the times of the cold war.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, there is a pervading sense of mystery and concealment from beginning to end. What is being concealed, I suggest, is the rottenness of the "good" characters. This does not, however, imply, in any sense, that Shylock is a tragic character. He has tragic traits but is a pure comic villain nonetheless and Portia is a pure comic heroine because her actions prevent bloodshed and conceal the ugly truth about her party. The prevailing trope used to engender such concealment is, as mentioned, ellipsis, which results in a "positive" ambiguity – a "negative" form of ambiguity will be discussed in the chapter abut *Hamlet*. In the next chapter, we will see such concealment, in *Measure for Measure*, through the use of irony.

Chapter 3. The Comic Sense in in *Measure for Measure*: The Need for Pain

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,
When not to be, receives reproach of being
And the just pleasure lost which is so deemed
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing.

–William Shakespeare, sonnet 121

In the previous chapter, I discussed how salvation is achieved through concealment in *The Merchant of Venice*. In *Measure for Measure*, the same notion of concealment is present, although it is executed in a different way. The sense of concealment is conveyed by Vincentio's implicit torture of other characters, who seem to accept and desire it. Salvation is achieved in this play because of this acceptance, but Vincentio's torture is concealed by irony.

Measure for Measure is currently classified as a "problem play" basically because critics do not see it as a pure comedy. It is one of the least staged of Shakespeare's plays, probably because it is one of the least understood. Bloom claims that "*Measure for Measure* surpasses the four High Tragedies [namely, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*] as the masterpiece of nihilism" (*Shakespeare* 363) and that it is "a comedy that destroys comedy" (*Shakespeare* 379-80). Irony, in the play, is employed in a highly subtle manner, which results in a concealment of the nihilism, which is inherent in it, as Bloom noted. In short, on the surface, it is just another comedy, but when the concealing irony is removed, we see its nihilism in full.

The play tells the story of Angelo who is suddenly thrust into a position of power by the duke Vincentio and abuses his new authority by taking advantage of Isabella, a nun who tries to free Claudio, her brother, arrested for premarital sex with his fiancée, Juliet. The setting is a contemporary Vienna overrun with brothels, gambling dens, and thieves. Vincentio disguises himself as a friar and puts Angelo in power so that he can enforce old laws in his name. Angelo follows the law to the letter and, as a result, brothels and gambling dens are closed. He also arrests Claudio and condemns him to death. Claudio implores his sister, Isabella, who is preparing to enter a convent, to argue for mercy on his behalf. Angelo assures Isabella that the only way she can save her brother is by agreeing to sleep with him. Isabella is left with the supposed dilemma of saving her brother's life while maintaining her religious convictions. Meanwhile, Vincentio lurks in

Vienna, disguised as a friar, and observes the struggles of Angelo, Isabella, and Claudio. In the end, Vincentio reveals his true identity (not after struggling to keep his disguise for some unknown reason) and also that he is aware of everything that had happened while he was gone. Finally, he arranges marriages (similarly to Rosalind in *As You Like It*) and proposes to Isabella, who does not answer before the curtain closes.

3.1. Irony as a Tool of Torture

According to Bloom, irony is "so pervasive in Shakespeare, in every genre, that no comprehensive account of it is possible" (*Shakespeare* 190). Of all the plays he wrote, however, only *Measure for Measure* seems to be in full ironic mode. According to Frye, in the division he establishes in the *Anatomy of Criticism* between low and high mimetic modes, the hero of most comedies and of realistic fiction belongs to the low mimetic. If "inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the *ironic* mode" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 34). The main difference between the low and high mimetic is the etiological nature of the hero. To Frye, mythical characters (either human beings or divine deities) belong to the high mimetic, while realistic ones (in the sense of not possessing supernatural features), to the low. While Frye's definition includes *Measure for Measure* in general, I aim to expand what he refers to as the ironic mode.

Measure for Measure gives us a sense absurdity, but Vincentio is not inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves. On the contrary, Angelo attributes godlike features to him, which suggests (ironically) that Vincentio has supernatural powers. Frye also attributes Vincentio the role of an *eiron*[45] (*Anatomy of Criticism* 174). The ironic mode of *Measure for Measure*, as I employ it, refers to the essential feature of irony, which is the sense of the concealment of intended meaning. In this play, nothing can be taken at its face value; it is always problematic to judge if the characters are being truthful or not. It is noteworthy that Frye uses the word "bondage" in the general sense of coercion or compulsion, but it fits perfectly in *Measure for Measure*'s pervading

[45] An *eiron* is a "man who deprecates himself" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 40). Vincentio deprecates himself by disguising himself as a friar, an individual of lower social rank. The word refers to irony. Greene makes a comment on irony which helps understands this: "Irony (εἰρωνεία) [*eironeia*] is the characteristic of a certain kind of man, the dissembler (εἴρων) [*eiron*] who says less than he knows, unlike the merely truthful man . . . A comic poet remarks that the fox is by nature εἴρων; conversely, we call some people 'foxy.' Aware of the dangers to which one is exposed in life from envious men, possibly even from jealous gods, the ironical man lies low and plays safe" (101).

sense of a paraphilic taste for pain. The main trio, Vincentio, Angelo and Isabella, all have darker intentions concealed by deceivingly virtuous exteriors. The three either like to inflict or receive pain, which is a taste related to sexuality often covertly. No other play Shakespeare wrote has such a feature, i.e., this ironic mode.

The play opens with Vincentio sending for Angelo. His first lines are: "Always obedient to your grace's will / I come to know your pleasure" (1.1.25-26). Through these lines, Angelo reveals the godlike capabilities of Vincentio and his taste for pain inflicted by Vincentio, who, delivers this speech:

> Thyself and thy belongings
> Are not thine own so proper as to waste
> Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.
> Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves: for if our virtues
> Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
> As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touched
> But to fine issues: nor nature never lends
> The smallest scruple of her excellence
> But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
> Herself the glory of a creditor,
> Both thanks and use (1.1.29-40)

In the first part of this speech, Vincentio's cosmological view is outward, that is, it is descriptive and refers to the autonomy of nature in relation to what it provides men. In the second part (from "Spirits are not finely touched" on), his cosmological view turns inward, i.e., Vincentio is expressing his take on the role of nature rather than describing it. It is a reflection of his own character since he will profit from what he provides. He profits from the power he provides Angelo and from the promises he makes to Isabella. This is the first instance of Vincentio's irony since he pretends that his own take on nature is universal. This stance, as will be revealed, is assumed so that he can profit from the pain of other characters. Whether he is fully aware or not of his ironic stance hardly matters; as the play goes on, we can observe that he seems to believe in his own good. What matters is that Vincentio's character fully embodies the ironic mode.

Lucio, after acknowledging Claudio's sentence, sets out to warn Isabella, Lucio's sister, about his execution. Claudio thinks that she will convince Angelo to change his mind:

> in her youth
> There is a prone and speechless dialect
> Such as move men; beside, she hath prosperous art
> When she will play with reason and discourse,
> And well she can persuade. (2.2.163-67)

According to Brian Gibbons, the editor of the NCS edition, "prone" here conveys the meaning "of submissiveness, coupled with the unexpected oxymoron 'speechless dialect', seems to suggest that Isabella's physical femininity has an effect on men, 'moves' their sexual feelings" (NCS 101). As it turns out, Isabella's reasoning is often bad and she cannot convince anyone in any argument she engages in, but both Angelo and Vincentio are sexually aroused by her.

In the next scene, we see Vincentio out of his customary ironic mode. His speeches in this scene are revealing because he does not have any reason to lie. He reveals to Friar Thomas his reasons: "No. Holy father, throw away that thought, / Believe not that the dribbling dart of love / Can pierce a complete bosom" (1.3.1-3). He is saying that love cannot pierce a heart as steadfast as his. This resonates with his supposed godlike aspect, suggested by Angelo, since falling in love is revealing a weakness. He is not lying either because his interest in Isabella, as we will see, seems to be merely sexual. He continues:

> My holy sir, none better knows than you
> How I have ever loved the life removed
> And held in idle price to haunt assemblies
> Where youth and cost witless bravery keeps. (1.3.8-11)

If he is indeed not lying to Friar Thomas, what he said in the first scene was a lie: "I love the people" (1.2.65). If he loves people, he should not also love living in isolation ("the life removed") and should not hold gatherings in contempt (hold it "in idle price to haunt assemblies"). He does not, however, lie in the next line: "But do not like to stage me to their eyes" (1.2.66). Indeed, Vincentio does not like to make public his real intentions, which is why he tortures covertly, i.e., ironically. He might actually believe that, by torturing others, he is doing good, i.e., he might believe his own lie, but that does not prevent him fom being a perspectivist. He is aware of the other characters' passions and inclination's, i.e., their wills and so he can dominate most of the

characters with his torturing irony. The ones he cannot dominate in this way (Lucio and Barnardine) are handled differently, but he still manages to inflict pain on them. He is like Portia in the sense that both use their intelligence for their own personal interests and benefit. Like Hamlet, he inflicts pain, but he does it because he lusts for it. Hamlet, on the other hand, does it for the sake of play. By inflicting pain and then relieving it, he lures others toward him. By inflicting pain, Hamlet wants to drive people away. Walter Pater compares *Measure for Measure* to *Hamlet*:

> It deals, not like *Hamlet* with the problems which beset one of exceptional temperament, but with mere human nature. It brings before us a group of persons, attractive, full of desire, vessels of the genial, seed-bearing powers of nature, a gaudy existence flowering out over the old court and city of Vienna, a spectacle of the fulness and pride of life which to some may seem to touch the verge of wantonness. Behind this group of people, behind their various action, Shakespeare inspires in us the sense of a strong tyranny of nature and circumstance. Then what shall there be on this side of it—on our side, the spectators' side, of this painted screen, with its puppets who are really glad or sorry all the time? what philosophy of life, what sort of equity? (179-189)

"Mere human nature," "the genial, seed-bearing powers of nature," "the verge of wantonness," "a strong tyranny of nature": Pater's latent insistence evokes an undersong of what being "full of desire" means in this play, i.e., a compelling force that makes pain not a necessary evil but simply a necessity. And yet, this need for pain seems to be related to an inherent feature of comic human nature than to any sense of justice. The sense of justice we get from *Measure for Measure* is, according to Bloom, retaliation, the law of talion, or the giving back of like for like: "Measure for measure is reduced to like for like, Claudio's head for Juliet's maidenhead, Vincentio's bed trick for Angelo's attempt upon Isabella's impregnable chastity, Lucio's enforced marriage to the whore Kate Keepdown for Lucio's mockeries of the Duke-turned-false-friar" (*Shakespeare* 363). Measure means punishment, as we see in Vincentio's account of Claudio: "He professes to have received no sinister measure from his judge" (3.2.208-09). Vincentio seems to possess divine or godlike features; does Angelo attribute these features to Vincentio or simply notice them? According to Stephen Greenblatt, if

> to the guilty, publicly disgraced Angelo, the ruler, in his ability to perceive what is hidden, appears to be "like power divine" (5.1.361), to the irrepressible libertine Lucio he is "the

> old fantastical Duke of dark corners" (4.3.146–47). The play does not allow one to choose one or the other image or even to settle somewhere in between. Instead, as generations of audiences have attested, Shakespeare's "problem comedy" elicits a strange, uncomfortable response. (*Shakespeare's Freedom* 17)

Greenblatt indicates that Angelo highlights Vincentio's divine features, to be contrasted by Lucio earthly perception. There seems to be, however, a tendency in Vincentio toward his supposed divine side if we consider that he dominates everyone. George Wilson Knight also notices Vincentio's "supernatural" features:

> The Duke, lord of this play in the exact sense that Prospero is lord of *The Tempest*, is the prophet of an enlightened ethic. He controls the action from start to finish, he allots, as it were, praise and blame, he is lit at moments with divine suggestion comparable with his almost divine power of fore-knowledge, and control, and wisdom. There is an enigmatic, other-worldly, mystery suffusing his figure and the meaning of his acts: their results, however, in each case justify their initiation (80)

Vincentio was about to use someone else's death for his own profit when heaven provided him with an accident.[46] Technically, Vincentio would not be committing a crime since Barnardine was a convicted murderer and Vincentio was the duke of Vienna, responsible for passing criminal judgement, so Barnardine's death would be "justified". Barnardine, however, had not been sentenced to death. Only after Vincentio sees a use for Barnardine's death does he decide cut off his head. Vincentio wants Barnardine's head because of his lust for Isabella, but no one knows about that. He inflicts pain, but, because of his irony, he does not receive any in return. Again, no one else knows about this, and so he has the power to carry out a measure without taking any back. Vincentio is like a god who punishes and inflicts pain without fear of retribution. He resumes his conversation with Friar Thomas:

> We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
> The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
> Which for this fourteen years we have let slip,

[46] "Oh, 'tis an accident that heaven provides" (4.3.68). This is a key line for understanding the heightened form of irony for which I am arguing. Vincentio says this after the Provost tells him another prisoner had just died and after Barnardine refuses his own execution. So, Vincentio can use Ragozine's head (the deceased convict) instead of Barnardine's to trick others into thinking that it is Claudio's: a miracle, an accident provided by the heavens, is the result of the death of someone else that allows Vincentio to fool other characters and satisfy his own intentions.

Even like an o'er-grown lion in a cave
That goes not out to prey. . . .
so our decrees,
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead (1.3.20-29)

"Hounds like steeds are associated with sexual desire (as in the myth of Actaeon). Thus 'headstrong . . . let slip' gives the impression of unleashed desire, when the Duke intended to say the laws had slipped into disuse (this was his fault or slip)" (NCS 103). Vincentio was the one who created the laws that punishes bawdiness ("lechery"). Angelo was just applying the punishments for the laws Vincentio had created and was not enforcing. Vincentio seems to plan on playing the good cop, while Angelo, the bad cop. This same strategy is also employed by Cleopatra:[47]

See where he is, who's with him, what he does.
I did not send you. If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick. (*Ant.* 1.3.2-5)

The beginning of this scene shows that Cleopatra thinks that, by being hostile toward Antony, she will increase his affection for her. In other words, she tortures Antony so keep him attached to her. This is the same procedure Vincentio uses – pain and relief – on Angelo. Vincentio and Cleopatra are aware that human nature needs both constraints and relief, except Vincentio is not going to take the blame for the constrains and punishments of the laws he himself had created:

I have on Angelo imposed the office,
Who may in th'ambush of my name strike home,
And yet my nature never in the fight
To do in slander. (1.3.39-44)

By not slandering his nature, he does not get his hands dirty.

---

[47] *Antony and Cleopatra* picks up after the death of Julius Caesar and the defeat of his conspirators. The Triumvirate, made up of Octavius, Antony and Lepidus ruled various sections of the then Roman Republic. Though the three were united in their civil war against Brutus and Cassius, they quarreled extensively afterward. Antony took over the rule of the eastern world which included the rich province of Egypt, ruled by Cleopatra, who had been the mistress of Caesar. Antony and Cleopatra begin a long-term affair, which historically produced three children. After a sequence of alliances made and unmade among Antony, Octavius (who was trying to take over the empire), and Cleopatra, she fakes her own death, saying she killed herself for betraying Antony, believing that it would cool him down. It has the opposite effect, however, as Antony tries to take his own life now that his love is supposedly dead. Unsuccessful at this attempt and finding out that Cleopatra is still alive, he is brought before her. As Antony dies in her arms, Cleopatra knows that Octavius is only paying her lip service and will parade her as a war prize in Rome. Protecting her role as a queen and Antony's memory by having his death be a noble one, she dresses in all her fine robes and takes her own life, bitten by an asp snake. In the end, Octavius wins but is denied the ultimate humiliating insult to his enemies.

In the next scene, Isabella is introduced and reveals that, like Vincentio, who likes "strict statutes", she also like sternness: "I speak not as desiring more [privileges], / But rather wishing a more strict restraint" (1.4.3-4). According to Bloom, when "we first encounter Isabella, we hear her 'wishing a more strict restraint / Upon the sisterhood' she is soon to join. Something of her unconscious sexual power is suggested by that desire for sterner discipline" (*Shakespeare* 364-65). It "is one of Shakespeare's most effective outrages that Isabella is his most sexually provocative female character" (*Shakespeare* 365). The fact that Isabella is a nun is relevant since it is one of the aspects that incites lust in both Angelo (as I will show) and Vincentio: "The Duke's lust for Isabella then takes on its proper resonance; . . . His flight from the city's stew of sexual corruption is manifestly a flight from himself, and his cure, as he sees it, is the innocent temptress Isabella, whose passion for chastity is perhaps reversible, or so he hopes" (*Shakespeare* 370). It would seem that Vincentio notices Isabella's yearn for a "sterner discipline" and uses that to seduce her.

When she first meets with Angelo, this is what she says:

There is a vice that most I do abhor,
And most desire should meet the blow of justice;
For which I would not plead, but that I must,
For which I must not plead, but that I am
At war 'twixt will and will not. (2.2.30-33)

For some reason, she does not even mention Claudio at first. The first thing she refers to is the "vice", that is, lechery or bawdiness. If she indeed has affection for Claudio, it is only secondary in importance. After Angelo refuses her plea, she gives the argument up and Lucio tells her to go back. Why does she do it? Considering Isabella's wish for "more strict restraint", I argue that she goes back because she yearns for pain. Lucio tells her twice that she is too cold (2.2.46 and 2.2.57) in her feeble attempt to persuade Angelo. Is Isabella getting "hotter" for Angelo as the argument heats up? Later, she says:

I would to heaven I had your potency
And you were Isabel: should it then be thus?
No. I would tell what 'twere to be a judge,
And what a prisoner. (2.2.68-71)

Potency is supposed to mean "power, executive authority; but the whole thought shows that the sexual connotation of the word is also in play. Isabella identifies Angelo's use of power as an

expression of his libidinous nature" (NCS 121). Isabella is saying that he has power and does not know what it is like to be a prisoner and to suffer, but Angelo knows what it is to be a "prisoner" since he wishes for the pain inflicted by Vincentio, as we see in the first scene. Vincentio says that power might alter Angelo's "precise" (in the sense of immaculate or pristine) behavior (1.3.51-55), but in fact Angelo does not seem to be that power hungry. He hesitates to be put in charge (1.1.47-50) and says he would give power away: "my gravity, / Wherein – let no man hear me – I take pride, / Could I with boot change for an idle plume / Which the air beats for vain" (2.4.-9-12). Angelo is more of a masochist, while Isabella will show herself to be a sadomasochist. Vincentio, as absolute as he is, is a sadist.

Lucio, who observes their discussion as a voyeur, keeps delivering sexual innuendos: "Ay, touch him, there's the vein" (2.2.73); "Oh, to him, to him, wench, he will relent. / He's coming" (128-29). After they finish their argument, Angelo partially yields to Isabella, telling her to come back the next day and revealing the lust Isabella causes in him: "She speaks, and 'tis such sense / That my sense breeds with it" (2.2.146-47). He soliloquizes at the end of the scene:

> Can it be
> That modesty may more betray our sense
> Than woman's lightness?
> . . .
> Never could the strumpet
> With all her double vigour, art and nature,
> Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid
> Subdues me quite. (2.2.166-90)

Sternness sexually arouses Angelo more than wantonness. Both pain and infliction of pain seem to arouse him.

Isabella comes back to make another attempt to convince him, not because she wants to save her brother but because she likes torture. Isabella is *at pains* to persuade Angelo, while she also inflicts pain on him. Isabella arrives for their second meeting and, knowing Angelo, says exactly what Angelo, who knew the duke, said to Vincentio in the first scene (1.1.25-26): "I am come to know your pleasure" (2.4.31). Angelo replies:

> ANGELO That you might know it would much better please me
> Than to demand what 'tis. Your brother cannot live.

ISABELLA Even so. Heaven keep your honour. (2.4.32-34)

Gibbons comments on Angelo's lines: "Angelo would be pleased if she understood his desire as carnal (so quibbling on 'know your pleasure', a polite formula) without his having to state it explicitly" (NCS 130). Just like the first time, Angelo quickly dismisses her plea, and she easily gives up and walks away, but then he teases her: "Yet may he live a while – and it may be / As long as you or I" (2.4.35-36). She gets interested, and another session of torturous argument begins. After Angelo proposes to exchange Claudio's life for a sexual favor, Isabella refuses:

ANGELO Then must your brother die.

ISABELLA And 'twere the cheaper way:

Better it were a brother died at once,

Than that a sister by redeeming him

Should die for ever.

ANGELO Were not you then as cruel as the sentence

That you have slandered so?

ISABELLA Ignomy in ransom and free pardon

Are of two houses: lawful mercy

Is nothing kin to foul redemption.

ANGELO You seemed of late to make the law a tyrant,

And rather proved the sliding of your brother

A merriment than a vice. (2.4.105-14)

Angelo notices the flaw in Isabella's argument. He sees that she becomes what she was accusing him of being. He says that moments ago she seemed to think the law was too harsh, and that Claudio's deed was more of a joke than a sin. Her answer is that "we speak not what we mean":

Oh, pardon me my lord, it oft falls out

To have what we would have, we speak not what we mean.

I something do excuse the thing I hate

For his advantage that I dearly love. (2.4.115-21)

Since the play is in ironic mode, nothing the major characters say can be taken at face value, as Isabella herself admits. She would rather have Claudio die than succumb to what could only be considered consensual rape. She says that she hates the sin, but if we sometimes speak not

what we mean, does she really hate it? And does she really love Claudio, as she says? What is Isabella's real reason for not wanting to help Claudio? She says:

> were I under the terms of death,
> Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
> And strip myself to death as to a bed
> That longing have been sick for (2.4.100-103)

According to Bloom, had "the Marquis de Sade been able to write so well, he might have hoped to compete with that, but in fact he wrote abominably" (*Shakespeare* 365).[48] According to Gibbons, as "one of the most precious stones, deep crimson in colour, the ruby could symbolise a martyr's blood or a secular woman's desirability. Unconsciously Isabella provokes Angelo's sadistic lust with the talk of whips . . . rubies . . . strip . . . bed . . . longing" (NCS 133). As far as she is telling the truth, what this reveals is that she hates the pleasure of sex and loves the pain of torture. If rubies refer to her desire, since it is associated with pain – as the marks left by whiplashes – it means that sexual pleasure, to her, is torturous pain. Another relevant element to be noticed here is the association of sex with death. She would strip herself (whether take her clothes off or bind herself) to death, which she identifies with a bed. Isabella thinks of stripping for the punishment that would lead to death, but the image takes on a sexual meaning.

The scene ends with her saying that her virginity is more valuable than Claudio's life and that she will prepare him for death (2.4.186-89). She is going to torture Claudio next. Her overvaluing of virginity – considering that its value is Claudio's life – is absurd, just like most of her reasoning is. The main point about Isabella is her revulsion toward the physical act of sex. Is it because it equals death? But she also has a need for "more strict restraint". Isabella likes pain, necessarily associated not with the physical act of sex but with arguing. It could be that she enjoys other sources of pain, and also that the tension of the uncertainty of Claudio's fate causes enjoyable pain to her, but we do not have textual access to that. To Katherine and Petruchio (in *Taming of*

[48] Marquis de Sade was a Frech writer best known for his libertine novels, in which he fused political authority, spiritual dominance, and sexual torture.

the Shrew),[49] Berowne and Rosaline (in *Love's Labour's Lost*),[50] and Benedick and Beatrice (in *Much Ado about Nothing*), arguing is almost like sex. Arguing seems to be like sex to Isabella, instead of just foreplay, as it is to the other couples mentioned. The main question about Isabella at the end is not why does she not answer, but, if she does not like sex, why does she not refuse Vincentio's proposal outright?

The next scene, 3.1, begins with Vincentio attempting to convince Claudio of accepting death: "Be absolute for death: either death or life / Shall thereby be the sweeter" (3.1.5-6). Vincentio is torturing Claudio; he wants Angelo to apply punishment so that he looks like the bad cop and him, when he returns, like the good cop. Claudio, however, is going to die anyway; so why does Vincentio still have to torture him? Pater deems Vincentio's moralizing on life and death "curious" (184). In 2.3, Vincentio, in disguise, says he wants to see afflicted spirits:

> Bound by my charity and my blessed order
> I come to visit the afflicted spirits
> Here in the prison. Do me the common right
> To let me see them and to make me know
> The nature of their crimes, that I may minister
> To them accordingly. (2.3.3-8)

Since we know that the play is ironic mode, we know that he is lying, and that his "charity" is a disguise (like the disguise of a friar he is using) that conceals his enjoyment of others' pain. He is only *pretending* to minister the prisoners, that is, he only takes profit from their pain. Disguising or concealment, which is the ruling process of irony, entails torture.

Next, Isabella enters to converse with Claudio. Like Vincentio, she also seems to enjoy inflicting pain on her poor brother. She tells him that he is going to die the next day and he asks:

---

[49] Baptista Minola, a rich townsman living in Padua, is attempting to find a suitor to his daughter, Katherina, but no eligible man wants her. Petruchio, a young man from Verona, arrives in Padua, where Katherina, the shrew, resides. Petruchio announces that he comes to Padua looking to marry if the prospect be rich. After they meet, Petruchio and Katherina lock horns from the start. Petruchio tries to dominate Kate by falling short of giving her a proper wedding, clothes, food, sleep, and lodging, all in an attempt to give her a taste of her own shrewish medicine. The play ends with Petruchio marrying Kate, but she reveals, in her final speech, filled with irony, that she is the one that tamed her husband, and not the way around.

[50] In *Love's Labour's Lost*, a group of four men, of which Berowne is part, and led the king of Navarre, decide to improve themselves by adopting a monastic lifestyle dedicated to pursuit of learning and to forgo any distracting pleasures, especially women. Their task is made more difficult with the arrival of the princess of France and her group of lady friends, of which Rosaline is part. As the princess' party arrives, they become aware of the men's situation and decide to test their faith. This proves especially troublesome for Berowne, whose old flame for Rosaline is still on. The play continues as the king's men woo their counterparts in secret. The main couple, in this play, is not the king and the princess, but Berowne and Rosaline and the play ends in an anti-climax because no marriages take place.

CLAUDIO Is there no remedy?

ISABELLA None, but such remedy as, to save a head,

To cleave a heart in twain.

CLAUDIO But is there any?

ISABELLA Yes, brother, you may live (2.3.60-63)

Isabella does to Claudio exactly what Angelo did to her. She teases Claudio into believing there is hope for him. She gives him hope, knowing that she will not cave to Angelo's request and that he will die. She is torturing him, but Claudio, even after being logically convinced by Vincentio of accepting death and instilled by Isabella with guilt related to her virginity, does not want to die:

The weariest and most loathed worldly life

That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment

Can lay on nature, is a paradise

To what we fear of death. (2.3.129-132)

Isabella, on the other hand, claims to prefer death to exchanging sex for a favor: "Oh, were it but my life / I'd throw it down for your deliverance" (2.3.103-04). Isabella's reason is this: "Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice? / Is't not a kind of incest to take life / From thine own sister's shame?" (2.3.137-140). Her absurd reason is that, by having sex with Angelo, Claudio would be delivered, i.e., be born again ("made a man"). In other words, Claudio would be made a son to her. In her crazed reasoning, it would be like she was having sex with her father so that Claudio would be become her son-brother. We already know that, to Isabella, sex is death; now we also know that sex is incest.

We can infer, then, that Isabella, just like Vincentio, has a certain taste for pain. Nuttall also notices that Vincentio's forgiveness is a form of torture:

> When Isabella went to Angelo to plead for her brother she thought she had a "knock-down" argument. She could afford, she thought, to explain how she agreed with Angelo (and she did agree) that Claudio deserved punishment, because she had in reserve an argument that would blow all such reasons away; Angelo is right at the level of justice, but justice itself is transcended, eclipsed, by mercy. This is the argument put by Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* with an eloquence that makes it triumph over the social and economic ironies simultaneously advanced in that play. Isabella says, as she thinks, unanswerably; "Yet show some pity" (II.ii.99). But Angelo has an answer, He says, "I show it most of all when

> I show justice; / For then I pity those I do not know" To Isabella's claim that mercy gloriously soars above mere justice he replies, in effect, "No; the one is entangled in the other." He means that if you are responsible for the inhabitants of a city, know that unrestrained crime will hurt large numbers of people, and then you do *not* restrain it, that is itself a kind of cruelty, is unmerciful to the unnamed, faceless innocent. Isabella challenges Angelo with the scriptural argument, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone" (John.8:7)—in effect, that only the sinless can property judge and punish. But again Angelo has an answer: obviously one cannot let the rapists and murderers do as they like simply because there are no sinless policemen or magistrates, what one can do is make sure that the agents of the law are themselves subject to that law, so that if a magistrate is caught out, he too is punished. He applies this expressly to himself; saying that if ever *he* offends, he must be punished by the same rule (II.i.29). At the end of the play his last words are an insistence that he, Angelo, must be punished (V.i.474-77). There is a sense in which the Duke's ultimate forgiveness insults him (*Shakespeare* the *Thinker* 267)

The argument Angelo uses against Isabella's makes sense because letting criminals run free can be a way of inflicting pain on other people, i.e., a kind of cruelty. He even insists that if he ever does something ethically wrong, he, the person who carries out punishment, must be punished as well. Let us be reminded that Angelo enjoys punishment (at least Vincentio's), as is suggested in the beginning:

> DUKE . . . we have . . .
> Lent him our terror, dressed him with our love,
> And given his deputation all the organs
> Of our own power.
> . . .
> *Enter* ANGELO
> DUKE Look where he comes.
> ANGELO Always obedient to your grace's will
> I come to know your pleasure. (1.1.17-26)

In my view, Angelo's sense of justice is more a taste for punishment than an indication of moral integrity. Just as Vincentio tortures Claudio by attempting to soothe him so that he would suffer

less for his death, Vincentio, in the last scene, also tortures Angelo through a seemingly benign act of forgiveness.

In conclusion, irony is employed as a tool of torture because it conceals the real intentions of the characters who use it, but especially Vincentio. As explained in the beginning of this chapter, irony operates by concealment. In verbal irony, one conceals what is really being meant by saying something with the opposite meaning. Such concealment, employed by Vincentio, aims to cause pain in other characters without their awareness. Nevertheless, the final effect of the play is still comic because, despite inflicting pain in society, social order is maintained in Vienna.

3.2. Sense of Justice or Lust for Pain?

> The best summary of what the play is literally about is Knight's:
>
> In *Measure for Measure* we have a careful dramatic pattern, a studied explication of a central theme: the moral nature of man in relation to the crudity of man's justice, especially in the matter of sexual vice. . . . The persons of the play tend to illustrate certain human qualities chosen with careful reference to the main theme. Thus Isabella stands for sainted purity, Angelo for Pharisaical righteousness, the Duke for a psychologically sound and enlightened ethic. Lucio represents indecent wit, Pompey and Mistress Overdone professional immorality. Barnardine is hard-headed, criminal, insensitiveness. Each person illumines some facet of the central theme: man's moral nature. The play's attention is confined chiefly to sexual ethics: which in isolation is naturally the most pregnant of analysis and the most universal of all themes. No other subject provides so clear a contrast between human consciousness and human instinct; so rigid a distinction between the civilized and the natural qualities of man (79-80)

I would deviate slightly from Knight here regarding the "human qualities" that certain characters represent. In my view, which will be explained in detail throughout this section, contrary to Knight's, Isabella stands for masochism, Angelo, for sadomasochism, and Vincentio, for sadism.

When Vincentio leaves Vienna and puts Angelo in charge and after Angelo assumes power, Claudio, is sentenced to death in the next scene for having impregnated Juliet outside marriage. In his speeches, he reveals, without irony, the truth about justice in Vienna:

> Thus can the demi-god, Authority,
>
> Make us pay down for our offence by weight

The words of heaven; on whom it will, it will,

On whom it will not, so; yet still 'tis just. (1.2.102-05)

Later on, he says: "Whether the tyranny be in his place, / Or in his eminence that fills it up, / I stagger in" (1.2.144-46). Claudio is questioning whether the role of governor or simply the man that is currently in that role is tyrannical. What matters is that there is no such thing as justice (as it will be confirmed by Barnardine's release at the end), since it varies according to the will of the one in power. Angelo remarks that "what's open made to justice, / That justice seizes" (2.1.21-22). Justice is usually portrayed as a blindfolded female figure holding scales, which, supposedly, represents impartiality. Angelo, however, argues that justice is impartial because she acts on what she sees. Escalus, prompted by Angelo's lust for bloodshed, also provides a cosmological remark:

Well, heaven forgive him, and forgive us all.

Some rise by sin and some by virtue fall,

Some run from breaks of ice and answer none,

And some condemned for a fault alone. (2.1.37-40)

Some prosper by wrongdoing, and others fall for doing good; some who commit a whole heap of crimes never have to answer for them, while others are condemned for a single mistake, which is not exactly new information to anyone, as Vincentio points out: "There is scarce truth enough alive to make societies secure, but security enough to make fellowships accursed. Much upon this riddle runs the wisdom of the world. This news is old enough, yet it is every day's news" (3.2.194-97). The point of all this, however, is hardly to make a moralizing compliant on the rotten state of the human condition.

As I previously explained, and also as Bloom reiterates, in "Vincentio's Vienna, as in Freud's, reality comes down to sex and death, though Vincentio's city is even closer to the formula: sex equals incest equals death" (*Shakespeare* 374).[51] In *All's Well that Ends Well*, this formula can also be partially observed. In 1.3, as in the conversation between the Countess and Helena:

COUNTESS You know, Helen,

I am a mother to you.

HELEN Mine honourable mistress.

COUNTESS Nay, a mother.

---

[51] "Death and sexuality are similarly associated by Antony: 'I will be / A bridegroom in my death, and run into't / As to a lover's bed' (*Ant*., IV.xii.99-101). Cf. Claudio, III.i.82-4. The image is more obviously suited to an Antony or Claudio than to the chaste Isabella: but its occurrence here is psychologically revealing" (AS 60).

Why not a mother? When I said ‘a mother’,
Methought you saw a serpent. What’s in ‘mother’
That you start at it? I say I am your mother,
And put you in the catalogue of those
That were enwombéd mine. ’Tis often seen
Adoption strives with nature, and choice breeds
A native slip to us from foreign seeds.
You ne’er oppressed me with a mother’s groan,
Yet I express to you a mother’s care.
God’s mercy, maiden! Does it curd thy blood
To say I am thy mother? What’s the matter,
That this distempered messenger of wet,
The many-coloured Iris, rounds thine eye?
—Why, that you are my daughter?
HELEN That I am not.
COUNTESS I say I am your mother.
HELEN Pardon, madam.
The Count Roussillon cannot be my brother.
I am from humble, he from honoured name;
No note upon my parents, his all noble.
My master, my dear lord he is, and I
His servant live and will his vassal die.
He must not be my brother.
COUNTESS Nor I your mother?
HELEN You are my mother, madam, would you were—
So that my lord your son were not my brother—
Indeed my mother! Or were you both our mothers
I care no more for than I do for heaven,
So I were not his sister. Can’t no other
But, I your daughter, he must be my brother? (*AWW* 1.3.137-166)

The idea of the Countess being her mother is dreadful to Helen. It causes a reaction in her comparable to that of seeing a serpent. It curdles her blood and brings tear to her eyes, a very unpleasant thought to Helen. It is so because it seems to presuppose that a relationship between her and Bertram would be incestuous. In the first chapter, I briefly mentioned the universal revulsion to incest. The negative connotations in Shakespeare we also see in *Hamlet*. I refer to it as a moral rather than a moralizing judgement. In this sense, Helen wishes to avoid the incestuous connotation of her relationship with Bertram, which is why she gets defensive. Without any mention of incest, she gets defensive and insists that the Countess is not her mother; this insistence leads to another, according to which Bertram is not her brother. To Helen, if the Countess is not her mother, a sexual relationship between her and Bertram would not be incestuous. My point is that she gets defensive since there must be a strong insinuation of incest because of the history Helen has with the Countess and Bertram. In other words, even though Helen's marriage with Bertram is not incestuous technically – since the Countess is not her biological mother – pragmatically it is because of the familial bonds they have developed. This disturbs Helen because she gets defensive about it. In 4.4, after the bed trick happened, Helen reveals that she is going to fake her own death. That is to say that after she had sex with her "brother", she symbolically died: sex = incest = death.

In 2.3 in *Measure for Measure*, Isabella meets Vincentio for the first time. She says: "I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul in the truth of my spirit" (2.3.197-98). She had already said that she would give her life to help Claudio, and now she says that she would do anything, but she is the one who said that we speak not what we mean. How can we be sure that she is telling the truth here?

In scene 3.2, Vincentio, in contrast to 1.2 – in which he does not lie to Thomas – meets Escalus in disguise and delivers his lines in full ironic mode. He asks Escalus what he thinks about him:

> DUKE . . . I pray you, sir, of what disposition was the Duke?
>
> ESCALUS One that above all other strifes contended especially to know himself.
>
> DUKE What pleasure was he given to?
>
> ESCALUS Rather rejoicing to see another merry, than merry at anything which professed to make him rejoice. A gentleman of all temperance. (3.2.197-204)

To Escalus, Vincentio was a "gentleman of all temperance", that is, a modest man. But he is also a man who struggles to know himself which suggests that Vincentio has a high level of self-awareness, that is, he is aware of his using torture through irony. Lucio, in the first part of this scene, challenges Vincentio's irony, but, in the final scene, Vincentio loses his patience with him and employs a more aggressive approach, torture without relief, to dominate him, since he had already dominated everyone else by inflicting pain alone. He asks Escalus, here, what he thinks of him to see if Escalus was already under his dominance, and in fact Escalus was already under the effect of his irony since he thinks Vincentio is a modest (of all temperance) man. But we, the audience, or the reader, know that he is not.

At the end of 3.2, Vincentio soliloquizes in couplets. He says: "He who the sword of heaven will bear / Should be as holy, as severe" (3.2.223-24). Swords have a sexual connotation – bearing the sword of heaven means dominating. Vincentio resumes the ongoing association of pain and sexual pleasure. Being simultaneously holy and severe reveals not his ambivalence (since ambivalence involves two opposites), but his irony, since he is being severe by having Angelo apply punishment while he maintains the external appearance of holiness – even though, internally, he likes to torture. He resumes the soliloquy: "Oh, what may man within him hide, / Though angel on the outward side?" (3.2.233-34). The soliloquy is highly ironic. We might think that he is referring to Angelo in these two last lines, but he is actually – even if unintentionally – referring to himself. He hides his taste for torture while displaying the appearance of an angel, that is, he plays the good cop. Could it be that, even Vincentio, having godlike power (as suggested by Angelo), is not aware of his own irony? Is his own irony taking control of himself so that he believes that he is actually doing good? In 5.1, the last scene, while in disguise, he says: "His subject am I not" (5.1.311), i.e., I, the plain friar, am not subject to the Duke (Vincentio). He is saying that he is not subject to himself. What does this suggest? That his irony is more powerful than his own consciousness?

In 4.2, he reveals his plot to torture Isabella: "But I will keep her ignorant of her good / To make her heavenly comforts of despair / When it is least expected" (4.3.100-02). He tells her that Angelo had Claudio killed even after the bed trick. "To make her heavenly comforts of despair" suggests sexual activity. According to Freud, increase in sexual tension is an also increase in pain.[52] Sexual activity is an increase in tension followed by relief. Like sex, death brings relief to pain.

[52] Cf. "The Economic Problem of Masochism".

Again, sex equals death, so Vincentio plans to torture Isabella so that she achieves relief in the end. This is the strongest evidence in the play for the association of pain and sexual pleasure, at least to Vincentio and Isabella.

After Vincentio tells her Claudio had been killed, she says: "Oh, I will to him and pluck out his [Angelo's] eyes!" (4.3.111). And after Vincentio tells her that they can get revenge on Angelo, she answers: "I am directed by you" (4.3.128). From this, we can infer that Isabella gets angry, but she does not seem to become mournful. Vincentio is doing what he does best, i.e., playing the good cop. Pain is (apparently) inflicted by Angelo. Being in pain, Isabella becomes, as if she were in sexual activity, vulnerable. Vincentio then relieves her pain by promising revenge. Does he control Isabella because he knows that she enjoys pain, or does he take control of her because he relives her of pain? Whatever the correct answer, the *need for pain*, one of the key features for most comic characters, is present. This is a prequel to what he will do in the last scene: he inflicts pain on Claudio, Mariana, Angelo, and the Provost and relieves them of it afterward. He does not torture Escalus because he was already under his dominance. Those he cannot dominate, Lucio and Barnardine, are either tortured without relief or simply released.

The scene ends with Lucio annoying Vincentio and showing him that he will not yield to his irony: "Friar, thou knowest not the Duke so well as I do: he's a better woodman than thou tak'st him for" (4.3.151-52). "Woodman" means womanizer. Lucio can see through Vincentio's irony, which is why he is a challenge to Vincentio, who has to dominate him another way.

In 5.1, as Vincentio performs his orchestrated plan, Lucio keeps challenging him by delivering witty remarks and Vincentio, unable to control him, keeps telling to stay quiet:

> LUCIO My lord, she [referring to Mariana] may be a punk, for many of them are neither maid, widow, nor wife.
>
> DUKE Silence that fellow. I would he had some cause to prattle for himself.
>
> . . .
>
> LUCIO He [referring to Angelo] was drunk then, my lord, it can be no better.
>
> DUKE For the benefit of silence, would thou wert so too. (5.1.178-88)

Vincentio then leaves and reenters disguised as Friar. Moments later, he has his disguise pulled off by Lucio. Why does Vincentio insist on his disguise? He could simply have told everyone what he secretly knew about them to prove that he had walked the streets of Vienna in disguise, but he needs to actually reenact his disguise. Lucio seems to be the only one aware of the

answer. As he tries to leave, Vincentio has him arrested, and Lucio says: "This may prove worse than hanging" (4.1.353). And what is worse than death? Torture. Lucio seems to be the only character who perceives Vincentio's taste for torture.

Moments later, Angelo, as he did in the opening scene, attributes omniscience, i.e., a godlike feature to Vincentio: "When I perceive your grace, like power divine / Hath looked upon my passes" (5.1.362). Of the main trio, Angelo seems to be the only ambivalent character, the only one who feels guilty, as is reported by Isabella: "With whispering and most guilty diligence / In action all of precept, he did show me / The way twice o'er" (4.1.35-37); and as it is revealed by himself in a soliloquy:

> He should have lived,
> Save that his riotous youth with dangerous sense
> Might in the times to come have tane revenge
> By so receiving a dishonoured life
> With ransom of such shame. Would yet he had lived.
> Alack, when once our grace we have forgot,
> Nothing goes right: we would, and we would not. (4.4.26-32)

We want something and we don't want it at the same time. Angelo is like Macbeth, because he suffers for his deed. He seems to reveal his masochistic trait in a soliloquy in 2.4. After a lengthy comment on the issue of deceiving appearances, or "false seeming" (2.4.15) – which refers to the prevailing irony in the play – he says: "Blood, thou art blood: / Let's write 'Good Angel' on the devil's horn, / 'Tis not the devil's crest" (2.4.15-18). According to Gibbons, the blood Angelo talks about is possibly "alluding to the sense 'high birth' as well as the bodily fluid, and basic appetites and passions: hence, 'whatever rank or name he has, a man is subject to common basic instincts and emotions'" (NCS 129). This shows that Angelo is aware that his blood is not 'snow-broth' – that is, like melted snow – as Lucio had imagined in 1.4.57-58 – but blood also suggests pain. The full meaning of the image of blood here is the association of the pleasure and pain of basic instincts. Vincentio, on the other hand, is rarely ambivalent. He is a sadist who (indirectly) inflicts pain without any guilt. Vincentio says he is going to sentence Angelo to death for rape. Mariana then asks Isabella for help. Why would Isabella plea for Angelo's cause? The only motive I see here, which is consistent with her character, is her taste for pain. Isabella never shows any genuine affection for Claudio. She seems to plead in his cause because she seems to like the labor of the

endeavor. We see the same thing happening again: she has no discernable reason to help Angelo; she actually has more than enough reasons to hate him, but she is not Rosalind, who, in *As You Like It*, mordaciously manages to suppress the negative feelings of most of the other characters. Isabella once again engages in a tortuous argument:

> For Angelo,
> His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,
> And must be buried but as an intent
> That perished by the way. Thoughts are no subjects,
> Intents but merely thoughts. (5.1.443-47)

Her reasoning here is again rather lame (as when Angelo notices her bad reasoning and as her absurd reason for not helping Claudio – that sex equals incest) since, in Angelo's mind, he did have sex with her. That is, he actually did perform the crime, only she was not the victim. Isabella's taste for tortuous exchanges is a reminder of the skirmish of wit between Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. She argued with Angelo and Claudio, and now is arguing again with Vincentio. Her plea for Angelo is the last thing she says.

Vincentio orders Angelo and Mariana to get married and then announces that Angelo is sentenced to death, although he is going to suspend the sentence later. He also tortures Mariana and also briefly tortures the provost:

> DUKE . . .
> Provost, how came it Claudio was beheaded
> At an unusual hour?
> PROVOST It was commanded so.
> DUKE Had you a special warrant for the deed?
> PROVOST No, my good lord: it was by private message.
> DUKE For which I do discharge you of your office (5.1.450-55)

But Vincentio finally gives him a promotion and then moves on to Barnardine. According to the provost, Barnardine is a

> man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep: careless, reckless, and fearless of what's past, present, or to come: insensible of mortality and desperately mortal. . . . He hath evermore had the liberty of the prison: give him leave to escape hence, he would not. Drunk many times a day, if not many days entirely drunk. We have very oft

> awaked him, as if to carry him to execution, and showed him a seeming warrant for it. It hath not moved him at all. (4.2.125-34)

This is the dialogue Vincentio and Barnardine have in the prison:

> BARNARDINE Friar, not I. I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets. I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.
>
> DUKE Oh, sir, you must; and therefore I beseech you
>
> Look forward on the journey you shall go.
>
> BARNARDINE I swear I will not die today for any man's persuasion.
>
> DUKE But hear you –
>
> BARNARDINE Not a word. If you have anything to say to me, come to my ward, for thence will not I today.
>
> DUKE Unfit to live or die: oh gravel heart! (4.3.45-55)

Barnardine is "fearless of what's past, present, or to come", does not want to leave prison and is always drunk. He is immune to Vincentio's irony, just as he is immune to time. There is nothing in the manipulative moralizing that Vincentio employs that would convince Barnardine to give his life for a cause. Barnardine's final word is: "I will not die today for any man's persuasion". Vincentio's take is that he is unfit "to live or die". If I were a director, I would have Bernadine enter the stage drunk, staggering and deliver his lines between hiccups. Vincentio, clueless and bewildered, would send guards after him since only brute force is able to move him. Vincentio's lust, different from Isabella, is not for death, but for pain. If he had to forcefully spill blood – even if it was the blood of a convicted murder, which supposedly would attenuate his dark motivation – to get what he wanted, he would not have hesitated. Even after Vincentio gets Ragozine's head, in the prison, he says that he is not done with Barnardine (4.3.68-72). Does he still plan to torture him? These are the last words from Vincentio to Barnardine:

> Sirrah, thou art said to have a stubborn soul
>
> That apprehends no further than this world,
>
> And squar'st thy life according. Thou'rt condemned:
>
> But, for those earthly faults, I quit them all,
>
> And pray thee take this mercy to provide
>
> For better times to come. (5.1.473-78)

Just like Isabella, Barnardine does not answer. The provost had told us that Barnardine did not want to leave jail since he has "the liberty of the prison". He also told us that he is immune to time. Vincentio says that he is condemned, even after releasing him. Is Vincentio still torturing Barnardine even now? Lucio is immune to his irony, but Vincentio still manages to dominate him through direct infliction of pain without relief. Barnardine, however, is a different case. He is immune to pain and time, which makes him unfit not only for life and death, as Vincentio points out, but also immune to his irony. Does Barnardine has godlike features like Vincentio? Is this why he is the only one who can stand up to the Duke? It is unclear if he releases Barnardine because he can neither dominate him nor torture him.

Finally, Vincentio concludes his agon with Lucio. Lucio had detracted him while he was in disguise. This is his excuse: "'Faith, my lord, I spoke it but according to the trick: if you will hang me for it, you may – but I had rather it would please you I might be whipped" (5.1.497-98), but Vincentio decides for a fate that, for Lucio, is worse than death:

> LUCIO Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping, and hanging!
>
> DUKE Slandering a prince deserves it. (5.1.514-16)

For torture without relief is what he deserves for challenging the godlike Duke.

According to Bloom, something "is very wrong with Vincentia's Vienna" (*Shakespeare* 361). In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye seems to make an unaware translation of *Measure for Measure*:

> In a very ironic comedy a different type of character may play the role of the refuser of festivity. The more ironic the comedy, the more absurd the society, and an absurd society may be condemned by, or at least contrasted with, a character that we may call the plain dealer, an outspoken advocate of a kind of moral norm who has the sympathy of the audience. . . . Such a character is appropriate when the tone is ironic enough to get the audience confused about its sense of the social norm: he corresponds roughly to the chorus in a tragedy, which is there for a similar reason. When the tone deepens from the ironic to the bitter, the plain dealer may become a malcontent or railer, who may be morally superior to his society . . . but who may also be too motivated by envy to be much more than another aspect of his society's evil, like Thersites (*Anatomy of Criticism* 176).

Thersites performs the role of chorus in *Troilus and Cressida*: "Here is such patchery, such juggling, and such knavery! All the argument is a whore and a cuckold: a good quarrel to draw

emulous factions, and bleed to death upon. Now the dry serpigo on the subject, and war and lechery confound all!" (*Tro*. 2.3.73-77).[53] According to Bloom, "The Matter of Troy is reduced to 'a whore and a cuckold,' Helen and Menelaus, and to a company of rogues, fools, bawds, gulls, and politicians masquerading as sages – that is to say, to the public figures of Shakespeare's day, and of ours" (*Shakespeare* 328). Additionally, Thersites, "the foul-mouthed Fool seems to me the only character in the play who truly has an outraged sense of intrinsic value. There is a weird self-reflective aspect to Thersites's highly conscious rankness, but it is difficult for us to receive, because of Thersites's otherness, his nonhuman aspect. . . . If we can trust anyone in the play, then it must be Thersites, deranged as doubtless he is" (*Shakespeare* 332). Finally, "Thersites is a reductive truth teller, too horrible, too outcast for any audience's identification" (*Shakespeare* 343). Thersites infuriates Ajax with his remarks:

Ajax. I shall cut out your tongue.

Thers. 'Tis no matter, I shall speak as much wit as thou afterwards. (*Tro*. 2.1.112-14)

Prince Hal, Othello, and Macbeth are all skilled fighters like Ajax, but nonetheless intelligent in their own regard and possessors of inwardness. Ajax never exactly demonstrates intelligence, but this reductionism of Thersites reveals a certain pervading bitterness. According to Bloom, there "is a bitterness, somehow both personal and impersonal, in Shakespeare's version of" Chaucer's tale (*Shakespeare* 333). How much of the bitterness of *Troilus and Cressida* is related to Shakespeare own personal life, we will never know. All that can be known is that, at the same time Ajax is a reductionist, Thersites is the only one in *Troilus and Cressida* with intrinsic value. *Troilus and Cressida* preceded *Measure for Measure* by three or four years and is overtly bitter. In *Measure for Measure*, the murky and dark aspect of human nature is concealed by irony. Thersites, notwithstanding his physical deformity and rancidity, is to be trusted, but Vincentio is not.

As I have indicated, Vincentio likes to live in isolation. In this sense, he is a refuser of festivity. The prevailing sense of absurdity – that to which Bloom refers as "something wrong in Vienna" – is in the association of sex with death. At first, it appears that the Vienna of *Measure*

[53] *Troilus and Cressida*, in my view, is satire (which is not comic because it has bitterness, unconcealed by irony, directed toward the audience), while *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* are comedies, even though ironic. *Troilus and Cressida* is set during the later years of the Trojan War, following the plotline of Homer's *Iliad*. The Trojan prince Troilus falls in love with Cressida, another Trojan. They profess their undying love before Cressida is exchanged for a Trojan prisoner of war. As he attempts to visit her in the Greek camp, Troilus glimpses one of the Greeks flirting with his beloved Cressida, and decides to avenge her perfidy.

for Measure resists the punishment that derive from this strict association. As Vincentio makes his play, however, the citizens of Vienna come to terms with it. Vincentio becomes, as Frye points out, an "outspoken advocate of a kind of moral norm who has the sympathy of the audience". It is not surprising that the last scene happens with the main characters surrounded by a crowd. In Greek tragedy, the chorus, besides providing commentary on the actions of the main characters, often confront them. Vincentio deliberately wants to make his play public[54] because he wants the approval of the crowd, and this is why he publicly makes known that he is the good cop. This is why *Measure for Measure* is only ironic, but not bitter like *Troilus and Cressida*, as Frye points out. Thersites plays the role of the chorus in *Troilus and Cressida*. In *Measure for Measure*, Vincentio plays the role himself by disguising himself as a friar. By inflicting pain and then relieving it, Vincentio, as Frye points out, gets people "confused about its sense of the social norm", thus, establishing his own social order dominating Vienna.

According to Bloom, in "*Measure for Measure*, everyone is an abyss of inwardness, but since Shakespeare takes care to keep each character quite opaque, we are frustrated at being denied an entry into anyone's consciousness" (*Shakespeare* 361). But except for Isabella, I do not see all characters as opaque. Angelo reveals his guilt to Isabella in his countenance and also in a soliloquy. We can see a little through Vincentio – regardless if he believes in his own goodness or not – because of his "confession" to Friar Thomas and with the help of Lucio's remarks. Isabella, however, is quite opaque indeed; we can hardly ever know whether she is being truthful or not. She never makes it clear in her speech if she cares if Claudio lives or dies but claims she would give her life to save him. She wishes Angelo were dead but pleads for his life at the end. Isabella is not exactly ambivalent or ambiguous. She is vague and opaque.

Perhaps her lack of response in the end is meant to enforce this vagueness. According to Bloom, "Shylock accepts conversion because the Venice of this play, like the Vienna of *Measure for Measure*, is too equivocal for any consistency to prevail" (*Shakespeare* 177). The difference from *Measure for Measure* to *The Merchant of Venice* is that, while, in Shylock's case, there might be something missing that would not be covered by a stage direction, in the case of Isabella (and Barnardine), if there is something missing, a stage direction (such as a hug between Isabella and Claudio, or Vincentio and Isabella grabbing each other's hand, or even a simple smile) would cover it. Her lack of answer in the end could mean that she abides by Vincentio's power, but it

[54] Angelo even questions why Vincentio would want to meet at the gates upon his return (4.4.4-5).

also could be a suggestion that she is stuck for being confused about how she feels about Claudio. If she has any affection for Claudio at all, after Vincentio's revelation, she might have been emotionally struck like Gloucester, in *King Lear*, after Edgar reveals his real identity to his him.[55] Or in the sense that, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony says that Octavia is divided:

> Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can
> Her heart inform her tongue — the swansdown feather
> That stands upon the swell at the full of tide,
> And neither way inclines. (*Ant.* 3.2.47-50)

Octavia cannot speak her true feelings since she is torn between the feelings for her brother and for her husband. Nor can her feelings tell Octavia what she should say or speak her true feelings.[56] Could Isabella be in the same condition? Isabella's heart does not burst, but being rendered speechless could be a consequence of an emotional turmoil. In other words, she might have been shocked by simultaneously feeling relieved for having found Claudio still alive and feeling guilty for having tortured him and pled for Angelo. Is Vincentio's proposal another form of torture (as Barnardine's release seems to be)? Is Isabella aroused by torturing her own brother? Why does not Isabella show any sign of mourning for Claudio? Is his death (like sex) a relief to her? These and other questions regarding the novice nun cannot be answered because, considering they are not meant to reinforce Isabella's opaqueness, we do not have access to the full original performance, which might have displayed a staging element. We do not know if Isabella's virginity will remain unstained. The only thing we can be sure of is that her opaqueness will. Even Frye did not manage to get *Measure for Measure* right; he claims that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with Isabella and that at the heart of her misery is a suppressed recognition of her attraction to Angelo and his proposition that she submit to his lust (*Myth of Deliverance* 21). He also claims that "the primary end and aim of everything the duke is doing is to get that speech out of her" (*Myth of Deliverance* 29). In this sense, Frye believes that Isabella doesn't respond to the Vincentio's proposal of marriage at the end because of her continuing attraction to Angelo. We cannot be sure

---

[55] Gloucester's "flaw'd heart . . . 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, / Burst smilingly" (*Lear* 5.3.186-89).
[56] There might be irony in Antony's remark, as the editor of NCS edition explains: "Antony's tender language raises questions of sincerity in view of his earlier admission that he intends to return to his 'pleasure' in Egypt after having made this marriage only for his 'peace' (2.3.38-40), and in view of the choric cynicism privately expressed in this scene by Enobarbus and Agrippa (51-60). The issue is delicately balanced" (*Ant*. NCS 166). Nonetheless, the circumstances William Hazlitt notices of Antony's remark do not void it of its value, i.e., what Antony says can be true in specific conditions.

if Isabela is upset because of Claudio's supposed death or of Angelo' betrayal. We cannot be sure if she wants to help Claudio or not. Isabella is vague character, and this feature is enhanced by her lack of response at the end.

Not all characters have lust for pain, and not all of them are easily subdued by Vincentio's irony. Pompey, for instance, is not exactly fond of being whipped: "Whip me? No, no, let carman whip his jade, / The valiant heart's not whipped out of his trade" (2.1.218-19). These characters, however, almost always end up being overruled by those with a lust for pain. Besides Claudio and Juliet, already mentioned, Lucio is another example. He is the only character who is patently tortured, but Vincentio was smart enough to make him publicly provide a reason for that, so that he would not be seen as a bad cop. Vincentio plays the good cop to achieve people's trust since he was not the one explicitly enforcing the strict laws of Vienna. Angelo plays the bad cop and takes the fall. Vincentio's torture is ironic because his laws inflict pain while he, disguised, does not take the blame for it, but does take the profit. There is no tradeoff for Vincentio, that is, he takes all and gives nothing.

Bloom claims that "*Measure for Measure* . . . harbors a deeper distrust of nature, reason, society, and revelation than the ensuing tragedies manifest" (*Shakespeare* 364). Additionally, Bloom argues that "Shakespeare employs Vincentio as the ultimate parody of the comic play-botcher, bringing order to a Vienna that cannot endure order. Yet what is the Duke's Vienna except Shakespeare's London, or our New York City, or any other vital disorder of the human?" (*Shakespeare* 374). He also claims that he does "not know any other eminent work of Western literature that is nearly as nihilistic as *Measure for Measure*" (*Shakespeare* 380). Is *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare's take on the discontents of civilization? Can we only be content if we ambivalently take pain from pleasure? And those who do not play this game – like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,[57] for instance – are brushed aside? Is Shakespeare hinting that anyone who believes their own persuasion, like Vincentio does, has a tendency to break the limits of paraphilia, bordering on psychopathy? After all, if one believes their own persuasion, one can convince someone else to give life for their cause, but the sublime Barnardine will not die for anyone's persuasion.

[57] Bottom is another example of a comic character in Shakespeare. One of his distinguishing features is that, unlike other comic characters, Bottom avoids pain. Need for pain, therefore, is not a feature common to *every single Shakespearean comic character*, but is still common to most of them. And this need, when present, is usually concealed somehow.

William Hazlitt argues that insofar as the play shows Shakespeare as a moralist, he is "a moralist in the same sense in which nature is one":

> Shakespear was in one sense the least moral of all writers; for morality (commonly so called) is made up of antipathies; and his talent consisted in sympathy with human nature, in all its shapes, degrees, depressions, and elevations. The object of the pedantic moralist is to find out the bad in every thing: his was to shew that "there is some soul of goodness in things evil." Even Master Barnardine is not left to the mercy of what others think of him; but when he comes in, speaks for himself, and pleads his own cause, as well as if counsel had been assigned him. In one sense, Shakespear was no moralist at all: in another, he was the greatest of all moralists. He was a moralist in the same sense in which nature is one. He taught what he had learnt from her. He shewed the greatest knowledge of humanity with the greatest fellow-feeling for it. (240-41)

Measure for Measure portrays the essence of human relations. Both Isabella and Vincentio attempt to rationalize their motivations, but their motivations can be reduced to the satisfaction that one gets by satisfying one's own interests, i.e., their lust and the taste for humiliating and being humiliated. We very much like to believe that our motivations are rational, but, in the end, we are all Vincetios and Isabellas. Genuine motivation is *not self*ish motivation. What is valuable to us is necessarily related to our most intimate affections and interests. Therefore, we are genuine and do something valuable only when we are *necessarily* selfish. The foundations of any belief, however firmly established, can be quickly disarranged by anyone with an acute sense of inwardness, like Falstaff and Hamlet. What they teach us is that anything that is outside the realm of inner self is fallacious, i.e., not genuine. This is true for everyone, either the comic or the tragic.[58]

According to Freud, one "feels inclined to say that the intention that man should be 'happy' is not included in the plan of 'Creation.' What we call happiness in the strictest sense comes from the (preferably sudden) satisfaction of needs which have been dammed up to a high degree, and it is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon" ("Civilization and its Discontents" 76). Is *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare's way of expressing that the basis not only of

[58] As I discussed in the Introduction, Falstaff and Hamlet are the best examples, in Shakespeare, of the comic and the tragic. Additionally, they value play more than anything else. Falstaff is always playing because he despises ethical categorizations, and Hamlet (as will be discussed in the next chapter) is always playing because he has a need to outsmart others. Ethical views can be manipulated so as to advance political interests. Play, on the other hand, has no purpose outside itself, i.e., it does not aim to achieve a goal other than playing. If one uses play to manipulate others, then, what one is doing is not playing anymore, but simply manipulating.

civilization, but of human life, is pain? Is *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare's way of saying that it is fine to inflict pain as long as it is agreed upon? Or his way of shedding light on the discontents of civilization, i.e., of illuminating the human need for pain – and thus perceiving that happiness is not in the plans of creation because we cannot live without pain? Perhaps *Measure for Measure* expresses a pessimism that surpasses even that of Timon, in my view, the most pessimist character in Shakespeare. In the spectrum of the comic, Vincentio occupies the role of prominence that attracts others by inflicting and relieving pain. Rosalind, on the other hand, is, as Vincentio puts it, an accident provided by the heavens, i.e., a miracle, but not in a cynical sense. The discontents of civilization are due to constraints imposed on primeval instincts. Is that assertion correct? *Measure for Measure* seems to be Shakespeare's way of saying, in a much subtler and sophisticated way than Freud's, not that that social constraints are a necessary evil, but that that we actually need and want them because *we need and want pain*. Otherwise, Vincentio's play would not work, and those who do not want or need pain have it trickled down upon them, Lucio being one example.

Therefore, in my view, any reading that considers the influence of cultural views of a period as a central aspect for determining the meaning of a literary text's meaning toward any subject (in this case, justice) is going to be weak. As Knight explains:

In *The Merchant of Venice* the Gospel reference is explicit:

> . . . We do pray for mercy;
> And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
> The deeds of mercy.
>
> (iv. i. 200)

And the central idea of *Measure for Measure* is this:

> And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
> (Matthew, vi, 12)

Thus 'justice' is a mockery: man, himself a sinner, cannot presume to judge. That is the lesson driven home in *Measure for Measure*. (82)

If man cannot presume to judge, when one does so it is through the infliction of pain. In any case, such infliction, as the play shows, is yearned for and accepted. The metaphysical idea of justice and ethics, however, conceals it, because what is truly at play – behind that concealment – is the satisfaction of individual needs through the infliction of pain. The speech which seems to strongly support my argument is delivered by Vincentio himself, part of which I already quoted previously in this chapter:

> there is so great a fever on goodness that the dissolution of it must cure it. Novelty is only in request, and it is as dangerous to be aged in any kind of course, as it is virtuous to be constant in any undertaking. There is scarce truth enough alive to make societies secure, but security enough to make fellowships accursed. Much upon this riddle runs the wisdom of the world. This news is old enough, yet it is every day's news. (3.2.191-97)

Vincentio begins by making a subjective judgment on the state of "goodness": "The fever can only be 'cured' by the death of the patient (i.e. of goodness)" (AS 92). In other words, in Vincentio's mind, he is the only bearer of goodness, which also serves as evidence for his taste for pain. Being the only possessor of goodness, punishing others would "cure" them and make them become good. Vincentio talks about truth. What truth is he referring to? Knight paraphrases "truth" as "knowledge of human nature" (89), which is better understood in literal terms, it seems. Here is N. W. Bawcutt's, the editor of the Oxford Shakespeare edition, gloss of this sentence: "'there is hardly enough trustworthiness or reliability around to make it safe to associate with other people, but there is enough foolish confidence to make such associations accursed (because the rogues will take advantage of this naivety)'" (OS 174). In my view, there is not enough sincerity in people to make relationships of any kind stable, but there is enough paperwork[59] and discourse about justice to make people foolishly trust in a judicial system. Another point of high irony in the play, this speech shows how Vincentio uses irony to conceal his intentions, torture the other characters and maintain social order. Vincentio's judgment about the lack of "goodness" in people, as I explained, is subjective: this is an inherent aspect of human nature, i.e., it cannot be "cured". And if we understand "truth" as Knight did, as "knowledge of human nature", then, there is no scarcity of it. People follow their own interests, which, in turn, may affect negatively other people and their own interests. If the discontents of civilization are not kept at bay somehow, violence unravels. What

[59] Other editors argue for a financial implication in the sentence, with security meaning financial pledge that guarantee loans and fellowship meaning corporation (AS 92; NCS 154).

Vincentio – claiming to be the only bearer of "goodness" – does is to manipulate that knowledge to satisfy his own taste.

Vincentio finishes by saying that the world runs upon this riddle and that there is nothing new about it. But why cannot the riddle be solved? Discussing this speech, Knight claims that it

> holds the poetry of ethics. Its content, too, is very close to the Gospel teaching, the insistence on the blindness of the world, its habitual disregard of the truth exposed by prophet and teacher:
>
> > And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.
>
> (John, iii. 19) (89)

Furthermore, "nobility in man is inextricably twined with 'baseness' (this is, indeed, the moral of *Measure for Measure*)" (92). In conclusion, the blindness to the truth, the *comic human need for pain*, is what holds society together and avoids the unraveling of continuous bloodshed.

3.3. Concealing Absurdity

In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo could be understood as a villain if we think of him as representing the threat of bloodshed. Vincentio is an ironic hero because he aims to disrupt this threat by replacing the intended victim with another, "justified" victim. His motivations are not heroic (in the romantic sense) since he does everything through covertly torture for his own benefit. Additionally, he would have spilled blood for his own gain were he not blessed by what he calls "an accident that heaven provides" (4.3.68). The salvation in *Measure for Measure*, which is even darker than that of *The Merchant of Venice*, resides in that the stability of social life is relatively maintained after the resolution of a conflict (between Angelo and Isabella) in which blood is almost shed and rape almost occurs, although the murky motivations of the characters remain implicit. Claudio, Isabella's brother, who was sentenced to death because he had sex outside marriage, is spared from death and no one, because of an accident provided by the heavens, has to die in his place. Another convict, Ragozine, dies of natural causes, and Vincentio uses his head to trick Angelo. Claudio's death is averted because of Vincentio's efforts. The moral integrity and the murky motivations of both Isabella and Vincentio, however, are at the dramatic core of the narrative. Isabella does not seem to care about saving Claudio at all since she refuses Angelo's

offer to have sex with him to save her brother. Her excuse for not waiting to sleep with Angelo is that Claudio's deliverance would configure a kind of incest (3.1.137-40). Such absurd reasoning, according to which her "shame" is more important than her own brother's life, reveals that Isabella was not interested in saving her brother at all.

Measure for Measure, in contrast to *The Merchant of Venice*, is highly ironic. In the final scene, Vincentio (hypocritically) moralizes over the society of Vienna, while Shylock's conversion, on the other hand, is a relief to the society of Venice. Salvation in *Measure for Measure* is achieved in an ironic mode because the motivations behind it are dark. In the last scene of the play, Vincentio gradually reveals himself to be aware of the conflicts involving all the characters without allowing them to know that he already knew. In other words, he conceals his knowledge, which is the essential sense of irony. Vincentio is aware of every characters' "sins" and thus moralizes by ordering them to marry other characters to whom they owed something. According to Bloom,

> in *Measure for Measure* we are given nothing like Hamlet's intellectual consciousness. Rather, we are halfway between Hamlet and Iago. Vincentio . . . seethes with Hamlet's sexual malaise and with Iago's drive to manipulate others, to weave his own web. Hamlet composes *The Mousetrap*, Iago an Othello-trap, and Vincentio, a would-be comic dramatist, arranges marriages: Claudio and Juliet, Angelo and Mariana, Lucio and Kate Keepdown, Vincentio and Isabella. Shakespeare employs Vincentio as the ultimate parody of the comic play-botcher, bringing order to a Vienna that cannot endure order. (*Shakespeare* 374)

Although, in *As You Like It*, we also have three couples revolving around Rosalind – Celia and Oliver, Touchstone and Audrey, and Silvius and Phoebe – she directly arranges only the marriage of Silvius and Phoebe. This contrast shows two things. First, Rosalind has no malicious irony in her. The arrangement of the marriage of Silvius and Phoebe is necessarily a good and unambivalent event. Second, it suggests that good can only accomplish so much. Vincentio arranged three marriages besides his, but through irony. In other words, evil can establish and maintain order thorough malicious torture, but good is rare and often realistic, as Rosalind is. In *Measure for Measure*, Vincentio manages to solve every issue. Claudio is saved, Isabella is not raped, Angelo is not condemned, and Barnardine is released. In *As You Like It*, the usurping duke and Jaques have to leave so that Arden can have some peace. The torturing irony of Vincentio

solves all the problems, while Rosalind's realism can only do so much, but what she manages to accomplish is genuinely good.

Claudio ends up being saved because of Vincentio's lust for Isabella. All the characters in the play meet a "happy" ending and bloodshed is avoided. In other words, salvation was only possible – and this strongly reinforces the irony – because of Vincentio's lust for Isabella and Isabella's lust for torture. He explicitly showed, however, that he was willing to shed blood in order to seduce her. Vincentio pardons even Bernardine, the convict murderer who was going to be killed so that he could trick Angelo. Bernardine's pardon heightens the irony because any sense of justice is destroyed. Vincentio moralizes to the other characters about fornication while releasing a murderer. As a convict, he needed not have been executed, but he should have remained in jail. Any sense of justice is destroyed because all that mattered, in the end, was the satisfaction of Vincentio's lust. According to Frye, it is noticeable how often "a Shakespearean comedy begins with some absurd, cruel, or irrational law: the law of killing Syracusans in the *Comedy of Errors*, the law of compulsory marriage in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the law that confirms Shylock's bond, the attempts of Angelo to legislate people into righteousness, and the like, which the action of the comedy then evades or breaks" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 166). Additionally, "the humor is intimately connected with the theme of the absurd or irrational law that the action of comedy moves toward breaking" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 169). The absurd is villainous in the other plays mentioned by Frye. That is why salvation is (at least partially) genuinely met when it is eliminated. In *Measure for Measure*, however, Vincentio's absurd lust for torture is not eliminated, and so salvation is achieved ironically.

In *All's Well that Ends Well*, according to Bloom, "Bertram has been wronged to an extreme; he is the prize set by Helen as her fairy-tale reward for curing the King of France. This ought to be abominable, but since Bertram is abominable, we are not distressed" (*Shakespeare* 352). As Bertram is not a sympathetic character, we are at first hardly distressed by Helen's malicious will to coerce him into marrying her. Bloom continues: "When Isabella accepts the bed trick . . . in *Measure for Measure*, at the instigation of 'the Duke of dark corners,' we are not startled at her moral complicity because, like nearly every other character in the play, she is at least half crazy. But we necessarily are bothered when Helen herself proposes the bed trick, where she is to be the sexual performer under another person's name" (*Shakespeare* 354). Helen, unlike Vincentio, is aware of what she is doing:

> Let us assay our plot; which, if it speed,
> Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed,
> And lawful meaning in a wicked act,
> Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact. (*AWW* 3.7.44-47)

The title of the play, then, comes about, in an apparent attempt to justify to herself that her ends justify her means:

> Yet, I pray you.
> But with the word, 'The time will bring on summer',
> When briars shall have leaves as well as thorns,
> And be as sweet as sharp. We must away.
> Our wagon is prepared, and time revives us.
> All's well that ends well; still the fine's the crown.
> Whate'er the course, the end is the renown. (*AWW* 4.4.30-36)

She repeats it in 5.1: "All's well that ends well yet, / Though time seem so adverse, and means unfit" (*AWW* 5.1.25-26). It is fairly clear that her audacity is lascivious and insolent and so she has to keep telling herself that all is well when (and if) it ends well. According to Bloom, the

> The bed trick is one thing, and fair game if you want to play it, but is it not a very different matter to pretend death, so as to grieve the foster mother Countess, the King, and LaFew? Helena's tactics here prelude those of the more-than-dubious Duke in *Measure for Measure*, when he cruelly deceives Isabella and everyone else as to Claudio's death. Not that Helena, like the Duke, is a sadist, but rather that she is relentless in her drive to make all's well for herself by ensnaring the inedible Bertram. (*Shakespeare* 355)

Helen and Vincentio seem to be similar in their godlike features. The King tells her after she proposes to cure his uncurable disease: "Thou this to hazard needs must intimate / Skill infinite, or monstrous desperate" (*AWW* 2.1.181-82). "Skill infinite" seems to ironically refer to godlike features, like Vincentio's "omniscience". It is ironic because they do not actually possess such powers, but it comes across as if they did. The major difference between Vincentio and Helen is that Vincentio gets what he wants by necessarily (and delightfully) inflicting pain. Helen does not go about France or Italy torturing people, but she devises a disturbing plot in order to get what she wants. Luckily, she does not need to harm anyone (like Vincentio threatens to do) to attain her will, but considering what we know about her personality, we assume that she would if she had to.

Not only Helen, but the King is also aware of the ambivalent nature of her plan: "All yet seems well, and if it end so meet, / The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet" (*AWW* 5.3.331-34). Helen uses some sort of magic trick to heal the King. Frye suggests that

> Helena's healing powers, in which she has such complete confidence, are really a form of magic, whatever she may have found in her father's recipe-books. If so, perhaps the rather puzzling dialogue at the beginning between Helena and Parolles about the former's virginity, often attributed to a corrupt text, may be emphasizing the traditional folktale association of magic with virgins. So if Helena succeeds in her design of marrying Bertram she will also be, like most magicians in plays, renouncing her magic at the end. (*The Myth of Deliverance* 46-47)

Both Helen and the King overtly comment on the irony. *All's Well that Ends Well* is in ironic mode, but, in that play, it not as heightened as it is in *Measure for Measure*, which is in full ironic mode because it does not overtly comment on its own irony. Helen's "magic trick" is overt; Vincentio's torture is not. The major difference between *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*, therefore, is in the degree of irony.

One of the minor characters, the First Lord, says: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together. Our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not, and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues" (*AWW* 4.3.71-74); Helen says: "briars shall have leaves as well as thorns / And be as sweet as sharp" (*AWW* 4.5.32-33); and the King says: "if it end so meet, / The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet" (*AWW* 5.3.333-34). These are some the most appropriate passages of the play that show its ironic tone in regard to salvation. According to Bloom, "what is strongest and subtlest about *All's Well That Ends Well* . . . [is] a dark vision of human nature that is also profoundly accepting of the darkness" (*Shakespeare* 351). *Measure for Measure* is even darker because it conceals such acceptance. Bittersweet, rather than just bitter like *Troilus and Cressida*, is the most fitting adjective to describe *All's Well that Ends Well*. Helen, as I discussed in chapter 1, has psychopathic tendencies, but, fortunately, nobody gets harmed in the play and Bertram abides. In *All's Well that Ends Well*, salvation is bittersweet, but it is still salvation.

According to Frye, as discussed previously, the absurd is eliminated from comedies so that salvation is achieved. The absurd characterological trats in *Measure for Measure*, however, is not

eliminated; rather, it is concealed. Here is a summary of the elements that comprise the prevailing image of absurdity in *Measure for Measure*:

a) bawdiness is sentenced with death. The provost points out the absurdity of the sentence:

> Alas,
> He hath but as offended in a dream.
> All sects, all ages smack of this vice, and he
> To die for't? (2.2.3-6)

Only in a dream is bawdiness a criminal offense, but then again, according to Prospero and Bottom, we are but the products of dream.[60]

b) the formula sex = incest = death. As Bloom points out, whether "Isabella, in her revulsion from a vision of universal incest, somehow speaks for the play, we cannot know" (*Shakespeare* 361), but Isabella is still the center of attention in the play. Almost everything happens because of her. Vincentio's initial plans change because of her; Angelo risks his own life only to have sex with her; Lucio seeks her because he is also turned on by her, even if as only a voyeur. If the formula does not apply to all the characters, they are certainly affected by it even so.

c) the presence of Barnardine. A drunken convicted murderer refusing to accept his death sentence and walking away can provoke laughter in an audience because of the absurdity of the situation. It is reinforced by his release, even though Vincentio might be releasing Barnardine as a last measure to torture him. Nevertheless, it refers back to what Claudio says on his first appearance. There is no such thing as justice, even for murderers. In other words, if bawdiness is punishable by death and murder is pardonable, it is because certainly something is very wrong indeed.

d) Isabella's plea for Angelo. Bloom argues that "Isabella, being crazed, must be serious; Shakespeare cannot be . . . Nothing is alive in Isabella, and Shakespeare will not tell us why and how she has suffered such a vastation" (*Shakespeare* 379-80). Isabella's flaws in reasoning are not deliberately patent, which reinforces the pervading irony. As I argued, her plea for Angelo is consistent with her taste for tortuous arguments, but this element enhances rather that diminishes the absurdity.

---

[60] "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (*Temp*. 4.1.156-58); "I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was – there is no man can tell what. Methought I was – and methought I had – but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had" (*MND* 4.1.197-205).

e) ultimately, the prevailing need, in Vienna, for pain and relief. Not all characters have such a need, but what make this element part of the big picture of absurdity is that the ones who participate in this social dynamic overrule the ones who do not. All the major characters seem to be affected by paraphilia. In the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Measure for Measure*, from 2019, directed by Gregory Doran, the paraphilia of the three main characters is made explicit. Angelo walks around with a chain attached to his thigh (to represent his masochism); Isabella seemingly has an orgasm while arguing with Angelo; and both Vincentio and Isabella demonstrate a deep satisfaction when he convinces her to participate in the bed trick; Vincentio and Lucio are voyeurs. Angelo is a masochist, Isabella, a sadomasochist, and Vincentio, a sadist. Claudio and Juliet are in the hands of those who have power, who are, coincidentally, paraphilic. The young couple is a victim of the lust of those in power. The sense of justice in the Vienna of *Measure for Measure* is not based truly on rationality. Rational thoughts only *conceal* the characters' *need* for pain, which is associated with punishment and justice. Pain is not a necessary evil to maintain order in civilization; it is a human need.

Shakespeare apparently wrote sonnet 121 (my epigraph) with a sort of proto-Vincentio in mind. According to Colin Burrow, it can primarily be paraphrased thus: "It is preferable actually to be a vile person than to be thought one, when in the eye of the world one receives all the odium of being vile when one is not in fact so . . . and the legitimate pleasure is lost when an affair is termed 'vile', not by those who experience it but by those who look on" (622). According to Katherine Duncan-Jones, "Shakespeare elaborates the proverb,[61] suggesting that it is actually better to be *vile* (here more or less synonymous with 'nought', = immoral, vicious, *OED* 1; cf. also *OED* vile 1, 'Of actions, character etc., Despicable on moral grounds') than to be falsely thought so" (Duncan-Jones 352). Burrow suggests secondary meanings for lines 3-4: "*So deemèd* (termed such) could refer back to *vile* or to *pleasure*. This allows two secondary senses: (a) we do not even feel what they call pleasure as pleasure; (b) those who think a love affair is vile also think (pruriently and erroneously) that pleasure comes from it" (Burrow 622). All these meanings seem to converge on Vincentio. Vincentio is vile – even if he might not admit it – but he does not want to seem so, and the pleasure (of inflicting pain) is lost when deemed vile by others. According to the secondary sense (a), we do not feel what they call pleasure as pleasure since, in Vincentio's Vienna, pleasure is painful. According to the secondary meaning (b), if a love affair is thought to

[61] "'There is small difference to the eye of the world in being nought and being thought so'" (Duncan-Jones 352).

be vile – as it turns out to be in Vienna – it is because those who think so take pleasure in it. There is yet another meaning to lines 3-4. Pleasure is lost because others are able to clearly see it. We know that Vincentio only feels pleasure when inflicting pain under disguise. Once the disguise is removed, the infliction of pain – and thus pleasure – is lost.

Irony can be understood as torture considering that the essence of irony is in pretending not to know, i.e., in disguising one's knowledge about something so that the interlocutor can be manipulated. In other words, concealing has an ironic effect because irony is pretending not to know. Vincentio is illuding Isabella by hiding a fact (that her brother is alive): he is being ironic. If her brother's death (or Angelo's betrayal) is painful to her, then, Vincentio is torturing her by concealing the truth. Vincentio does not seem to like arguing because he does not like to receive pain, only to inflict it; he likes to dominate. This is why he is impatient with Lucio. Vincentio, observing Isabella and Claudio from the shadows (as Lucio observed Isabella and Angelo), is a voyeur. Isabella seems to like torturing and being tortured. She seems to get aroused only when there is pain. Torturing Claudio does not necessarily mean that she would not want to help him, but she does not make it clear if she would like him to be saved or not. It is not possible to say that Vincentio is ever being truthful, but his love of irony walks hand in hand with his love of inflicting pain. Vincentio has a very physical motivation for his irony: his taste for pain. As I argued, he is not ironic in 2.1, in which he reveals part of his true self to Thomas, but he certainly fixates all his motivations in his taste for inflicting pain.

We saw in *The Merchant of Venice* and in *Measure for Measure* how salvation, the comic sense, is conveyed through concealment. Egotistical motivations are concealed in the first play by ellipsis, while a need for pain is concealed in the second by irony. In the next chapters, we will see how tragic characters convey a tragic sense by removing such concealment.

Chapter 4. The Tragic Sense in *Hamlet*: Chance as the Ruling Factor of Will

Why should man fear since chance is all in all
for him, and he can clearly foreknow nothing?
–Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 977-78

ill-annexèd Opportunity
thy guilt is great
Thy honey turns to gall, thy joy to grief.
–William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, 874-89

The direct opposite of salvation, which means the maintenance of social order in the sense being discussed in this dissertation, is destruction. In Hamlet's cosmological view, human will is like an ocean tide that ebbs and flows, i.e., it is never constant. This vulnerability of the will is governed by chance, which is a notion that, associated with ambiguity, leads to an overall sense of cosmological emptiness. Ambiguity is the ruling trope in *Hamlet*, and the pragmatic result is a sense of uncertainty, indetermination, and indefiniteness. In the play, this is emphasized during Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy and the Player King's speech, both in act three. Santos, in the article "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Anguish", argues that the uncertainty about the murder of King Hamlet and the appearance of the Ghost emphasize the pain of anguish and doubt (201). Garber, based on Freud's theories, suggests that the Ghost is an agent of repetition: "And what is a ghost? It is a memory trace" (*Profiling Shakespeare* 34). Bloom contends that "pain is the authentic origin of human memory. . . . Memorable pain, or memory engendered through pain, ensues from an ambivalence both cognitive and affective, an ambivalence that we associate most readily with Hamlet" (*Shakespeare* 11). I prefer Santos's reading of the Ghost and Bloom's reading of memory in *Hamlet* (both pragmatic readings) because they emphasize Hamlet's – and, by extension, humanity's – pain. In the end, *Hamlet* seems to be mainly about the pain of uncertainty, indetermination, or indefiniteness.

4.1. What is the Cause of Hamlet's Melancholy?

In the first act, the sense of uncertainty is conveyed by the imagery of witchcraft. All five scenes of the first act build up a subtle but persistent suggestion that human will results from witchcraft, i.e., the origin of will is uncertain. In 1.1, Marcellus suggest that the appearance of the ghost is related to the wickedness of the time. In gracious times, when "no planets strike, / No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm" (1.1.162-63), the Ghost would not have appeared. In other words, planets do not exert their influence, fairies do not attack or lay hold, and witches have no power to charm in hallowed times. In 1.2, Hamlet scolds his mother's weakness in succumbing to sexual desire in less than two months:

> frailty, thy name is woman –
> A little month, or ere those shoes were old
> With which she followed my poor father's body
> Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she –
> O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
> Would have mourned longer (1.2.145-150)

The implied suggestion here is that Gertrude's lust is prompted by witchcraft. In the previous scene, Marcellus has told us that, during the appearance of the Ghost, witches have "power to charm us", and so Gertrude is under witches' charm. In 1.5, this suggestion will be fully fleshed out. In 1.3, Laertes, when alerting Ophelia about Hamlet, says: "you must fear, / His greatness weighed, his will is not his own, / For he himself is subject to his birth" (1.3.16-18). Laertes is literally referring to Hamlet's condition as part of royalty and the restrictions that such condition impose on his social and personal lives; but the statement "his will is not his own" – especially considering the background sense of uncertainty, expressed through the imagery of witchcraft – seems to encompass something broader than mere restraints imposed by his political situation. In 1.4, Hamlet, in his first speech, says:

> So, oft it chances in particular men,
> That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
> As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty,
> Since nature cannot choose his origin,
> By their o'ergrowth of some complexion,
> Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,

> Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens
> The form of plausive manners – that these men,
> Carrying I say the stamp of one defect,
> Being nature's livery or fortune's star,
> His virtues else be they as pure as grace,
> As infinite as man may undergo,
> Shall in the general censure take corruption
> From that particular fault. (1.4.23-36)

The presence of a vicious mole in "particular men" is like one's birth, for which one is not guilty – i.e., it cannot be controlled – since "nature cannot choose his origin". This first image of the mole is reminiscent of the cosmological view we will see in the speech of the Player King later on, in which he says that we are "yet to prove, / Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love" (3.2.183-84). The uncertainty of not knowing whether love leads fortune, or fortune, love, is also present in the origin of the mole: where does it come from and why is it a negative feature? The excessive growth of "some complexion", a natural tendency of temperament corresponds to a "stamp", an imprinted characteristic over which one has no choice or which one cannot remove. It is either "nature's livery" or "fortune's star".[62] Such a feature, a mole, is the reason for one to be in the aim of "general censure" since it is a blemish, but the mole cannot be only a defective mark since it can also be a mark of greatness. In the case of Hamlet, his greatness is not related to "virtues" that are "as pure as grace", but to his consciousness.

According to Bloom, Hamlet's consciousness "is his salient characteristic; he is the most aware and knowing figure ever conceived" (*Shakespeare* 404). Commenting on 1.4, Tom McAlindon, in *Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'*, argues that Hamlet is the one who

> offers what looks like Shakespeare's explanation for the fall of all the tragic heroes when he speaks of noble and gifted men who are born with some vicious mole of nature . . . that brings ruin upon them but more often it is arguably their good qualities which, in the given

[62] This distinction seems to be the contemporary difference between hereditariness and acquisition. It is important to keep in mind the image of "stamping", that is of imprinting, since both result from one's birth. Brian Gibbons, the editor of The New Cambridge Edition states that "nature's livery" means "a dress marking one's servitude to nature", and "fortune's star", "a destiny falling to one by chance" (114). Eye color, therefore, would be an example of "nature's livery", while nationality, of "fortune's star". With this, Hamlet is suggesting that the cause of such a feature cannot be determined with precision. He is nonetheless emphasizing the uncontrollability of such a feature since it is the result of birth and is, therefore, "stamped".

> circumstances, prove fatal and become or engender defects. . . . Friar Lawrence [in *Rom*.] comes nearer than Hamlet to the causal centre of Shakespearean tragedy when he observes – while philosophising on the paradoxes of Nature – that "virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied" (2.2.21). (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 119)

In this scene, Hamlet talks to Horatio and Marcellus while they wait for his father's ghost. The reason for Hamlet's monologue is the noise from the uproar that Claudius was causing until late at night. Hamlet says that this characteristic embarrasses the people of Denmark when compared to other countries. He compares the presence of such a feature to a mole, but this mole refers not only to the condition of Claudius or Denmark, but also to his own. Hamlet's mole, which is his consciousness, is supposed to be the cause of the postponement of his revenge, which leads to his death, i.e., his ruin. The ambivalent aspect of the mole, his consciousness, is both the cause of his glory and his ruin.

In the speech in 1.2, Hamlet says: "O that this too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew" (1.2.129-30). According to Philip Edwards, the editor of the NCS edition,

> Q2 [the second quarto] reads 'sallied'. Q1 [the first quarto] has 'too much griev'd and sallied flesh'. Q2 makes considerable use of Q1 in this part of the play, and the coincidence of a very unusual spelling argues strongly that Q2 derives from Q1. Q1 is a 'reported' text. What did the reporter hear on stage to make him write 'griev'd and sallied flesh'? It is argued that 'sallied' means 'sullied'. The evidence is in 2.1.39, where Q2 has 'sallies' and F [the first folio] 'sulleyes', and *Love's Labour's Lost* 5.2.352, 'unsallied'. . . . The case for 'sullied' is tortuous, though it is the reading of most modern editions. The case for 'solid' is simple. It is the unequivocal reading of one of the two authoritative texts, and it suits the context much better. Hamlet's lament is that his flesh is too solid to melt away, and that he is forbidden by God to do away with himself. In the context of the speech, it would hardly be surprising if Shakespeare heard the word 'sullied' as he wrote 'solid' and that the reporter caught only the unexpressed part of the pun. (100)

Davvid Herbert Lawrence claims that "a sense of corruption in the flesh makes Hamlet frenzied, for he will never admit that it is his own flesh" (123). However ironic Lawrence might be in this remark, Hamlet's natural revulsion toward sullied flesh seems to justify Lawrence's claim. The First Folio gives us "solid flesh," while the second quarto reads "sallied flesh." Bloom argues that while "'sallied' could mean 'assailed,' it is probably a variant for 'sullied'" (*Hamlet: Poem*

Unlimited 8). Sullied, meaning "stained", refers back to the mole as naturally – in the sense of being uncontrollable – defiled flesh. In 4.4, Hamlet uses another image with the same meaning: "This is th'impostume of much wealth and peace, / That inward breaks, and shows no cause without / Why the man dies" (4.4.27-29). Impostume is an abscess, a swollen area within body tissue, containing an accumulation of pus, another kind of blemish on human flesh. Having too much wealth and peace is like a curse because it is like an abscess, which grows inside someone until it bursts and kills them, without anyone really knowing why, and it is ambivalent like the mole. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that the mole is an image for the natural corruption of humanity. Later, we learn that Denmark is a metonym for the world. This meaning for the image of the mole makes sense because the feature that Hamlet points out as the one that embarrasses the people of Denmark (unruly behavior) is not exclusive to Danish people, but to all humanity. The mole is the naturally corrupted flesh of humanity.

Finally, in 1.5, the Ghost, when talking to Hamlet, says that Claudius, with

"witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts –
O wicked wit and gifts that have the power
So to seduce – won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming virtuous queen." (1.5.41-46)

The Ghost implies that Claudius's wits and gifts, with which he seduced Gertrude, are the product of witchcraft. According to Laertes, Hamlet's "will is not his own, / For he himself is subject to his birth". According to Hamlet, the presence of a mole in someone, which is comparable to birth, is outside the range of human agency, that is, out of one's control, suggesting that the totality of our will is out of our control. Finally, since Claudius won Gertrude's will with his gifts, which, according to the Ghost, were bestowed on him by witchcraft, there is a suggestion that will stems from witchcraft, which is uncontrollable.

Likewise, in *Othello*, Desdemona seems to have been under effect of witchcraft when she fell in love with Othello. Brabantio, Desdemona's father, uses witchcraft to explain Desdemona's love since, in his view, there was no rational reason for Desdemona to feel attracted to Othello, the Moor had enchanted her with some kind of "witchcraft":

She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so preposterously to err,

> Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
> Sans witchcraft could not. (*Oth*. 1.3.60-64)

Othello also uses the imagery of witchcraft to explain affection: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them. / This only is the witchcraft I have used" (*Oth*. 1.3.166-68). What Othello does here is to turn the literal meaning of witchcraft (the use of spells and potions) into a metaphor. The metaphor would be: the engendering of affection *is* the product of unknown forces, regardless of the literal reasons we might point out, like Desdemona's falling for the hardships Othello had endured. There is also a suggestion that, in *Othello*, the inclinations of the characters are, if not determined, at least influenced by witchcraft. *Othello* is a realistic play in the sense that it does not present fantastic elements like the Ghost in *Hamlet*, but there is evidence for the agency of magic in the world of the play. Othello gives Desdemona a handkerchief imbued with magic "There's magic in the web of it: / A sibyl . . . In her prophetic fury sewed the work" (*Oth*. 3.4.65-68). Witchcraft. in *Othello*, is not simply a metaphor because it refers to the literal fictional world of the play. What matters is the use of the image of witchcraft to explain affections.

The mention of witchcraft helps paint the bigger picture of the play. We learn that Hamlet suffers because he cannot understand or control his hesitation. He cannot control in the sense that he cannot *will it*, i.e., feel compelled to take revenge. In this regard, Bloom argues: "Something in Hamlet dies before the play opens, and I set aside the prevalent judgment that the deepest cause of his melancholia is his mourning for the dead father and his outrage at his mother's sexuality. . . . The foreground to Shakespeare's tragedy is Hamlet's consciousness of his own consciousness, unlimited yet at war with itself" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 86). I agree with Bloom in regard to the cause of Hamlet's melancholy. If such a cause can be identified, it is probably his consciousness. Consciousness could here be roughly replaced by awareness. Of course, the information perceived by one that is aware needs to be internalized in order to become fully conscious. This is when Hamlet's continual inwardness plays its role. The most important aspect of a consciousness is awareness, the ability to perceive and differentiate the surroundings in which it is immersed. Bloom adds: "the triumphal *Hamlet* is cosmological drama of man's fate, and only masks its essential drive as revenge. . . . by the start of Act V . . . we come to see that hesitation and consciousness are synonyms in this vast play" (*Shakespeare* 405). If hesitation and consciousness are indeed synonyms, the following logic is followed: Hamlet's powerful

consciousness provides him a comprehensive understanding of reality, which, in turns, voids a compulsive motivation for revenge.

Bloom claims that *Hamlet* is a cosmological play because it is an investigation into why reality is the way it is. In other words, characters attempt to find causes for events. The play is a pragmatic study of human will. Gertrude and Claudius try to define the cause for Hamlet's grief:

CLAUDIUS . . .

He [Polonius] tells me, my dear Gertrude, he hath found

The head and source of all your son's distemper.

GERTRUDE I doubt it is no other but the main:

His father's death, and our o'erhasty marriage. (2.2.54-57)

They like to think they know the cause of Hamlet's distemper, his grief, but their assumptions are wrong.

Likewise, Hamlet is also in a cosmological quest to find out not the cause of his grief but the cause of his hesitation, that is, the postponement of the act of revenge against Claudius. Is the cause of both the same? This is a question that may emerge, but a necessary connection between grief and hesitation is not evident. Hamlet also cannot find such a cause, for which he spends most of the play looking. But if Hamlet, the acumen of the aesthetic i.e., anti-metaphysical intellectuality, cannot find the cause for one, could he find the cause for the other? Are such causes even identifiable?

The cosmological questions persist throughout the play and are never answered: why is Hamlet grieving and why does he hesitate? Bloom calls Hamlet's grief "certainly the most enigmatic malaise in all of Western literature" (*Shakespeare* 428). One of the symptoms of Hamlet's grief is Hamlet's distaste for the uses of the world:

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable

Seem to me all the uses of this world!

Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden

That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature

Possess it merely. (1.2.129-37)

To Hamlet, the world is like an untended garden that only grows nasty and gross weeds that cover it completely. Hamlet also understands the world as a prison:

HAMLET Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ Then is the world one.

HAMLET A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons; Denmark being one o'th'worst. (2.2.234-37)

Next in the list of symptoms is Hamlet's general revulsion of sexuality:

HAMLET Man delights not me – no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

ROSENCRANTZ My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts. (2.2.290-93)

Hamlet says that the company of people delights him not, and his answer to Rosencrantz's assumption (that Hamlet is not homosexual) indicates revulsion toward sexuality, including the sexuality of others. Contrary to what an ethical reading would believe, i.e., that Hamlet's distaste for Gertrude's speedy marriage with Claudius indicates that Hamlet has noble ethical principles, Hamlet's confronts Gertrude about her lust because *sexuality itself* is repulsive to him. The root of Hamlet's problem runs much deeper than a superficial and naïve ethical belief – the belief that individuals are bothered about moralizing claims. As I have been insisting, Hamlet's problem with reality is structural. His revulsion of sexuality becomes clearer if we think of it as operating by the same formula we see in *Measure for Measure*: "sex equals incest equals death. That equation is the only idea of order in *Measure for Measure*, as it was also Hamlet's reductive idea of order until his sea change and emergence into disinterestedness in Act V" (*Shakespeare* 374).

Gertrude's relationship with Claudius is not technically incestuous, but Hamlet believes it to be, which only heightens the level of revulsion since he naturally has no interest in sexuality – as Isabella did not either. To Hamlet, sex is repulsive because it is necessarily incestuous, which is naturally repulsive. It is also repulsive in the same way death is repulsive. The formula sex = death, as a form of order, is as true to Isabella as it is to Hamlet. It is not outward, i.e., a kind of external force, but when it affects the most prominent characters, it tends to affect others as well. Hamlet's sense of the naturally corrupted state of humanity, for instance, seems to affect Gertrude herself: "Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct" (3.4.89-91). The association of sexuality with death is also textually present. In "To be or not to be" speech, Hamlet says:

who would bear the whips and scorns of time,

. . .

When he himself might his quietus make

With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,

To grunt and sweat under a weary life (3.1.70-77)

Who would undergo the trials and tribulations of time since we can just end our pain using an unsheathed dagger? A "bare bodkin" is a very suggestive image for the male genitalia, and "quietus" is a pun with "coitus": the words sounded similar in Elizabethan English.[63] The imagery of sexuality is strengthened by "bearing", "grunting" and "sweating". Since "quietus" = "coitus", sexuality is to Hamlet as painful as death.

Finally, the symptom that, in my view, makes it clear that Hamlet's grief is due to the structure of reality is his aversion to language:

This is most brave,

That I, the son of the dear murdered,

Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,

Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,

And fall a-cursing like a very drab,

A scullion! (2.2.535-40)

To unpack his heart with words is another instance of unprofitable (and uncomfortable) use of the world to Hamlet. Words, after all, only seem to result in slander:

POLONIUS . . . What do you read my lord?

HAMLET Words, words, words.

POLONIUS What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET Between who?

POLONIUS I mean the matter that you read, my lord.

HAMLET Slanders sir (2.2.187-93)

Bloom explains that "[Friedrich] Nietzsche's most Shakespearean realization is pure Hamlet: we can find words only for what already is dead in our hearts, so that necessarily there is a kind of contempt in every act of speaking. The rest is silence; speech is agitation, betrayal, restlessness, torment of self and of others" (*Shakespeare* 400). Bloom also states that one of the differences between Falstaff and Hamlet "is that Falstaff frequently laughs with a whole heart, with faith both in language and in himself. Hamlet's laughter can unnerve us because it issues from

[63] According to the linguist David Crystal the pronunciation of "quietus" was /kwɪˈɛːtəs/ (447). The first syllable was shorter in comparison to the contemporary/ kwaɪˈiːtəs/. Thus, it is approximated to coitus – /ˈkɔɪ.təs/.

a total lack of faith, both in language and in himself" (*Shakespeare* 410). Additionally, what "Falstaff finds words for is still alive in his heart, and for him there is no contempt in the act of speaking. Falstaff possesses wit lest he perish of the truth; Hamlet's wit, thrown over by him in the transition to Act V, vanishes from the stage, and so Hamlet becomes the sublime personality whose fate must be to perish of the truth" (*Shakespeare* 412). And what is this truth? That human nature (to Hamlet) is naturally corrupted, that the world has no uses and that "we are arrant knaves all" (3.1.125). Language, to Hamlet, is agitation, restlessness, slander, torment, and pain. Hamlet's problem is therefore structural, that is, he naturally does not accept reality as it is, which is the one trait I have been emphasizing to as common to tragic characters.

As already discussed, Hamlet spends a large part of the play trying to understand why he does not feel compelled to carry out revenge. On the other hand, Laertes and Fortinbras – whose partial roles are to serve as contrasting parameters – do not hesitate; Hamlet suffers on account of his hesitation. As A. C. Bradley points out, in "the two soliloquies where he reviews his position . . . he reproaches himself bitterly for the neglect of his duty" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 97). The soliloquies are those of 2.2 – when Hamlet notices the affection that the actor could nurture for Hecuba – and of 4.4 – when he notices Fortinbras' army, which marches toward a bloody battle that is worth an irrelevant portion of territory:

> Now whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on th'event –
> A thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward – I do not know
> Why yet I live to say this thing's to do,
> Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
> To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me. (4.4.39-46)

Hamlet feels the moral obligation of carrying out the vengeance demanded by his father, but he cannot carry it out. And he does not know what makes him hesitate, i.e., he does not know why his heightened consciousness prevents him from acting. This is precisely, according to John Lawlor, the "tragic conflict in *Hamlet*; the hero averse from the deed that is required of him, seeking endlessly the cause of that aversion, calling it by any name but its own, and failing to know it for what it is" (66). Bradley argues that the "direct cause [of hesitation] was . . . a state of

profound melancholy. Now, Hamlet's reflectiveness doubtless played a certain part in the *generation* of that melancholy, and was thus one indirect contributory cause of his irresolution. . . . But excess of reflection was not . . . the *direct* cause of the irresolution at all" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 108). Bradley is right in pointing out that an excess of reflection is not the main cause of Hamlet's hesitation. By excess of reflection, Bradley refers to "'an almost enormous intellectual activity' in the way of 'a calculating consideration which attempts to exhaust all the relations and possible consequences of a deed'" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 107), but Bradley is also too confident in asserting that melancholy is the cause of hesitation. Bradley also points out that "Hamlet seems to be an example of [melancholy temperament] . . . as Lear is of a temperament mixedly choleric and sanguine" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 110). Therefore, melancholy, irresolution (or hesitation), and (excessive) reflectiveness, are all different things that might be related or not to one another. Bradley insists on the attempt to establish a relation between Hamlet's melancholy and his hesitation, but I suspect such a relation cannot be firmly established. Melancholy could be a relevant psychological feature of Hamlet's character and even play a role in his hesitation, but I maintain that, if the cause of Hamlet's irresolution can be identified, it is his consciousness. Hamlet, however, never discovers the cause of his hesitation – whether "bestial oblivion" or excessive thinking, as Bradley suggests. As Edwards explains, "Pyrrhus, or Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, was summoned to the Trojan war to avenge his father. With Hamlet, Fortinbras, and Laertes, he makes a fourth son avenging a father" (NCS 149). But Hamlet had not met Laertes after having killed Polonius, so the examples Hamlet speaks of in the soliloquy in 4.4. are Pyrrhus and Fortinbras. Hamlet feels guilty for not carrying out revenge; Fortinbras, Laertes, and Pyrrhus, as mentioned, are contrasting characters with regard to resolve. We do not know exactly how they feel about their fathers, but what matters is that they feel compelled to retaliate in a reaction to an act of aggression toward their families. What is it, then, that can explain the difference in will between these two characters? This is part of the cosmological investigation going on in the play.

4.2. Ophelia's Madness

Gertrude and Claudius also attempt to define the cause of Ophelia's "madness" – which is more of an outrage than an actual loss of cognitive capabilities, similarly, in my view, to what happens to Lear. Ophelia, hence, is also part of the cosmological investigation. When Claudius spots her acting strangely, he says: "Oh this is the poison of deep grief, it springs / All from her

father's death" (4.5.74-75). It is reasonable to think that Polonius death would affect Ophelia to an extent, just as the death of Hamlet's father partially affected him, but the more powerful affections affecting Ophelia seem to be more deeply rooted:

Song

Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose and donned his clothes
And dupped the chamber door;
Let in the maid that out a maid
Never departed more.

. . .

Young men will do't if they come to't –
By Cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.'

He answers –

So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
And thou hadst not come to my bed. (4.5.48-66)

And yet Hamlet never went to her bed as is suggested by Edwards: "Ophelia's words are intensely moving because they show her deranged mind wandering over the sexual relations which she has *not* had" (NCS 207). Instead, Hamlet told her to go to a nunnery (3.1.119). What is being suggested here is that sexual failure is the cause of her grief and subsequent despair. The cosmological investigation could be rephrased: why does our sanity depend so much on sexual success? Timon, Lear and Edgar understand sexuality as the cause of everything wrong with humanity, as it will be discussed in the next chapter. Hamlet's revulsion of sexuality has slightly different nuances from what we see in the other three characters. Hamlet, after all, is not interested in sexuality – of any kind – and it causes revulsion in him to see sexual interest in others. Ophelia, on the other hand, is deeply affected by his sexual rejection. In the National Theatre's production of *Hamlet*, from 2015, directed by Lyndsey Turner and Robin Lough, Ophelia, from the beginning, shows distress, which is a reading that clearly suggests that the cause of her disturbance began

before the events of the play. Hamlet's rejection seems to be only a trigger to her madness. Likewise, we can infer that Hamlet's melancholy is structural, that is, it was an inherent part of his character, but its full effects were triggered by the death of his father and its consequences.

4.3. Fluctuations of the Will

The one thing that Hamlet seems to value the most, and what takes him (even if temporarily) away from the suffering of his grief and hesitation is play. Bloom argues that inwardness "as a mode of freedom is the mature Hamlet's finest endowment, despite his sufferings, and wit becomes another name for that inwardness and that freedom" (*Shakespeare* 401). The play Hamlet arranges in the third act can be understood as a suggestion that *he values more his inner self* than the demands of the outside world. As Bloom suggests, his "*inwardness* is his most radical originality; the ever-growing inner self, the dream of an infinite consciousness, has never been more fully portrayed" (*Shakespeare* 416). He is more worried about his play, which, if successful, would make Claudius reveal himself as the murderer, than with the act of revenge.

Hamlet is cheered by the arrival of the company of players, as Rosencrantz observes:

> Madam, it so fell out that certain players
> We o'er-raught on the way; of these we told him,
> And there did seem in him a kind of joy
> To hear of it. (3.1.16-18)

Rosencrantz had supposed that Hamlet would not give a good welcome to the company of players, but contrary to his expectations, Hamlet changes his mood when the company arrives and welcomes them. Hamlet feels like a whore when unpacking his heart with words, but he does not feel negatively about using language to devise a play.

After the success of his play, Hamlet starts singing and asks for music. He completely forgets his grief and the guilt regarding his irresolution:

> Why, let the strucken deer go weep,
> The hart ungallèd play,
> For some must watch while some must sleep,
> Thus runs the world away.
> . . .
> Ah ha! – Come, some music! Come, the recorders!

> For if the king like not the comedy
> Why then – belike he likes it not, perdy.
> Come, some music! (3.2.246-68)

All that matters to him, even if temporarily, is the success of his play. Bloom argues that there is something in Hamlet that "transcends his play" (*Shakespeare* 385) – the play *Hamlet*, not *The Mousetrap*. Play is the one thing that temporarily nullifies his grief. I will discuss transcendence in more detail later on. For the time being, I argue that, if Hamlet is, indeed, looking for transcendence, it is not metaphysical transcendence. The order of play, at its highest level, provides, even if temporarily, this kind of *physical* transcendence, i.e., *without* metaphysical implications. As Bloom explains, the "Hamlet Complex is not incestuous but . . . theatrical" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 54).[64] Additionally, "he is a breaking wave of sensibility, of thought and feeling pulsating onward. For Hamlet, as Oscar Wilde saw, the aesthetic is no mystification, but rather constitutes the only normative or moral element in consciousness" (*Shakespeare* 405). We could think that, realistically, Hamlet could have spies investigate and find out the truth about his father's death. Instead, he makes a play reveal the truth about how a suspect feels so as to acquire evidence of a crime. I interpret this as a homage to art and its power to evoke and represent sensations so as to achieve some kind of truth.

Bloom argues that "Hamlet is as critical as he is creative, as rational as he is intuitive. He does not listen to the voice of the god, but rather to his own voice, which both mediates and expands his own consciousness of self. If Hamlet perishes of the truth, such truth is barely external. Hamlet *is* the truth, insofar as any hero of consciousness can be" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 94). There is an epistemic issue in the play; Hamlet arranges the play to confirm that Claudius was the murderer because he *needs to know* the truth, just like he needs to know why he cannot be compelled to carry out revenge.

---

[64] Bloom provides a full rejection of an attempt to read *Hamlet* through the lenses of Freud's Oedipal complex in the chapter dedicated to the play in *The Western Canon* ("Freud: A Shakespearean Reading"). The core of the argument can be summarized thus: "Freud would not bother to notice it, but Shakespeare was careful to show that Prince Hamlet was a rather neglected child, at least by his father. Nowhere in the play does anyone, including Hamlet and the Ghost, tell us that the uxurious father loved the son. . . . Thus, when the Ghost urges Hamlet to revenge, it cries out, 'If thou didst ever thy dear father love–,' but says nothing about its own affection for the prince. Similarly Hamlet, in his first soliloquy, emphasizes the devotion between his father and mother while excluding their regard, if any, for him" (*The Western Canon* 378). Hamlet never shows a desire either to have had murdered his father or to have sex with his mother.

If Hamlet had political motivations (which is another thing that assumedly causes revulsion in him), he would not need a reason to kill Claudius rather than taking power. Hamlet has an epistemic need, but he aims to achieve epistemic truth *through play*. By doing this, he is, at the same time, proving that he is better than Claudius by outsmarting him and simultaneously achieving epistemic truth, i.e., he proves that Claudius is guilty so as to not falsely accuse him of a crime he did not commit. Play is an ultimate concern for Hamlet, and if it has this level of importance to him, we cannot expect that he aims to use it as mere diversion. In other words, he uses it to attain truth. Once he confirms that Claudius is a murderer and usurper, however, he does not bring him to justice. Instead, he forgets the guilt caused by his hesitation and mocks Claudius. Furthermore, acquiring that kind of knowledge is something possible. There is, however, a kind of knowledge that cannot be fully acquired: what is the cause of his hesitation? In other words, it is not possible to confirm that the cause of Hamlet's grief or hesitation is his consciousness as it is possible to confirm that Claudius was the murderer. Bloom suggests that "Hamlet discovers that his life has been a quest with no object except his own endlessly burgeoning subjectivity" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 96). Prompted by inwardness, Hamlet leaves the outward and pretentious world of ethics and re-enters his inward and genuinely aesthetic world. Bradley argues that the main interest in Shakespeare's tragedies resides in the hero's torn soul, which presents his inward struggle, his conflict *within* (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 18). At the same time that "the notion of tragedy as a conflict emphasises the fact that action is the centre of the story, . . . the concentration of interest . . . on the inward struggle emphasises the fact that this action is essentially the expression of character" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 19). Bradley also highlights that in "the circumstances where we see the hero placed, his tragic trait, which is also his greatness, is fatal to him" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 21). Hamlet's consciousness, a product of his inwardness, seems to be the reason for his ruin because supposedly, it is what prevents Hamlet from taking action against Claudius.

Hamlet continues to hesitate even after being convinced that Claudius had killed his father. When he meets Claudius praying, he says: "now I'll do't", but refrains: "and so a goes to heaven" (3.3.74). Hamlet refrains from stabbing Claudius because he would be killing him "in the purging of his soul, / When he is fit and seasoned for his passage" (3.3.85-86), and so he would not go to hell. According to Bradley, that "this again is an unconscious excuse for delay is now pretty

generally agreed" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 135). I deviate from Bradly here because of Hamlet's genuine suspicion of what happens after death:

> there's the rub,
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause. There's the respect
> That makes calamity of so long life (3.1.65-69)

The major purpose of this scene (3.3), it seems to me, is to reinforce the ambiguity: we cannot decide anymore whether Hamlet is just hesitating or is actually worried about the failure of revenge. Hamlet has no more reason to hesitate, but something keeps preventing him from taking action.

4.4. Negative Ambiguity: Chance as Hamlet's Cosmological View

Here, ambiguity has a negative connotation because it indicates the suffering that the vulnerabilities of human will can cause. In the *Merchant of Venice*, it is the opposite because the resulting ambiguity conceals the ugly truth. D. H. Lawrence claims that Hamlet is a "creeping, unclean thing" (122) and also that "the soliloquies of Hamlet are as deep as the soul of man can go, in one direction, and as sincere as the Holy Spirit itself in their essence" (134). This ambivalence, Bloom suggests, "is the essence of Hamlet's view of humankind" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 9). But Hamlet is part of humankind, and the ambivalence in him, as heightened as can be, is reflected, in practice, in his ambiguous behavior. Hamlet's antic disposition hinders a precise categorization of himself; in other words, the ambivalence in Hamlet is so heightened that almost every action on his part is ambiguous. Bloom adds: "Falstaff, master of theater, nevertheless is scarcely theatrical. Sir John need not play the part of Falstaff: he is neither a double man nor a counterfeit. Hamlet is a multiple man: who can count him? He *says* that he counterfeits madness, and I believe him, but how much else does he counterfeit?" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 56).

There is not much ambivalence in Falstaff. Consequently, there is not much ambiguity in him either. Falstaff almost always *is* the thieving and lying fat old knight. He does not *act*. Hamlet, on the other hand, never makes it clear if he is *acting* or *being* the shrewd melancholy prince. We can never be sure of how exactly Hamlet feels regarding the people and the events that surround him. We also see this in one of Ophelia's lines delivered when she is "mad": "They say the owl

was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be" (4.5.42-44). If we know what we may be, can we be sure of what we are? Again, this is not relativism. The assumption that we do not know what we are does not necessarily entail that we do not have a more or less solid and unchangeable nature or essence, even if we cannot fully acknowledge it.

Bloom argues that "Hamlet's explorations in consciousness turn upon the question 'What is man?' which in him is not an Oedipal concern. Perhaps it [consciousness] is the invention of ambivalence, as we have come to know it" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 146). As discussed before, Hamlet's image of the mole suggests ambivalence; it is the cause of both glory and ruin, joy and grief. The best candidate for the mole, in *Hamlet*, is his consciousness because it both provides him a comprehensive understanding of reality and grief. This is why Bloom claims that Hamlet's consciousness is the invention of ambivalence – not because it did not exist before but because of the scope and comprehensiveness with which it is emphasized. Furthermore, "Shakespeare created him to be as ambivalent and divided a consciousness as a coherent drama could sustain" (*Shakespeare* 387). Hamlet's highly ambivalent self, as mentioned, operates through his ambiguous behavior. Let us take, for instance, his relationship with Ophelia. In 2.1, she describes his strange behavior when being with her:

> He took me by the wrist, and held me hard;
> Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
> And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
> He falls to such perusal of my face
> As a[65] would draw it. Long stayed he so;
> At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
> And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
> He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
> As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
> And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
> And with his head over his shoulder turned
> He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
> For out-a-doors he went without their helps
> And to the last bended their light on me. (2.1.85-98)

[65] "he".

In 3.1, he says that he loved and did not love Ophelia at practically the same moment: "I did love you once" (3.1.114); "I loved you not" (3.1.117). Hamlet seems to be putting on a show to Claudius and Polonius, who are observing the exchange between the couple. He is deliberately being contradictory to trick them into believing he is mad. We can never with certainty take what he says, in the presence of others, as his genuine opinion. Nonetheless, Ophelia confesses: "I was the more deceived" (3.1.118). Hamlet never seemed to have nurtured lust for Ophelia, and apparently never really loved her as well, but we can never be sure.

Along with Hamlet's deliberate refusal to kill Claudius in 3.3, in 3.4, there is also a reinforcement of ambiguity. The Ghost's existence can be questioned since Gertrude cannot see it. The best assumption here is that, for the moment only, the Ghost is a figment of Hamlet's imagination in the heat of the moment, similar to the appearance of Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth*. For the Ghost to be an exclusive image of Hamlet's mind, we would have to assume that Horatio, Barnardo, and Marcellus are also images of Hamlet's brain as well, since they also see the Ghost. Barnardo and Marcellus only talk among themselves, of course, besides Hamlet. Horatio, on the other hand, shows up twice in scenes in which Hamlet is not present, but these two appearances are somewhat vague. Bloom even mentions that though "without visible means of support, and without either status or function at the Court of Elsinore, Horatio is omnipresent" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 13). Is Horatio some kind of spirit? Regarding Horatio, Bloom concludes: "Horatio seems to be there to represent the audience's love for Hamlet. Horatio is our bridge to the beyond, to that curious but unmistakable negative transcendence that concludes the tragedy" (*Shakespeare* 423). Understanding Marcellus, Barnardo, and Horatio as images of Hamlet's brain would not be very fruitful because, as I have argued, the Ghost is also supposed to be ambiguous.

Another ambiguous situation for Hamlet is Polonius' death. He seems to feel guilty about it since Gertrude says that he "weeps for what is done" (4.1.27), but in the very next scene he is mocking his death (4.2.17-23). Another instance of ambiguity involves his irresolution: "His notorious hesitations at hacking down Claudius stem partly from the sheer magnitude of his consciousness, but they may also indicate a realistic doubt as to his paternity" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 8). There is a possibility that Claudius might be Hamlet's father.

Hamlet's consciousness is responsible for insights like these: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world,

the paragon of animals – and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (2.2.286-92). This is said to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern after his grief is mentioned. In his *Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker emphasizes this very gap, the heavenly nobility of faculties of the mind held back by an earthly animal condition:

> the essence of man is really his *paradoxical* nature, the fact that he is half animal and half symbolic . . . This is the paradox: he is out of nature and hopelessly in it; he is dual, up in the stars and yet housed in a heart-pumping, breath-gasping body that once belonged to a fish and still carries the gill-marks to prove it. His body is a material fleshy casing that is alien to him in many ways . . . Man is literally split in two: he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever. (26-27)

In the play, there are 56 entries for "heaven" (with variations) and one entry for "skyish". There are 25 entries for "earth" (with variations), 11 for "ground" (with variations) and 11 for "hell" (with variations). I am considering no pragmatic distinction in the dichotomy "heaven and earth" or "heaven and hell", between earth and hell. The earthly is hellish to Hamlet since flesh is a natural inheritor of pain and we are all sinners.

Another instance of the pervading ambiguity of the play is the indefiniteness between heaven and earth, emphasized in the graveyard scene (5.1). The gravedigger is digging up the earth, that is, going on with his *earthly* business, while Hamlet is looking up to the skies, searching for an explanation for his hesitation. The gravedigger is a character that clearly represents the earthly condition of mankind. It is reasonable to assume that Hamlet, being a member of royalty and nobility, would not get along with the gravedigger, but the gravedigger and Horatio are the only two character he gets along with – "How absolute the knave is!" (5.1.115). Is Hamlet's distaste for the uses of world related to his distaste for (most) people? According to Bloom, "Hamlet palpably does not need or want . . . anyone's love" (*Shakespeare* 722). If we consider that Horatio subtly displays heavenly features, this is also a strong reminder of Hamlet's heightened ambivalence, since the only two characters in the play with whom he gets along with are Horatio and the gravedigger. Ambivalence is a condition intrinsic to human nature. We cannot rationally take hold of an exclusive aspect of our condition, i.e., we cannot be fully in control of our selves

so as to decide if have surpassed our animal status. Portia, when she devises her cosmological view, seems to know this very well.

As Bradley observers, Hamlet is cosmologically divided. There is "kind of religious resignation which . . . deserves the name of fatalism rather than that of faith in Providence, because it is not united to any determination to do what is believed to be the will of Providence" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 145). Can we fix, after all, what kind of force or entity is operating in *Hamlet*? Regardless of the name we give to that major power or the belief in such a power, be it fatalism or providence, the most important aspect of it is uncontrollability. Bradley argues that the effect of such force "is to strengthen in the spectator the feeling that, whatever may become of Hamlet, and whether he wills it or not, his task will surely be accomplished, because it is the purpose of a power against which both he and his enemy are impotent, and which makes of them the instruments of its own will" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 173). I reiterate here Lawlor's words about the crucial feature of Shakespearean tragedy, which is "a reality that . . . asserts itself while remaining mysterious in its whole nature and scope". I would call that reality uncontrollability. In a tragic character like Hamlet, the understanding of reality causes bewilderment according to Bradley:

> '*Why*,' he asks himself in genuine bewilderment, 'do I linger? Can the cause be cowardice? Can it be sloth? Can it be thinking too precisely of the event? And does *that* again mean cowardice? What is it that makes me sit idle when I feel it is shameful to do so . . . ?' . . . A man irresolute merely because he was considering a proposed action too minutely would not feel this bewilderment. (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 126)

All the traits aforementioned are characteristics *stamped* on him, and Hamlet cannot free himself of them. In short the most relevant aspect here is uncontrollability. This is what makes him bewildered. Bradley adds that

> the psychological point of view is not equivalent to the tragic; and, having once given its due weight to the fact of Hamlet's melancholy, we may freely admit, or rather may be anxious to insist, that this pathological condition would excite but little, if any, tragic interest . . . [The] connection between . . . genius and Hamlet's failure . . . gives to his story its peculiar fascination and makes it appear . . . as the symbol of a tragic mystery inherent in human nature. (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 127)

Indeed, the tragic cannot be reduced to psychological features. What configures the tragic, as I have been insisting, is the unacceptance of the structure of reality. *It* only *seems* that melancholy is the consequence of Hamlet's consciousness and consequent unacceptance. What makes a character tragic is the unacceptance of such uncontrollability, the structure of reality itself and the subsequent destruction of any sort of disguise that conceals it. Comic characters, on the other hand, accept the structure of reality by concealing it somehow. We do not see, for instance, the sense of bewilderment in Falstaff. According to Bloom, there is only one

> Shakespearean rival to Hamlet in comprehensiveness of consciousness and keenness of intellect: Sir John Falstaff. Clearly Falstaff *had* once looked truly into the essence of things [referring to Nietzsche's Dionysian man], long before we ever meet him. The veteran warrior saw through warfare and threw away its honor and glory as pernicious illusions, and gave himself instead to the order of play. Unlike Hamlet, Falstaff gained knowledge without paying in nausea, and knowledge in Falstaff does not inhibit action but thrusts action aside as an irrelevancy to the timeless world of play. (*Shakespeare* 394)

Furthermore, the "idea of *play* is as central to Falstaff as the idea of *the play* is to Hamlet. These are not the same idea: Falstaff is infinitely more playful than Hamlet, and the prince is far more theatrical than the fat knight" (*Shakespeare* 401). Additionally, "unlike Falstaff, Hamlet is not a rebel against the idea of time and the idea of order. Falstaff is happy in his consciousness, of himself and of reality; Hamlet is unhappy in those same relations" (*Shakespeare* 403). While seemingly contradictory at first, this claim makes perfect sense. Hamlet is unhappy with reality but does not rebel against it. Falstaff, on the other hand, is happy with reality because he simultaneously acknowledges and ignores it. This is why Falstaff is not a fool of time: he does not rebel against it; he simply ignores it because the order of time does not matter to him, only the order of play. Bloom continues: "Categorizing Hamlet is virtually impossible; Falstaff, who pragmatically is as intelligent, identifies himself with the freedom of wit, with play. One aspect of Hamlet is free, and entertains itself with bitter wit and bitterly intended play, but other aspects are bound, and we cannot find the balance" (*Shakespeare* 406). Additionally, "Falstaff is *homo ludens,* while anxiety dominates in Hamlet's realm. . . . his theatricality is dangerously nihilistic because it is so paradoxically *natural* to him. . . . Hamlet is a walking mousetrap, embodying the anxious expectations that are incarnating the malaise of Elsinore" (*Shakespeare* 424). Where, then, resides the major difference between them? Perhaps, the sentence that best defines Falstaff is this one,

from *The First Part of Henry IV*: "Give me life" (*1H4* 5.3.56). Hamlet, on the other hand, is defined by what Bradley calls a "morbid state" (117). The major difference between them, as I have been insisting, resides in acceptance; the difference resides in whether or not the character accepts reality as it is.

In the play Hamlet devises to entrap Claudius, *The Mousetrap*, the Player King exposes what we think is Hamlet's first cosmological view, which involves chance – the second one, presented in act five, involves providence. We cannot assume with certainty that the lines in the Player King's speech were written by Hamlet, but his lines are the central cosmological view of the play. If a cause to Hamlet's grief can be identified, as I have been suggesting, it is probably related to the unacceptance of the structure of reality, of which he is sharply aware because of his sophisticated consciousness. Hamlet's speech in 3.1 suggests religious faith, which would create a tendency toward a belief in providence, which is necessarily opposed to randomness. Bloom explains: "With a cunning subtler than any other dramatist's, before or since, Shakespeare does not let us be certain as to just which lines Hamlet himself has inserted in order to revise *The Murder of Gonzago* into *The Mousetrap*. Hamlet speaks of writing some twelve or sixteen lines, but we come to suspect that there are rather more" (*Shakespeare* 424). The speech of the Player King follows:

> What to ourselves in passion we propose,
> The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.
> The violence of either grief or joy
> Their own enactures with themselves destroy. (3.2.175-78)

We promise ourselves we must do certain things because we are momentarily taken by passion, but such passions are temporary. The Player King's goes on:

> Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament;
> Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.
> This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange'
> That even our loves should with our fortunes change,
> For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,
> Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love. (3.2.179-84)

Joy may become grief and vice-versa, i.e., "our loves should with our fortunes change". The question that remains to be answered is "Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love." Bloom

argues that the "Player King tells us that ethos is not the daemon, that character is not fate but accident, and that eros is the purest accident" (*Shakespeare* 424). In my view, rather, the Player King equals accident and fate. The only thing that is certain is uncertainty and uncontrollability; therefore, accident is fate. Lucrece, in one of the epigraphs, calls this "opportunity". In her cosmological view, however, chance has an exclusively negative tendency since honey turns to gall and joy to grief. Hamlet's view is more encompassing because grief joys and joy grieves.

> But orderly to end where I begun,
> Our wills and fates do so contrary run
> That our devices still are overthrown;
> Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own. (3.2.191-94)

Our wills and fates never match; that is, what we wish for may never happen. This is why our devices are overthrown, or our plans never work out. Besides not controlling how we feel – since "Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident" – we also do not control the consequences of our thoughts or desires.

Bloom questions: "Do all of us will against our own characters/fates, so that our designs always are thwarted? If character is fate, so that there are no accidents, then our desires do not matter" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 48), but are not our characters accidents in themselves? In other words, are not our characters the product of an uncontrollable process? As the Player King says, we do not know if fortune leads love or love, fortune. Bloom continues:

> Freud thought it was all over before our first birthday; Hamlet seems to give us even less freedom from overdetermination. If everything that ever will happen to you is only a mirror of your own character, then holding the mirror up to nature becomes rather a dark activity: all of us are the fools of time, victims of an unfolding we cannot affect. I do not think that this . . . vision . . . will . . . be Hamlet's, in Act V. (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 48-49)

Slightly deviating from Bloom, I suggest that the providence Hamlet comes up with in act five might be the very chance of act three, understood as a form of order. In Hamlet's "providence", the inner workings of the natural order of reality are chaotic. One thing that is important to mention again is that Hamlet's perception of reality and the cosmological view that ensues from his perception are pragmatic, i.e., aesthetic, and *not* religious, as Bradley argues.

In the end, the indefiniteness of Hamlet's view of reality is just another way to reinforce of ambiguity. "One of our many perplexities with Hamlet is that we never can be sure when he is

acting Hamlet, with or without an antic disposition" (*Shakespeare* 402). Bloom also notices the intended ambiguity: "Hamlet's own poetic metaphysic, as we have seen, is that character and fate are antithetical, and yet, at the play's conclusion, we are likely to believe that the prince's character was his fate. Do we have a drama of the personality's freedom, or of the character's fate? The Player King says that all is accident; Hamlet in Act V hints that there are no accidents. Whom are we to believe?" (*Shakespeare* 428). We can never be sure when he is acting because of his ambiguous behavior – prompted, of course, by his highly ambivalent self; but if we cannot be sure when he is acting, can we be sure that the cosmological view of chance is Hamlet's actual view of reality?

To support my argument that chaos could be understood as a form of order, I present two elements. First, contrary to Bloom's claims that chance has dark connotations since it implies that "all of us are the fools of time, victims of an unfolding we cannot affect", chance needs not be always negative. Richmond Lattimore states: "*tychē*, which in Greek does not mean 'fate,' 'chance,' or 'fortune' so strictly as it means 'contact,' or, say, 'coincidence,' the way things are put together" (*The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* 88). The main idea of chance, which makes it closer to *tyche*, would be randomness, which does not have a necessarily negative connotation. Additionally, Leo Salingar explains: "The primary scope of meaning of *tyche*, fortune, in Greek has been explained as the way things 'hit' or turn out, where there is no evident reason; and the connotations of the word were neutral or favourable at first" (129). An example in Shakespeare is in *Twelfth Night*,[66] when it is implied that, by chance, Sebastian, Viola's brother, might have survived shipwreck:

[66] The play is set in Illyria, which nowadays corresponds to the region of Croatia. The plotline follows twin sister and brother Viola and Sebastian, who are shipwrecked during a violent storm. Sebastian disappears and is supposed dead, while Viola disguises herself as a man and looks for employment at Orsino's court. Orsino spends most of his time painting and unsuccessfully wooing for Olivia, and employs Viola, disguised as Cesario, to help him woo her. Olivia's house is occupied by two opposing forces, Sir Toby Belch, and her head of household, Malvolio. Toby, along with his friends, Sir Andrew, Maria, Fabian, and Feste seek to party constantly and often lock horns with Malvolio, who would nothing better than to throw the lot out and keep a polished order in his mistress' house. Orsino sees "Cesario" as a trusted friend, while Olivia falls in love with "him". Matters are further complicated when Sebastian turns up alive with the help of a criminal named Antonio. Sebastian and Antonio venture further into Illyria and are separated, while Viola is mistaken for Sebastian and vice-versa and Antonio is captured. Sir Toby seeks to marry Sir Andrew to Olivia and get rid of Malvolio in the same process, and so he plots to have Malvolio find a group of letters that Olivia supposedly has written professing her love for him. Malvolio is later jailed by Olivia for what appears to be lunatic behavior. Later, seeing that Cesario is being favored by Olivia, Toby forces Sir Andrew to have a duel with Cesario. Sebastian arrives on the scene and becomes mixed up with the duel and Olivia, takes matters in her own hands, and promptly marries him, thinking that he is Cesario. The culmination of all these mistaken identities, deceptive plots, and physical bashings end as the true identities of Sebastian and Viola are revealed. Though Malvolio is badly treated, the play ends happily as Viola and Orsino come together and Sebastian and Olivia are reunited.

CAPTAIN It is perchance that you yourself were saved.

VIOLA O my poor brother! And so perchance may he be.

CAPTAIN True, madam, and to comfort you with chance. (*TN* 1.2.5-7)

Second, contrary to the assumption – also suggested by Bloom – that will (which entails indetermination) and fate (which entails predetermination) are incompatible, I argue that the two could be theoretically understood as the same, although the pragmatic result is ambiguous. In the cosmological view of the Player King, as already discussed, our "wills and fates do . . . contrary run", which means that what actually happens to us is often contrary to what we would want to happen to us, but if our wills and fates are incompatible, why cannot we shape our will so that they become compatible? The key lines of the speech are these: "'tis a question left us yet to prove, / Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love". What determines our love or will? Do our minds have the capacity to, if not determine, at least influence how we feel? Or is there some kind of uncontrollable force outside of our bodies (either social or religious) that determines how we feel, preventing us from taking control? Is it witchcraft that controls our feelings, as is suggested by the Ghost? Or is such a force *inside* us? There is no way of answering this question scientifically, which is why ambiguity is the central trope here. As mentioned previously, Bradley suggests that Hamlet is divided between providence and fatalism, but there does not seem to be a pragmatic difference between the two. Both refer to an idea of a predetermined order, so that the result is not under our control. Indetermination, at first, exists in contrast to predetermination. Indetermination either branches into autonomous determination (one decides what one feels) or random determination (one does not decide what one feels). It is in the possibility of random determination – which I call chance – that pretermination and indetermination become the same. There might be a theoretical difference between providence and fatalism: providence, to Augustine, means divine intervention, which, in turn, entails ordered predictability, in direct opposition to the randomness of chance.[67] Chance is related to fatalism in the sense of relinquishment. For instance, when Jocasta, in the passage used as one of the epigraphs, says that we should not be afraid because we cannot predict the future (which would be the case of providence), Jocasta is relinquishing to chance, as Greene explains: "Since there is no sure knowledge of the future and *Tyche* rules, argues Iocasta, 'tis best to live at random" (143). Pragmatically, however, both are the same because they

[67] Cf. *On Free Choice of the Will*.

both involve acceptance of uncontrollable influence. Therefore, Hamlet's cosmological view seemingly changes from chance to providence, but does that configure actual change?

The notion of providence seems to have resided within Hamlet's view alongside that of chance, which is relevant because his view weakens the possibility of change. Before act five, we already see him expressing an idea of providence, however careful we should be considering he might be feigning. We see this at the death of Polonius: "heaven hath pleased it so, / To punish me with this, and this with me, / That I must be their scourge and minister" (3.4.173-76); and at Hamlet's farewell to Denmark:

HAMLET For England?

CLAUDIUS Ay Hamlet.

HAMLET Good.

CLAUDIUS So is it if thou knew'st our purposes.

HAMLET I see a cherub that sees them. But come, for England! (4.3.44-45)

Finally, in act five, after his supposed change, Hamlet tells Horatio that there is "a divinity that shapes our ends" (5.2.10) and, later on, that there is "special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (5.2.192-93).

4.5. Change and Transcendence

I reiterate my argument that Hamlet's problem is structural, i.e., the corruption that affects him (and it is reasonable to think that it is the cause of his grief) is not political or sexual; it is of human nature: "I think we may discount any notion that the double shock of his father's sudden death and his mother's remarriage has brought about a radical change in him. Hamlet always has had nothing in common with his father, his mother, and his uncle. He is a kind of changeling, nurtured by Yorick, yet fathered by himself, an actor playwright from the start" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 9). Bloom goes on: "The malaise that haunts Elsinore is not the unrevenged regicide, or the other corruptions of the shuffling Claudius, but the negative power of Hamlet's consciousness" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 134). Hamlet is aware of the "naturally corrupted state" – which resembles Christianity, but is still secular – of human nature, which is why the malaise can also be understood as Hamlet's consciousness, i.e., it only takes form through Hamlet's consciousness. Grief, to Hamlet, is not appearance:

Seems madam? nay it is, I know not seems.

> ‘Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play,
> But I have that within which passes show. (1.2.76-85)

As discussed, Claudius and Gertrude assume that the cause of Hamlet’s grief is his father’s death. It might have been a trigger, but Hamlet’s grief, which is genuine, seems to have deeper roots than the death of his father. If Freud is right, as he argues in “Mourning and Melancholia” Hamlet’s mourning has passed its normal stage so as to become melancholy, i.e., melancholy is a prolonged and unjustified grief. Still, the cause of his grief cannot be identified. Gertrude’s lust and Claudius’ ambition might have been specific triggers to his grief, but Hamlet seemed to have always been disgusted by both sexual lust and political ambition. His grief cannot be surpassed like the grief of mourning. It is reasonable to assume that his grief is directed toward the structure of reality itself since all the uses of reality seem, in his own words, weary, stale, flat and unprofitable. It seems that the cause of Hamlet’s melancholy is his disgust with the sexual lust of his mother and the lust for power of his uncle and the impossibility of controlling such lust because of the vulnerabilities and fluctuations of the human will. In the end, lust and ambition are elements of human nature that seem to be in direct opposition to play, which is what gives Hamlet joy.

Sexual lust and lust for power are elements inherent to human nature, which means they cannot be eliminated. That is to say that human nature cannot be changed, but can Hamlet change himself so as to tolerate these elements? According to Bradley, Hamlet seems to have changed in act five: “the Hamlet of the Fifth Act shows a kind of sad or indifferent self-abandonment, as if he secretly despaired of forcing himself to action, and were ready to leave his duty to some other power than his own. *This* is really the main change which appears in him after his return to Denmark” (*Shakespearean Tragedy 144*-45). If Hamlet has come back from his overseas travel indeed changed, the major evidence would be an alteration in his grief. Bloom argues that we “do not know whether the mysterious movement from Act IV to Act V of Hamlet constituted

Shakespeare's farewell to his own youth, but it certainly was a farewell to the Hamlet of his youth. . . . Nothing of Hamlet's 'antic disposition' lingers after the graveyard scene" (*Shakespeare* 390). Moreover, "Hamlet's skepticism . . . passes into something very rich and strange in Act V, something for which we have no name" (*Shakespeare* 391). The "Hamlet of Act V has stopped playing; he has aged a decade in a brief return from the sea, and if his self-consciousness is still theatrical, it ensues in a different kind of theater, eerily transcendental and sublime, one in which the abyss between *playing* someone and *being* someone has been bridged" (*Shakespeare* 411). Furthermore, he "is neither funny nor melancholy in Act V" (*Shakespeare* 411). Finally, "his mourning . . . initially centers upon the dead father and the fallen-away mother, but by Act V the center of grief is everywhere, and the circumference nowhere, or infinite. . . . though an absolutely revisionary consciousness, he seems, throughout Act V, to be carried on a flood tide of disinterestedness or quietism" (*Shakespeare* 413). By act five, Hamlet has not lost his grief; it has, in fact, expanded. Does this configure change? Bloom states: "The Hamlet of Act V appears to have cured himself, and affirms that the readiness or willingness is all. I interpret that as meaning personality is all, once personality has purged itself into a second birth" (*Shakespeare* 428). Hamlet might have purged himself from grief, but does this configure change in his nature? If a second birth of personality, as Bloom argues, is a purging of the original one, it is therefore not a change in the nature of character.

The sense of change, in the sense Bloom suggests, apparently prompted by Hamlet's cosmological view, seems to be in the sense of sonnet 123:

> No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change.
> Thy pyramids built up with newer might
> To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
> They are but dressings of a former sight. (*123*)

Grief joying and joy grieving (along the passage of time) on slender accident configure a *superficial* form of change, as it is referred to in the sonnet. These kind of changes "are but dressings of a former sight", in which there is no strangeness of novelty. Does Hamlet change? A change in the nature of characte – if such change is possible – would, in my view, demand a deep psychological effect. Macbeth, as I will explain in the final chapter, undergoes such a change, the only character I am aware of in Shakespeare that does so. No other character demonstrates a

significant change in behavior like Macbeth. Timon, for instance, does not change since his pessimism is just sparked by his downfall.

Bloom, on the other hand, argues that the matured Hamlet takes us "to the process of self-revision, to change by self-overhearing and then by the will to change. . . . The great *topos*, or commonplace, in Shakespeare is change: his prime villains, from Richard III on to Iago, Edmund, and Macbeth, all suffer astonishing changes before their careers are ended" (*Shakespeare* 411). Let us discuss Edmund for a moment. What do we know with relative certainty about him? He resents being humiliated for being a bastard. He cannot love neither his family or his lovers (this absence of familial love has nothing do to with his resentment, as I will explain regarding Cordelia and Lear, in the next chapter, to whom pride has nothing to do with love); and he is a great manipulator. Based on these features, can we really say that Edmund has a significant *change of nature* at the end of the play? Perhaps his resentment triggered a vengeful drive, which, conjoined with his inability to love and his manipulative skills, helped unravel the plot of *King Lear*. His sudden change of heart at the end shows just that he was very resentful and was not a complete psychopath, since he has apparently always had, however slender, a sense of guilt.

I question change in Edmund not because it is not realistic, but because it does not seem to be a change in nature. Hamlet's contingent notion of change, i.e., guided by chance, is more like the sense of Portia's fancy. Joy grieving, and grief joying, does not seem to configure change in nature in my view. This is, as Bloom insists, the kind of change that ensues from self-overhearing. Despite Bloom's insistence in change as Shakespeare's typical *topos*, I would argue that change is a nature-altering process that should be reserved for more radical situations, like that of Macbeth's. What we see in Hamlet, however, we might insist that it could be called change or maturation, is a process of coming to terms with oneself, a shaping or taking form of something without shape or form that is already there. In the case of Macbeth, we have a new element present that actually changes his nature and, consequently, his character.

Bloom also claims both that the "final form of change is death" (*Shakespeare* 414) and that Hamlet becomes aware "that the corruption is within him as much as in the state of Denmark" (*Shakespeare* 416). If it is the structure of human nature – of which he is part of – that causes Hamlet to grieve, it is reasonable to assume that, if he is looking to overcome his grief, he is also looking to transcend the human condition. This kind of transcendence, however, can only be achieved through death. Bloom also argues that: "Perhaps there is an undersong in *Hamlet*: . . . the

play's prolonged meditation upon death, with the acceptance, pragmatic and nihilistic, of annihilation" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 141). Hamlet anticipates Claudius's every move. He knew he was going to be sent to England beforehand:

> I must to England, you know that?
>
> . . .
>
> [There's letters sealed, and my two schoolfellows,
> Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,
> They bear the mandate. They must sweep my way
> And marshal me to knavery. Let it work,
> For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
> Hoist with his own petar, an't shall go hard
> But I will delve one yard below their mines
> And blow them at the moon. Oh 'tis most sweet
> When in one line two crafts directly meet.] (3.4.213-11)

This implies that he at least had a hunch of what was supposed to happen to him if he returned to Denmark after the attempted murder on him. Knowing that Claudius wanted him dead, why would Hamlet go back to Elsinore, knowing that his life was in danger? Has Hamlet become suicidal by act five? This is reminiscent of Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, who was also grieving. Antonio never lets it become obvious that he wanted to die, although he is not very subtle about it. Hamlet's suicidal return to Elsinore, if true, is much more subtle.

As already mentioned, Bloom argues that Hamlet

> transcends his play. Transcendence is a difficult notion for most of us, particularly when it refers to a wholly secular context, such as a Shakespearean drama. Something in and about Hamlet strikes us as demanding (and providing) evidence from some sphere beyond the scope of our senses. Hamlet's desires, his ideals or aspirations, are almost absurdly out of joint with the rancid atmosphere of Elsinore. 'Shuffle,' to Hamlet, is a verb for thrusting off 'this mortal coil,' where 'coil' means 'noise' or 'tumult.' (*Shakespeare* 386).

I slightly deviate from Bloom in regard to the scope or kind of transcendence Hamlet is looking for. Hamlet, in my view, is not looking for metaphysical or divine ascension, such as the one Oedipus achieves at the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*. This kind of transcendence is not in a metaphysical realm, i.e., in a sphere beyond the scope of our senses. The transcendence Hamlet

yearns for is the freedom from the pain inherent in human nature, which is a physical impossibility. The only possible way to transcend pain is though death, even if one cannot be sure if pain exists in the undiscovered country. It is relevant to remember that Elsinore is a metonym for the world. If Hamlet is out of joint with Elsinore, he is out of joint with the world, and consequently with reality. "Mortal coil" has a derogatory connotation, much like the "sound and fury" in *Macbeth*. As explained previously, Hamlet has an aversion toward the "mortal coil" that is inherent to language and, consequently, to reality. Santos suggests that Hamlet had pretended to be mad to avoid the pain of knowing the truth about the sexual and murderous reality that causes him pain (200), but the only way to eschew the pain of life is through transcendence of the human flesh, to which lust is inherent; and the ultimate form of change is death. Hamlet wants to achieve transcendence because he does not accept reality as it is. Gertrude's lust, as I explained, is an instance of the reality he does not accept. What Hamlet does in 3.4, the scene with his mother, is to complain that her lust causes him pain. What he seems to realize in act five is not that Gertrude should have a carefree sexual life – he calls her "wretched queen" (5.2.312) – but that the only way to end structural pain, i.e., in his own words, the thousand natural shocks that flesh inherits, is through death.

Bloom also claims that Hamlet's death is "the price of his apotheosis as an intellectual consciousness" (*Shakespeare* 389). Additionally, "Falstaff's comic genius at once turns the joke upon himself, yet also transcends that turning . . . Falstaff's sheer joy is countered by Hamlet's uncanny gallows humor . . . In Falstaff's wit we hear the injunction 'It must give pleasure,' but in Hamlet's we hear 'It must change, and there is only one final form of change'" (*Shakespeare* 395). Falstaff's comic genius naturally transcends him; he needs not look for transcendence because he is not a fool of time. Hamlet, however, is a fool of time. Hamlet looks for transcendence because he does not accept reality as it is, while Falstaff does. If Hamlet does not accept reality as it is, it is reasonable to assume that he would want to change it, but the only final form of change is death. Bloom continues: "'To be or not to be' . . . is the center of Hamlet, at once everything and nothing, a fullness and an emptiness playing off against each other. It is the foundation for nearly everything he will say in Act V, and can be called his death-speech-in-advance, the prolepsis of his transcendence" (*Shakespeare* 409). Bloom also argues that "the play ends with a highly original, quite secular point-of-epiphany, as a transcendental splendor seems to break outward from the eminence up to which the soldiers carry Hamlet's body" (*Shakespeare* 392). Moreover, "his death

scene . . . [is a] revisionary release . . . experienced by the audience as a transcendental music, with Horatio invoking angelic song-and Fortinbras the rites of war" (*Shakespeare* 411-12). We see Hamlet's transcendence through death suggested in the Stratford Festival production of *Hamlet*, from 2016, directed by Antoni Cimolino and Shelagh O'Brien. In the production, while Hamlet's body is being carried, a light is cast upon it from the ground. When all the actors leave the stage, a tomb (represented by a trapdoor in the stage) opens and the same light is cast upwards.

4.6. Removing the Concealment of the Rottenness of Denmark

Bloom argues that Hamlet "needs us to give honor and meaning to his death. His story must be told, and not just to Fortinbras, and it must be reported by Horatio, who alone knows it truly. Does Horatio then understand what we do not? . . . The story can only be told by someone who accepts Hamlet totally, beyond judgment . . . we worship (in a secular way) this all-but-infinite consciousness" (*Shakespeare* 421). Additionally:

> "Let be" has become Hamlet's refrain, and has a quietistic force uncanny in its suggestiveness. He will not unpack his heart with words since only his thoughts, not their ends, are his own. And yet there is something far from dead in his heart, something ready or willing, strong beyond the weakness of flesh. . . . For Hamlet there is nothing but . . . a confidence in a final consciousness. That consciousness sets aside both Jesus's Pharisaic trust in the resurrection of the body, and also the skeptical reality principle of annihilation. "Let be" is a setting aside, neither denial nor affirmation. What Hamlet could tell us is his achieved awareness of what he himself represents, a dramatist's apprehension of what it means to incarnate the tragedy one cannot compose (*Shakespear*e 422).

His consciousness, by act five, sets aside both resurrection and annihilation, both denial and affirmation. Avoiding both faith and doubt, Hamlet, a dramatist, as an individual self, a distinct and pragmatic consciousness, incarnates drama itself. His consciousness cannot be separated from the pragmatism of theatricality. Hamlet's consciousness is the epitome of a pragmatic consciousness, and is hardly Oedipal. Recent critics, such as Marjorie Garber, insist on the use of Freudian concepts as tools for reading *Hamlet*.[68] Bloom rejects Freud's reading of the play:

> The Freudian analogies between the two tragedies [*Oedipus King* and *Hamlet*] represent strong misreadings and cannot be sustained by an analysis that evades Freud's

[68] Cf. "Hamlet: Giving Up the Ghost" in *Profiling Shakespeare* (2008).

> overvaluation of what he called the Oedipus complex. A Hamlet complex is a very rich affair, since there is no more intelligent character in all of Western literature. The Oedipus of Sophocles may have a Hamlet complex (which I define as thinking not too much but much too well), yet the Hamlet of the man from Stratford most definitely does not have an Oedipus complex. (*The Wester Canon* 377)

Blooms adds: "Hamlet's universalism seems our largest clue to the enigma of his personality . . . His blocked affections, diagnosed by Dr. Freud as Oedipal, actually reflect a transcendental quietism for which, happily, we lack a label" (*Shakespeare* 422). The issue of Hamlet's personality, the Hamlet complex, as Blooms puts it, is related to transcendence, for which Bloom provides his take:

> Clearly, Hamlet's sublimity is a question of personality; four centuries have so understood it. . . . What, after all, is personality? A dictionary would say the quality that renders one a person, not a thing or an animal, or else an assemblage of characteristics that makes one somehow distinctive. That is not very helpful, particularly in regard to Hamlet or Falstaff, mere roles for actors, as formalists tell us . . . I submit that we know better what it is we mean when we speak of the personality of Hamlet as opposed to the personality of our best friend, or the personality of some favorite celebrity. . . . Like Falstaff, Hamlet implicitly defines personality as a mode of freedom, more of a matrix of freedom than a product of freedom. Falstaff, though, . . . is largely free of the censorious superego, while Hamlet in the first four acts suffers very terribly from it. In the beautiful metamorphosis of purgation that is Act V, Hamlet almost is freed from what is over or above the ego, though at the price of dying well before his death. (*Shakespeare* 422-23)

I deviate from Bloom in regard to the definition of personality. If personality is freedom, as he claims, such freedom is bound to make one with a singular personality distinctive, as the dictionary definition suggests. The dictionary definition, however, ceases being helpful when classifying a celebrity or a politician as a personality because of fame. Bloom continues:

> Hamlet has ceased to mourn in the interval between Acts IV and V. The profoundest mysteries of his personality are involved in the nature of his universal mourning, and in his self-cure. Hamlet's spiritual despair transcends a father's murder, a mother's hasty remarriage, and all the miasma of Elsinore's corruption . . . The crucial question becomes, How ought we to characterize Hamlet's melancholia in the first four acts, and how do we

> explain his escape from it into a high place in Act V, a place at last entirely his own, and something like a radically new mode of secular transcendence? . . . Hamlet . . . returns disinterested, or nihilistic, or quietistic, whichever you may prefer. But he dies with great concern for his wounded name, as if reentering the maelstrom of Elsinore partly undoes his great change. But only in part: the transcendental music of cognition rises up again in a celebratory strain at the close of Hamlet's tragedy, achieving the secular triumph of 'The rest is silence.' What is not at rest, or what abides before the silence, is the idiosyncratic value of Hamlet's personality, for which another term is "the canonical sublime." (*Shakespear*e 429-31)

Hamlet apparently achieves, even if partially, a sort of primary transcendence in his disinterested quietism, which seems to have replaced his initial grief, but Hamlet is not allowed to "enjoy" his recently acquired peace. Bloom also notes that "it is remarkable that Hamlet will not kill Claudius until he knows that he himself is dying" (*Shakespeare* 419). That he finally became conscientious and finally decided to fulfill his duty of revenge is unlikely. Why does Hamlet finally attack Claudius? Is he simply acting in self-defense? Perhaps Hamlet would never have assaulted Claudius if he had been left alone. Hamlet's transcendence is transcendence from the flesh, not transcendence into a sort of ethereal realm. Hamlet is looking for transcendence from the natural state of humanity, which to him is stained, corrupted. Hamlet searches for transcendence from lust, both sexual and political, but that is not a possibility, and he seems to realize that by act five. The only way to achieve such transcendence is through transcendence from physical flesh, since it is inherently lustful. I am not sure if Hamlet is suicidal or not, but if he is not, what explains his return to Elsinore? Could it be that his newly achieved mental state had come at the price of some naïveté? Would "Let be" have worked if Claudius did not want Hamlet dead? Hamlet never posed a threat to Claudius, and Claudius is even less endangered by act five. Is there any suggestion here that is Hamlet's transcendental quietism is not to be allowed by human nature?

The outward world of *Hamlet* (represented by the Ghost) says that it is witchcraft that rules reality. The inward world of Hamlet says, at first, that it is chance that rules human will and later, providence. After all what is the one entity or force that controls human will? Witchcraft, chance, or providence? Can chance and providence be understood as the same thing? Can we find a definitive cosmological answer? And even if we find the answer to what it is what determines human nature, can we be free from its constraints? Ultimately, what is to be understood is that

Hamlet, in search for freedom from pain, realizes that it can only be achieved through authenticity of personality. In his case, such authenticity corresponds to a quietist stance. Santos claims that Hamlet's readiness to face the hardship of fate, revealed by his "Let be", seems to be less owing to his internal conflicts (217). I reiterate therefore that Hamlet does not suffer a change in nature as Macbeth does – which will be explained in the last chapter. The meaning that Hamlet's will seems to convey at the end of the play, with his search for transcendence and his apparent acceptance – "Let be" (5.2.196); "let it be" (5.2.317) – is, in my view, a pacified tragic will, which has come to terms with itself but still does not accept reality as it is. Hence, the core of his nature remains tragic.

Play provided only a temporary relief from pain. Supposedly having that in mind, Hamlet realized that only a full incarnation of the aesthetic could provide a transcendence of human nature – the constraints imposed by hatred, need of sexual success, and fear of death. Hamlet, however had to pay with his life for his newly realized stance. The governing trope of the play, as I stated, is ambiguity. Chance is an image that encapsulates the general sense of ambiguity because it conveys uncertainty. If it is indeed Hamlet's consciousness the cause of his malaise, it is because he cannot accept the chaotic order (oxymoron intended) of reality. By act five, Hamlet has transfigured the merged amalgam composed of the ambiguous nature of human will and consciousness – "To be or not to be" – into a transcendental disinterest: "Let be". As Bloom suggested, the quietist state Hamlet achieves by act five does not have a name, which is why Hamlet is the canonical sublime: his personality enlarges our understanding of human nature and reality in such a powerful way that we lack forms of addressing it. "Let be" means that Hamlet, from act five on, *accepts* that will cannot be controlled and the inherently lustful nature of humanity. He showed that he already knew it in *The Mousetrap*, but now he pragmatically embodies it.

A tragic nature destroys the concealment of the current social order and attempts to impose a new one. As Emil Staiger states, the pathetic man is moved by what must be and his passions invest against the *status quo* (125). Hamlet perceives the structure of reality in its bare state; he is aware of the vulnerabilities of the will, which is vulnerable and is always susceptible to superficial change. He does not know why, while many other characters avenge their fathers without hesitation, he never takes the initiative to avenge his own father, which makes him suffer, but this is not the only aspect of reality that he perceives. The sexual lust of Gertrude, and the political lust

of Claudius, are also made explicit by Hamlet. The rottenness of Denmark – and, by extension, of the world – is exposed by the tragic hero of the play, and this makes him suffer even more. In conclusion, Hamlet removes the comic concealment that holds together the current social order, the *status quo*. In the end, he seems to come to terms with (instead of *accepting*) the structure of reality, but he pays for all of this with death, the ultimate form of change, achieving transcendence and determining his nature as fully tragic.

Chapter 5. The Tragic Sense in *King Lear*: Hollowness and Cosmological Emptiness

Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas
(Vanity of vanities, all is vanity)

–*Ecclesiastes*

For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene
To monarchise, be feared and kill with looks,
Infusing him with self and vain conceit

–William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*

Lear, because of his suffering, is led to conclude that pain is the essence of human life; again, like in *Hamlet*, the sense of cosmological emptiness is conveyed in his play. Lear, like Hamlet, is an example of a tragic character whose unacceptance of the structure of reality leads to the destruction not only of himself but also of the social order.

To discuss Lear, it is paramount to emphasize this contention by Bloom: "The crucial foregrounding of the play, if we are to understand it at all, is that Lear is lovable, loving, and greatly loved, by anyone at all worthy of our own affection and approbation" (*Shakespeare* 479). Lear, just like Cordelia, is not a politician or at least, as Bloom later points out, is a failed one at that: "Endlessly furious, Lear also is infinitely frank: his enormous spirit harbors no duplicities. Every inch a king, he is less of a Machiavel than any other king in Shakespeare. . . . Shakespeare risks the paradox that his worst politician is his most awesome ruler" (*Shakespeare* 511-12). That is one of the reasons why Lear is likable and can be sympathized with, even though he is a politician. Lear is very unlike, for instance, prince Hal (in the two parts of *King Henry IV*), a politician with whom we might dangerously sympathize, but then we remember that his spirit, unlike Lear's or Falstaff's, is one that that harbors enormous duplicities instead of an enormous spirit that harbors duplicities. Hal is just another instance of an archetypal politician, a

Machiavellian actor that ruthlessly deceives others for his own gain, and for his own gain only. Lear, on the other hand, is much more.

5.1. The Noncentral Aspect of Lear

King Lear is a play that stands out from the standards to which it belongs. Although a handful of Shakespeare's plays have unique features that distinguish them from his body of work (mostly because of the unique characters), consisting of 38 plays, in all of the 10 tragedies, the center of attention is on the characters that give their names to the title.[69] In *King Lear*, the center of attention is less focused on Lear, which is an element that contributes to the overall image of the play. Bloom argues that

> Lear's play is strangely divided. Before he goes mad, Lear's consciousness is beyond ready understanding: his lack of self-knowledge, blended with his awesome authority, makes him unknowable by us. Bewildered and bewildering after that, Lear seems less a consciousness than a falling divinity, Solomonic in his sense of lost glory, Yahweh-like in his irascibility. The play's central consciousness perforce is Edgar's, who actually speaks more lines than anyone except Lear. . . . but no one . . . can be dominant in Lear's tragedy (*Shakespeare* 482).

Although Lear is the main character, his role as a protagonist is performed in a decentered manner through Cordelia and Edgar. In other words, Lear's greatness is the central pivot around which the play revolves, but the characters who perform the plot-related actions are Edgar and Cordelia. Cordelia might not be foregrounded, as Lear and Edgar are, but she operates in the background by arranging the invasion of Britain. In this sense, the play is, according to Bradley, dramatically "out of place": "that which makes the *peculiar* greatness of King Lear . . . interferes with dramatic clearness even when the play is read" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 247). It is notable that the first scene bears a heavily dramatic load because of the confrontation between Lear and Cordelia and her rash banishment.

---

[69] *Julius Caesar* might be another exception to this rule because, like *King Lear*, the play is also decentered. In *King Lear*, the main character, however, does not lose his prominence, rather, he shares the role of most prominent character with Cordelia and Edgar. In *Julius Caesar*, the character who gives the play its name is the only prominent one, although Brutus and Cassius are the ones who carry on the main action. Caesar's death midway through the play, however, is an element that problematizes his protagonism. Brutus and Cassius are the leading characters in the sense that they perform the most relevant actions, as Cordelia and Edgar do in *King Lear*, but Caesar is the most prominent character in the sense of possessing the most remarkable individual features, just like Lear.

Lear's lack of self-knowledge is a contrasting feature with his awesome authority. Goneril and Regan notice his weakened judgement that ensues from this feature:

> GONERILL . . . He always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgement he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.
>
> REGAN 'Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself. (1.1.281-85)

The authority being discussed here is in the sense Kent attributes to Lear, a feature of character that is responsible for attracting the affection of others. After being banished alongside Cordelia, Kent assumes a disguise and, even after being humiliated by Lear, seeks to serve him again:

> LEAR Dost thou know me, fellow?
>
> KENT No, sir; but you have that in your countenance, which I would fain call master.
>
> LEAR What's that?
>
> KENT Authority. (1.4.23-27)

From someone with Lear's greatness and awesomeness, one expects god-like features, like omniscience, but Lear barely knows himself. This feature of character (the blend of authority and lack or perception) is bewildering.

Bloom claims that "Lear's personality, every inch a king, requires universal reverence and obedience from everyone" (*Lear* 15). He also argues that "Lear, beyond us in grandeur and in essential authority, is still a startlingly intimate figure, since he is an emblem of fatherhood itself" (*Shakespeare* 493), and "Lear is overwhelming because he is so close, despite his magnitude" (*Shakespeare* 510). Lear's peculiar intimacy with us partly depends upon this shared sense of outrage: "Lear incessantly proclaims his anguish, fury, outrage, and grief, and while he means everything he says, we never become accustomed to his amazing range of intense feeling. His violent expressionism desires us to experience his inmost being, but we lack the resources to receive that increasing chaos" (*Lear* 7). Lear demands universal love and an outrageous amount of love. He is simultaneous alien and intimate. When he himself is outraged, he is overtaken by anguish, fury, outrage, and grief, while we, lacking the resources to receive his magnitude, are bewildered by the intense feeling of his personality. Lear is the incarnation of bewilderment: "There is something uncanny in Lear's greatness. Shakespeare has combined in the aged King the attributes of fatherhood, monarchy, and divinity" (*Lear* 11). Additionally, "Lear . . . incarnates the God who identifies all that is with himself" (*Lear* 17). Lear's authority is the fusion of these

elements: fatherhood, monarchy, and divinity. He compares himself to a dragon not only because he is metaphorically spitting fire in his curses but also because he is an awesome figure. A dragon does not exist, but if we think of a whale, we can think with a real physical referent in mind. A whale is an astounding and disconcerting animal because of *its size alone*. If we think of a dragon, we think of very large creature, perhaps even larger than a whale. Is *Moby-Dick* an attempt to conquer awe itself? Why is Ahab obsessed with a whale?

Lear is the sublime incarnate. One of the aspects of the sublime is an incomprehensibility that ensues from magnitude. Lear is the human epitome of this sensation incarnated in flesh and blood. It is not therefore a matter of perspective; Lear *is intended as divine*. He is not like Coriolanus, who is seen as divine by his mother and by Menenius, nor is he Vincentio, to whom godlike features are attributed by Angelo. Lear is not *like* a god. Lear *is* a flesh and blood god without supernal or supernatural powers, as Bloom explains.

Finally, Bloom claims that "Lear is not a study in redemption but in outrageousness and in being outraged; he is Shakespeare's perfection in the poetics of outrage . . . Mortality is the ultimate outrage . . . and Lear's authentic prophecy is not against filial ingratitude but against nature, despite his insistence that he speaks for nature" (*Shakespeare* 510). Moreover, "the mad king's revulsion is from nature itself, not an idea but the fundamental fact of sexual difference" (*Shakespeare* 514). Lear's outrage, at first, is against abandonment and sexuality. It is, at first directed at his daughters, but it culminates in an outrage against nature itself. Lear's anger, therefore, is not ethical or ideological, but structural; it is against the structure of reality itself.

After Cordelia's banishment, the Fool characterizes Lear as a zero without any preceding numeral: "Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her frowning; now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing" (1.4.151-53). An "O without a figure" is "a cipher; a zero with no number before it to give it value" (NCS 132). What kind of paradoxical (or oxymoronic) figure is this, a zero with great magnitude, a centralizing emptiness, a meaningful nothing, a figure who, even after unjustly banishing his most beloved daughter and his most loyal follower, manages to keep their love?

5.2. The Vanishing of the Fool

The Fool, as Bloom notices, seems to be a supernatural being: "the Fool is of no determinate age, though clearly he will not grow up. Is he altogether human, or a sprite or

changeling? His utterances differ sharply from those of any court fool in Shakespeare; he alone seems to belong to an occult world" (*Shakespeare* 495). Also noteworthy is his autonomy from time: "Though trapped in Lear's endgame, the Fool is also free of time, and presumably drifts out of the play into another era" (*Shakespeare* 499). At the end of 3.2, he soliloquizes a prophecy:

I'll speak a prophecy ere I go:

When priests are more in word than matter;
When brewers mar their malt with water;
When nobles are their tailors' tutors,
No heretics burned, but wenches' suitors,
Then shall the realm of Albion
Come to great confusion.
When every case in law is right;
No squire in debt nor no poor knight;
When slanders do not live in tongues,
Nor cutpurses come not to throngs;
When usurers tell their gold i'th'field,
And bawds and whores do churches build,
Then comes the time, who lives to see't,
That going shall be used with feet.

This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time. (3.2.78-93)

He then disappears at the end of 3.6, saying that he will "go to bed at noon" (3.6.41). If we are to consider his prophecy a part of the fictitious world of the play, and not just an extra-diegetic element directed toward the audience, we must understand the Fool as intended as a supernatural character. He is aware of a prophecy that is going to be uttered in the future. Merlin is, of course, a pseudo-historical character, but what matters is that the Fool has knowledge of future events. In this sense, the Fool is literally not a fool of time. He seems to fit the play's major image by representing a shifting, wayward entity. His prophecy also fits because it alludes to chaotic evens, i.e., events that seem unnatural or without a fixed center. Let us look at some of the events in the first part: when clergymen talk more for the sake of talking than to say something, when aristocrats teach their tutors. The natural order would be clergymen saying something meaningful and tutors teaching. Then comes the next set of events: when every law case is fair, when tongues do not

slander, and pickpockets do not steal from crowds, when moneylenders have nothing to hide, and pimps and whores build churches. In a world of a natural order, law cases would not be fair, tongues would constantly slander, pickpockets would steal from crowds, moneylenders would always have something seedy to hide, and churches would not be built by pimps and whores. When all this finally happens, then, Albion – the Roman name for Britain (NCS 181) – will collapse and "going shall be used with feet". "Going" means to walk (NCS 181). Walking with feet means normality, the natural order, but if chaotic events become customary, they become the normality. Therefore, in Albion's place, chaos will reign. When everything that is chaotic prevails, perversions shall reign and normality shall end. In other words, when perversions become normal, then chaos becomes the ruling image.

5.3. Edmund's Nihilism

After the battles end, Edmund orders for both Lear and Cordelia to be hanged, but later regrets it. Bloom attempts to explain Edmunds's sudden change at the end of the play:

> Edmund, reacting to Edgar's extraordinary account of their father's death, confesses to being moved, and hesitates on the verge of reprieving Cordelia. He does not get past that hesitation until the bodies of Goneril and Regan are brought in, and then his reaction constitutes the paradigmatic moment of change in all of Shakespeare . . . The dying nihilist reminds himself that in spite of all he was and did, he *was* beloved. (*Shakespeare* 504-05)

"Yet Edmond was beloved. / The one the other poisoned for my sake, / And after slew herself" (5.3.213-15). Bloom argues that "Edmund follows the Shakespearean paradigm of changing at last through self-overhearing" (*Shakespeare* 509). A sequence of stirring events, thoughts materialized into words and self-overhearing, realization and, finally, change: this is the process of change that takes place in Edmund. This particular instance of change in Shakespeare's work calls attention to itself because it seems abrupt. It is up to interpretation, but the whole process I described above would only take a few minutes onstage. Is this time enough for a convincing or realistic change? Bradley also notices it: "Shakespeare, set upon the dramatic effect of the great scenes and upon certain effects not wholly dramatic, was exceptionally careless of probability, clearness and consistency in smaller matters" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 258). Probability and consistency are criteria usually taken into consideration when discussing realism. If Shakespeare is deliberately undermining these criteria, it is, in my view, because he is relocating the relevance (supposedly

attributed to) plot and realism, not to the formal role of a character, but the individuality of character. As I have argued, events of plot mostly function only as a referential background upon which the lyricism of characters operate.

Bloom calls Edmund's instance of change paradigmatic. In my view, the kind of change going on in Edmund's case is the kind described in Hamlet's cosmological view. What kind of change is there in Hamlet's notion? It seems to me that change, according to Hamlet, is the paradigmatic change we see in Shakespeare, and not a radical change in nature, as we see in Macbeth. Does Macbeth change upon self-overhearing? I do not think so. Macbeth's changes are much deeper and more significant, and this is going on in a play where fate governs. Is this a suggestion that even change is predetermined, i.e., that we cannot control even when and how we change? I would argue this, having in mind that there is a preconceived contradiction between the notion of destiny (which entails predetermination) and change (which denies predetermination). Therefore, the aesthetic understanding of fate has nothing to do with predetermination, but with the lack of conscious or rational control over our own behavior. Edmund says, after he is defeated, that the "wheel is come full circle" (5.3.164). His place in the wheel of fortune may change, but he does not seem to be responsible for it.

Edmund's change, however convincing, is still mysterious to an extent, but even more mysterious than Edmund is Edgar. Edgar's injunction at the very end of the play, that we must speak "what we feel, not what we ought to say" (5.3.298), is necessarily contradictory with the unravelling of the plot. Bloom argues that Lear "is the great image of authority, but he himself impairs that image with high deliberation: 'A dog's obey'd in office.' His true greatness is elsewhere: appallingly wrongheaded, he remains always totally honest, and his example teaches his godson Edgar to 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say,' two lines away from the play's close" (*Shakespeare* 511). Greenblatt argues that it is a sense of limit that engenders part of Edgar's final words at the end of *King Lear*:

> Shakespeare as a writer is the embodiment of human freedom. He seems to have been able to fashion language to say anything . . . Yet if Shakespeare is the epitome of freedom, he is also a figure of limits. . . . the limits that he embodied are ones he himself disclosed and explored throughout his career, whenever he directed his formidable intelligence to absolutes of any kind. These limits served as the enabling condition of his particular freedom. (*Shakespeare's Freedom* 1)

Additionally:

> in the wake of the devastation [at the end of *Lear*], what is left? Shakespeare's solution was to end his great tragedy with an ambiguous exceedingly reluctant accession to rule and then to turn the closing words away from any assumption of authority and toward the necessity, under immense pressure, of emotional honesty . . . The dream of the absolute with which the play opens, whether absolute power or absolute love, has been destroyed forever. But the terrible sense of limit articulated at the close—the weight, the sadness of the time, the need to obey—has brought with it the strange injunction that is one of Shakespeare's most remarkable gifts, the simple injunction to speak what we feel. (*Shakespeare's Freedom* 94).

I would say that, by "ambiguous", Greenblatt refers to the contradiction between Edgar's words and the unfortunate events that unfolded for Cordelia speaking what she felt at the beginning. Bloom thinks Edgar is influenced by Lear's honesty, which is also Cordelia's. Honesty, therefore, must always be praised, even if it brings destruction. Greenblatt thinks that Edgar's injunction is a manifestation of his author's freedom. If Greenblatt is right, *King Lear* is probably one of the epitomes, in Shakespeare, of the autonomy of the aesthetic: it is necessarily anti-ethical in the sense that prescribing action is necessarily wrong. If we must speak what we feel rather than what we ought to say, even if speaking what we feel is bound to bring destruction and ruin, sensation comes always before rational thought.

5.4. Bareness and Pain in their Purest State

Despite the similarities – both Lear and Timon tear their clothes off and set off to the wilderness to denounce the rottenness of human nature – Timon is very different from Lear. Lear's inner self is large enough to make us feel that his passions are our own, but among all the similarities between the two, one that is worth emphasizing is their cosmological views. Bloom argues that tragedy is comprised of "perpetually growing inner selves" (*Shakespeare* 593). Would the cause of this perpetual growth be the more poignant and lasting suffering? As I have argued, both comedy and tragedy are submitted to the same structure of reality, but tragic characters tend to suffer more. There seems to be a tendency in tragedy toward characters who elaborate more sophisticated and encompassing cosmological views. Is suffering the cause of these growing inner selves that come up with elaborate cosmological views?

As Bradley observes, "the misanthropy of Timon pours itself out in a torrent of maledictions on the whole race of man; and these at once recall, alike by their form and their substance, the most powerful speeches uttered by Lear in his madness" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 246). Bloom also notes the parallel between Timon's and Lear's "diatribes that combine visions of financial corruption and of rampant sexuality" (*Shakespeare* 484). There seems to be a pattern in the pathos of loss and abandonment and an ensuing revulsion toward sexuality, which, in turn, is the result of a search for a structural truth about pain. Let us observe Lear, Edgar and Timon side by side in their painful search for truth. This is Lear: "Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! Here's three on's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here" (3.4.92-97). This is Edgar:

> My face I'll grime with filth,
> Blanket my loins, elf all my hairs in knots,
> And with presented nakedness outface
> The winds and persecutions of the sky. (2.3.9-12)

This is Timon, who dug the earth to look for roots:

> Therefore be abhorr'd
> All feasts, societies, and throngs of men!
> His semblable, yea himself, Timon disdains.
> Destruction fang mankind! Earth, yield me roots.
>
> [*Digging*.
>
> (*Tim*. 4.3.20-23)

Now, the conclusions each character reaches. First, Lear:

> Ay, every inch a king.
> When I do stare, see how the subject quakes.
> I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?
> Adultery?
> Thou shalt not die. Die for adultery? No,
> The wren goes to't, and the small gilded fly
> Does lecher in my sight.

Let copulation thrive: for Gloucester's bastard son
Was kinder to his father than my daughters
Got 'tween the lawful sheets.
To't, luxury, pell-mell, for I lack soldiers.
Behold yon simp'ring dame,
Whose face between her forks presages snow,
That minces virtue, and does shake the head
To hear of pleasure's name.
The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't
With a more riotous appetite.
Down from the waist they're centaurs,
Though women all above.
But to the girdle do the gods inherit;
Beneath is all the fiend's.

There's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption. (4.6.103-25)

This is Edgar:

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us.
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes. (5.3.160-63)

The dark and vicious place, the vagina, begot Edmund, whose actions resulted in his father losing his eyes. This is Timon: "Be a whore still. They love thee not that use thee. / Give them diseases, leaving with thee their lust" (4.3.84-85). Later: "Plague all, / That your activity may defeat and quell / The source of all erection" (4.3.164-66). That is, give diseases to everyone so that, in your profession, you subdue all the power of men. Timon says these lines when talking to Timandra, one of Alcibiades's whores.

Let us juxtapose there three views side by side:

	Lear	Edgar	Timon
Search for truth	Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. . . . thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here.	with presented nakedness outface The winds and persecutions of the sky.	Destruction fang mankind! Earth, yield me roots. [*Digging*.
View on sexuality	women . . . But to the girdle do the gods inherit; Beneath is all the fiend's. There's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption.	The dark and vicious place where thee he got Cost him his eyes.	Be a whore still. They love thee not that use thee. Give them diseases, leaving with thee their lust. Plague all, That your activity may defeat and quell The source of all erection.

As Bloom explains, "hell" "in Elizabethan slang was the vagina" (*Sonnets* xiv). Hell is also used as an image for the female genitalia in *Mac*. 2.3, the Porter scene, and in the sonnets. This is the passage in *Macbeth*: "Here's a knocking indeed: if a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key. *(Knock)* Knock, knock, knock" (*Mac*. 2.3.1-3). Ralph Berry argues that "the dark room has a natural womb referent; and 'turning the key,' together with 'knocking,' are commonplace usage for sexual entry" (108). According to Berry, "the scene's hell references take over the senses of *hell* that Shakespeare explores in Sonnet 144 . . . The key line is 'I guess one angel in another's hell' (line 12), and the best coverage is Stephen Booth's" (108). This is Booth's gloss: "(1) each is a punishment for the other; they are one another's punishment; (2) one angel (the man) is in the other's (the woman's) hell" (*Shakespeare's Sonnets* 499). Booth, then, goes on to quote W. G. Ingram and Theodore Redpath, editors of an edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*: "Several meanings appear to be present: (1) they are both in the 'Hell' or middle-den of a game of barley-break; (2) as contemporaries averred, such a position was often used as a pretext for a sexual tumble; (3) 'Hell' is probably also, as in Boccaccio's story of Rustico and Alibech (*Decameron*, III, 10), the female sexual organ" (Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* 499). Berry, then, concludes: "These associations, particularly (2) and (3), appear to me to bear directly upon *hell-gate*, the

symbolist milieu of the Porter. The associations of sexuality (stemming from the female organ) and joint punishment for sin are paramount" (109). The ambivalent complex, in sonnet 144 and in *Macbeth*, therefore, is punishment-lust.

Hell is also used as an image for the vagina in the couplet of sonnet 129: "All this the world well knows, yet none knows well / To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell". According to Dympna Callaghan "there is no reference to 'woman,' or anyone as such, in the sonnet, which is entirely devoid of personal pronouns. Sonnet 129 tells instead a troubled story of male lust and female reproductive organs" (Callaghan 99). This is the couplet of 129: "All this the world well knows, yet none knows well / To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell." According to Duncan-Jones, "world", in line 13, means "probably, as the following line suggests, = all *male* persons in the world"; "heaven", in line 14, "*bliss* . . . perhaps also, women's 'heavenly' beauty"; and "this hell", also in line 14, "the *hell* of shame and hatred described in the preceding lines; the female sex organ" (Duncan-Jones 373). This is my gloss of the couplet: all men know this (that the sexual act is shameful) but none can resist the heaven of lust, which leads men to the vagina. The specific ambivalent complex is shame-lust. In *Macbeth* and in the sonnets, the negative aspect of sexuality (at least from a male perspective) is part of its ambivalence of pain-pleasure. In *King Lear* and in *Timon of Athens*, the character's views on sexuality are exclusively negative. If there is a causal relation in the search for the deeper truth of reality through the investigation of pain, and the conclusion being that sexuality ends up as the source of it, I cannot point it out, but it certainly does not seem to be just a coincidence.

In *Hamlet*, we also observe a revulsion toward sexuality, but more in the sense of what we see in *Measure for Measure* than in the sense of what we see in *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*. Hamlet's ambiguous stance toward everything and everyone prevents us from knowing exactly what his take is on sexuality. Referring to the scene in which Ophelia reports their encounter (*Ham.* 2.1), Bloom argues that what "emerges clearly is that Hamlet is playacting, and that Ophelia already is the prime victim of his dissembling" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 38). This scene, which is narrated rather than dramatized, enhances the ambiguity because we do not have first-hand access to it. Referring, now, to *Ham*. 3.1, Bloom argues that "we are given the prince's astonishingly brutal verbal assault upon Ophelia, which far surpasses his need to persuade the concealed Claudius of his nephew's supposed madness. What broader ambivalence Hamlet harbors toward Ophelia, Shakespeare will not tell us" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 38). Hamlet's

assault on Ophelia, however, comes immediately after he associates sex with death in his soliloquy – discussed in the previous chapter. It is another point of ambiguity if Hamlet's problem is with sexuality in general, or with women specifically. Hamlet, indeed, complains about female sexuality in *Ham*. 3.4. If Hamlet's revulsion of sexuality is in the line of Lear's and Timon's, it is another iteration of the pattern. We do not see, however, the history of Hamlet's malaise, i.e., we do not know if he had lost something, as Lear and Timon had. Freud's suggestion was that melancholy was the loss of something that could not be identified ("Mourning and Melancholia"). If Hamlet's melancholy is due to loss, the pattern repeats, but Hamlet's nature is too ambivalent. We cannot know for sure how much of his assault on Ophelia is just playacting to Claudius and Polonius (who are observing the couple from the background) and how much Hamlet genuinely abhors sexuality because of his ambivalence and resulting ambiguity. Bloom continues: "for the Ghost's second appearance, we wonder if Hamlet *would* murder Gertrude. . . . In the event, he assuages his rage by manslaughter, skewering Polonius through a curtain, but the thrust is a displacement of his true will, which is to immolate Gertrude" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 54). Bloom concludes: "The Hamlet Complex is not incestuous but again theatrical. Hamlet, prince of players, kills players; at the tragedy's close we are richer by eight corpses: . . . That is prodigal even for Shakespearean tragedy, but belongs to the Hamlet Complex, of which murderousness forms as large a component as does self-conscious theatricality" (*Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* 54). Immolation has no figurative meaning in *Ham*. 3.4; it is more likely that Hamlet would kill his mother than have sex with her. Hamlet's complex is Hamletian, not Oedipean. In the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *King Lear*, from 2018, directed by Gregory Doran, Lear makes an upside-down triangle with his hands near his genitals while delivering these lines: "There's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption. Fie, fie, fie; pah, pah!" (4.5.124-25).

In short, in the case of *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear*, the revulsion toward sexuality localizes it as the source of all the evils of the world. In the case of *Measure for Measure* and *Hamlet*, the formula sex = incest = death can be applied, but with different consequences. In *Measure for Measure*, Isabella's revulsion is toward physical sexuality. She seems to enjoy, however, the ambivalence of sexual tension. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet reveals a distaste for sexuality, as it is part of the ambivalent structure of reality. In other words, while Lear and Timon locate the

source of all evils of humanity in sexuality, Hamlet locates only part of the rottenness of human nature in it.

5.5. Removing the Concealment of Pain

Bloom states that while suffering "achieves its full reality of representation in *King Lear*, hope receives none. Hope is named Cordelia, and she is hanged at Edmund's command; Edgar survives to battle wolves, and to endure a heroic hopelessness. And that, rather than ripeness, is all" (*Shakespeare* 506). In *King Lear*, suffering achieves full reality. Hope is hanged, and Edgar survives to endure hopelessness. And there an end. That is the most concise translation of *King Lear*. According to Bloom, "'Nothing will come of nothing' [1.1.85] . . . prophesied the final emptiness that will afflict his world" (*Lear* 15). After Edmund's deception regarding Edgar's betrayal, Gloucester remarks: "Machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders follow us disquietly to our graves" (1.2.98-100). The irony is that the machinations and treachery come not from the one whom Gloucester thinks they do, and the preliminary outline of the governing image of the play begins to take shape in his words: hollowness and all ruinous disorders. This image is enforced by the setting itself: just before the storm begins, Gloucester says: "Alack, the night comes on, and the high winds / Do sorely ruffle; for many miles about / There's scarce a bush" (2.4.293-95). In the heaths of *King Lear*'s England, there is scarcely any vegetation. The frequent references to nakedness and raggedness in the heath scenes also help make up the bigger picture.

Bloom argues that love "is transformed by Shakespeare, more than by any other writer, into the greatest of dramatic and aesthetic values. Yet more than any other writer, Shakespeare divests love of any supposed values of its own" (*Shakespeare* 487). Additionally, the "worship of Lear by Kent, Gloucester, Albany, and most of all his godson Edgar is directed not only at the great image of authority but at the central emblem of familial love . . . The exorbitant passion or drive of familial love both in Lear and in Edgar is the cause of calamity" (*Shakespeare* 492). Love is not, in *King Lear*, in the humanistic or Christian sense of self-abnegation because it occurs simultaneously with pride, which, for Christian or humanistic thought, is a necessary contradiction. Contradicting humanism, Lear and Cordelia, as Bloom have argued, are one of the instances of actual love in the play: "Lear and all three daughters suffer from a plethora of prides, though Cordelia's legitimate concern is with what John Keats would have called the holiness of her heart's

affections" (*Shakespeare* 508). Lear and Cordelia genuinely love each other, even though the two are overly concerned with doing things their way; that is, Cordelia is concerned with holiness of her heart's affections, while Lear, with a public demonstration of authority. The irony with Cordelia's concern is that she attempts to convince her father that her sisters' words were devoid of meaning since true love is only demonstrated through actions, but her struggle is also in vain. While her thought is true, it is vain nonetheless, i.e., she just wants to prove her point without caving to her father's will.

Regarding this issue, Bradley argues that we feel "the presence of force as well as weakness, but we feel also the presence of the tragic ὕβρις [*hubris*]. . . . Lear . . . is . . . choleric by temperament . . . And a long life of absolute power . . . has produced in him that blindness to human limitations, and that presumptuous self-will, which in Greek tragedy we have so often seen stumbling against the altar of Nemesis" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 282). If we check Aristotle's definition of hubris, it fits perfectly with the contest between Lear and Cordelia. In the *Rhetoric*, he defines hubris as the demeaning of a victim, not because of anything that happened or might happen to the committer, but merely for that committer's own gratification:

> Belittling . . . is an actualization of opinion about what seems worthless . . . and there are three species of belittling: contempt . . . spite . . . and insult [*hybris*] . . . The person who gives insult also belittles; for insult is doing and speaking in which there is shame to the sufferer, not that some advantage may accrue to the doer or because something has happened but for the pleasure of it; for those reacting to something do not give insult but are retaliating.
>
> 6. The cause of pleasure to those who give insult is that they think they themselves become more superior by ill-treating others. (116-17)

Then again, Lear's struggle to humiliate Cordelia publicly is as vain as Cordelia's struggle to prove her sisters are fallacious.

Love, therefore, has nothing to do with each character's individual vanity. *Both of them* are proud in the sense that they demand things be done their way, and this pride is vain because it only serves personal satisfaction; but this does not preclude the existence of actual love between Lear and Cordelia and Edgar and Gloucester. *Vanitas*, in Latin, means emptiness or nothingness. It is not surprising that Bloom associates Lear intimately with Solomon, from whom I took one of the epigraphs: "the models for Lear were the darker Solomons of Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of

Solomon, . . . weary of eros, and of all else. 'Better thou / Hadst not been born than not t'have pleased me better,' Lear's vicious remark to Cordelia, is apt prelude to a drama in which everyone would have been better had they not been born. It is not so much that all is vanity; all is nothing" (*Shakespeare* 509). There is a litany of nothingness in *King Lear*, more than anywhere else in Shakespeare. *King Lear* has a total of 34 entries for the word "nothing", against 16 in *Macbeth*.

Bradley claims that throughout the latter half of *King Lear*, "we note in most of the better characters a pre-occupation with the question of the ultimate power, and a passionate need to explain by reference to it what otherwise would drive them to despair" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 273). There seems to be a sort of "theological chaos" going on the play. Almost all of the main characters on the "good" side attribute the cause of their sufferings to a different entity, while the big picture of the play seems to portray reality itself as utter randomness. To Kent, "It is the stars, / The stars above us, govern our conditions" (4.2.30-31). Edgar thinks that "The gods are just" (5.3.160). To Gloucester, as "flies to wanton boys are we to th'gods; / They kill us for their sport" (4.1.36-37). To the father, gods are evil; to the son, they are good. Capitalized "God" is only mentioned once in 5.3.17 by Lear. He says, at one moment, that the storm seems the messenger of heaven: "Let the great gods, / That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads, / Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch, / That hast within thee undivulged crimes" (3.2.47-50). At this moment, he believes that the storm has come as punishment for those who had wronged him. At another moment, however, he accuses the gods of injustice: "Take physic, pomp; / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, / That thou mayst shake the superflux to them / And show the heavens more just" (3.4.33-36). Edmund, although not on the "good" side, declares: "Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law / My services are bound" (1.2.1-2). Bloom claims that the "gods in *King Lear* do not kill men and women for their sport; instead they afflict with Lear and Edgar excess of love, and Goneril and Regan with the torments of lust and jealousy" (*Shakespeare* 484). The gods, therefore, are not responsible for anything. They just endow people with character traits that ensue from the mix and flow of sensations. No person has control over anything in the world of *King Lear*. There are 19 entries for "heaven" as a noun, and two for "heavenly", one as an adjective and another as an adverb. If the two most frequent words in the play are "nothing" and "heaven", could we consider this as a suggestion that – enforcing the image of cosmological emptiness – there is nothing in the heavens, i.e., that the heavens, which are supposed to be a source of meaning, are devoid of it?

During 3.4, the pivotal moment of the play, we are allowed a clear vision of its governing image. Lear meets Edgar, who is lying down on the filth, under the storm, half-naked, and says: "Is man no more than this? Consider him well. . . . thou art the thing itself" (3.4.92-95). Bradley's take on this scene is that "Lear's insanity . . . stimulates . . . that power of moral perception and reflection which had already been quickened by his sufferings. . . . the naked beggar represents truth and reality, in contrast with those conventions, flatteries, and corruptions of the great world . . . Lear regards the beggar . . . as a person who is in the secret of things" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 289). Lear realizes, because of both his and Edgar's suffering, that Edgar *is* suffering, which, in turn, *is* the structure of reality itself. Part of the point of the storm, briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph, is to make visible the contradiction of Lear's belief in nature as a deity. Another part of the intention of the storm, it seems to me, is to expose the bare-naked body of Edgar to the pain nature can afford. The storm is one of the worst kinds of pain that nature – "extremity of the skies" (3.4.92) in Lear's words – can inflict, in contrast to torture, which is pain inflicted by humans, and which happens to Gloucester. But how does it relate to Edgar's disguise? Bloom highlights its asceticism: "There is something . . . profoundly disproportionate in Edgar's self-abnegation throughout the play . . . Whether as bedlamite or as poor peasant, Edgar refuses his own identity for more than practical purposes" (*Shakespeare* 480). My suggestion is that it is a form to reach truth. The evidence is that Lear, when conversing with Edgar, does the same, i.e., he takes his clothes off under the storm: "Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here" (3.4.97). The two characters undress to discover the truth about pain and reality. In other words, self-abnegation is a way of getting to the essence of things, "the thing itself", as Lear names it.

It is not surprising that Lear calls Edgar a philosopher: "First let me talk with this philosopher. / What is the cause of thunder?" (3.4.138-39). Tom, the naked beggar, is, to Lear, a philosopher because his bareness leads to truth. It could be argued that Lear is delirious, but that is countered by Edgar himself – "reason in madness". Lear is inquiring about the nature of pain, which, for Lear, at this point, is the nature of reality itself. He enquires about the nature of a bolt of lightning, not only because there is a storm over their heads, but also because there is one in his mind, causing him pain, and he wants to know the truth about it, about the nature of pain: "This tempest in my mind / Doth from my senses take all feeling else" (3.4.12-13).

Lear, however, is not satisfied with this answer, i.e., that pain is the thing itself and so he carries on his investigation on the nature of pain. In 3.6, Lear makes a mock-trial to judge Goneril

and Regan so as to find out why they abandoned him: "Then let them anatomise Regan; see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard-hearts?" (3.6.33-35). To anatomize means to scrutinize down to the most minute detail. By anatomizing, Lear is removing layers (just like he removes his own clothes) so as to get to the hard-hearted Regan. The culmination of Lear's investigation is the "Ay, every inch a king" speech already quoted in its entirety. In 4.5, after having observed Edgar and having anatomized Regan and Goneril, Lear reaches a conclusion, which is that the vagina, the dark and vicious place, is the cause of all pain. It is no wonder that he asks for his imagination to be sweetened after acknowledging it: "Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, sweeten my imagination" (4.5.126-27). Shakespeare's attribution of the cause of pain to women is risky to an extent, partly because it could quickly degenerate into ideology, that is, Lear would be considering only his part of reality. As already indicated, I do not know what is the causal relation between the nature of pain and the nature of sexuality present in Lear's cosmological view, but it certainly is not coincidental. There seems to be some degree of truth in Lear's, Edgars and Timon's conclusions, however aggressive this might seem to women. The "madness" into which Lear, Edgar and Timon are thrown, a result of their outrages, leads them to conclude that sexuality is the source of the evils of humanity. In Lear's specific words, it is "hell", i.e., the vagina, "the sulphurous pit".

According to Bloom, madness "and blindness become a doublet profoundly akin to tragedy and love, the doublet that binds together the entire play. Madness, blindness, love, and tragedy amalgamate in a giant bewilderment "(*Shakespeare* 482). Additionally, "Lear is mad only as William Blake was mad: prophetically, against both nature and society. Edgar, agonizing at his godfather's sufferings, cries, 'Reason in madness,' but that is not necessarily the audience's perspective. Again as with Blake, Lear's prophecy fuses reason, nature, and society into one great negative image" (*Shakespeare* 515). The reader's or audience's perspective is not that there is reason in madness, i.e., Lear seems to be just insane, without any reason behind him. Attributing the pains of the world to the nature of women, therefore, would just be a result of his resentment – in the view of the audience or reader – but, as mentioned before, Lear's cosmological view is anything but ideological. Bloom also indicates that, at the center of Lear's tragedy, "there is a terrible and deliberate gap, a cosmological emptiness into which we are thrown" (*The Western Canon* 67). Lear and Edgar, in an attempt to unveil the structure of reality itself, discover that man

is no more than pain, deprivation, filth and bare-nakedness. This is the structure of reality in *King Lear*.

The governing image of the play is voidness, emptiness, or hollowness. Its elements are chaos, barrenness, deprivation, nakedness, and emptiness. Richard, in the epigraph I used from *King Richard II*,[70] also encapsulates this very well. It is noteworthy that the female genitals can also be understood as an image for emptiness. A summary of the elements of the whole image of the play follows:

a) the whole first scene sets the sense of emptiness associated with pride. The play opens with Gloucester humiliating Edmund for being a bastard, i.e., he is humiliating his son for no good reason. Gonerill and Regan give Lear vain, i.e., hollow, praises. The confrontation between Lear and Cordelia happens for vain reasons. Lear is just too proud and Cordelia just too stubborn.

b) the litany of nothingness lingers throughout the entirety of the play. It begins with Cordelia's refusal to praise Lear. Lear's reply, "Nothing will come of nothing", reveals that he believes that verbal language can convey meaning, however vain in its nature. Cordelia, on the other hand, is aware of the hollow nature of language.

c) blindness. Gloucester's blindness suggests darkness, which leads him to suicide because of the lack of meaning – hollowness, as he himself indicated.

d) the contrast between barren heaths and the pompous castles as the spatial setting. Although initially in opposition, the pompousness and poverty converge into the unified cosmological hollowness. Poverty reveals pain, and pomp reveals pride. In the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *King Lear*, previously mentioned, a white background and a stale tree are the only props used for the setting of scene 4.5, which takes place in an open field. In Peter Brook's film adaptation of the play (from 1971), a desolate beach is used as the setting. Both convey the meaning of bareness and, especially, scarcity, which refers back to the pain of cosmological emptiness.

e) the search for structural truth about pain leads to the conclusion of cosmological hollowness or emptiness is at the center of human life.

---

[70] Richard Plantagenet (Richard II) was the rightful heir of the throne at the end of the medieval age that relished the principle of the Divine Right of Kings. No one could challenge him because he was God's appointed messenger in England. Richard, however, proved to be disconnected from his nobles, and excessive with the royal treasury and power. As the plot of *King Richard II* unravels, Richard is deposed and imprisoned.

The governing image is largely an outcome of Lear's suffering, which leads Lear to conclude that pain is the essence of human life, a meaning that is also partly conveyed by Hamlet's cosmological view of human will, which is ruled by chance. Cosmological emptiness is a notion that is a major part, if not the core, of the Shakespearean tragic sense. As such, it will also be present in Macbeth's conclusion in the final soliloquy.

We see that tragic characters remove the concealment of a negative aspect of human nature, which conveys a general sense of cosmological emptiness – although it acquires specific configurations in each play. Hamlet removes the concealment of egotistical interests, that is, political ambition and sexual lust, while Lear removes the concealment of the rule of pain at the center of human nature. In the next chapter, we will see how, in *Macbeth*, the concealment is, at first, present in an approximate fashion of a traditional comedy, but is then disturbed and fully removed eventually.

Chapter 6. The Role of Fate in Macbeth's Change from Comic to Tragic Nature

When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least

–William Shakespeare, sonnet 29

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.
I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.
I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,
But not to call me back or say good-bye;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky
Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

–Robert Frost, "Acquainted with the Night"

The four previous chapters were an attempt to show that, broadly speaking, there are two major types of characters: comic and tragic. My argument is influenced by Frye's description of the major four *mythoi* (laid out in chapter 1), of which the tragic and the comic comprise the two

predominant modes. In my analysis, the comic consists of accepting the currently predominant cycle of pain; the tragic, of attempting to establish a new cycle of pain. By will, I understand that by which one is motivated to take (or not) an action, i.e., will is wanting to be doing what one is doing, a notion that encompasses several aspects of humanity, such as personal interests and temperament. If one is *willing* to do something, it is because one has interest in it (whether in the action itself or in its results) and one's temperament is motivated by and for it.

Bloom states that whether "or not Nietzsche (and Freud after him) were right in believing that we are lived, thought, and willed by forces not ourselves, Shakespeare anticipated Nietzsche in this conviction" (*Shakespeare* 522). The image of fate in *Macbeth* pervades the play textually. While Macbeth mechanically executes Duncan's murder with his own hands, he does so unwillingly. What is noteworthy is that in a play in which fate is a prevalent and pervading entity, the protagonist undergoes a change in nature. The tragic, in *Macbeth*, entails resilience in the sense that he keeps moving forward even with the entire world standing against him. Therefore, he concludes that anything he does is not going to be worthwhile, i.e., meaningful, because it is *as if* it were predetermined, since he cannot control time, which, in the play, is a metonym for fate. My aim in this chapter is to show that Macbeth is not in control of the change of nature that he goes through.

6.1. Macbeth Standing on the Border between the Comic and the Tragic

Macbeth does not exactly want to be king. He is moved by an incipient ambition in the beginning, but this ambition wanes by the end of the first act. When Macbeth murders Duncan, he does it *unwillingly* after being "coerced" by the witches and by Lady Macbeth. The fear of being humiliated by his wife is one of the factors that induces him to murder Duncan. If Macbeth had endured that humiliation, he might have kept at least one foot on the comic side of the border. In this first section, I discuss this tendency of the character of Macbeth toward the comic in part of the first half of the play.

6.1.1. Whose Fault Is It? The Problem of Will in *Macbeth*

As briefly discussed in the Introduction, an ethical reading of *Macbeth* would understand that ambition, and so the protagonist's guilt – not referring to his internal sense of guilt, but to ethical sense regarding a judicial system – plays a major role in the play. Bradley argues that the

"Witches . . . are not goddesses, or fates, or, in any way whatever, supernatural beings. They are old women, poor and ragged, skinny and hideous, full of vulgar spite" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 341). They cannot be referenced as fates because Shakespeare does not use the features that would make them to be understood as goddesses or deities (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 342). Bradley says that, in Shakespeare, "character is destiny", but at the same time he argues for a "tragic practice": "There is no sign whatever in the play that Shakespeare meant the actions of Macbeth to be forced on him by an external power, whether that of the Witches, or of their 'masters,' or of Hecate. It is needless therefore to insist that such a conception would be in contradiction with his whole tragic practice" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 343). By this practice, Bradley seems to be referring to ethical responsibility, i.e., he puts considerable weight on the protagonist assuming responsibility for action. While it is all true, Bradley's argument shows an excessive concern about responsibility for action. According to Bloom, the "witchcraft in *Macbeth*, though pervasive, cannot alter material events, yet hallucination can and does" (*Shakespeare* 516). Macbeth's imagination and fear play crucial roles in Macbeth's actions. There is evidence (which I will discuss later) that suggests the pervading presence of the witches (and ultimately of the powers they serve) *indirectly* control Macbeth.

And yet, Bradley was right in assuming that the witches were not supernatural. They seem to serve the purpose of personifying the powers of the masters that control them so that they can communicate with Macbeth, i.e., they are a sort of mediator between the spirits and the world. Regardless of the form these messengers of obscure powers (which take the form of a ghost in *Hamlet*) take to make themselves apparent, they hint at the influence of an invisible yet acting force that exerts influence on humanity. In my view, Bradley insistently underplays the role of the witches in order to emphasize an awareness of responsibility that is not so obvious in Shakespeare's plays as he suggests and which he calls Shakespeare's "tragic practice"[71] (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 343). It is, however, only an assumption that such practice exists. Bradley is here attributing his general pre-established reading to the tragedies; and, if such a practice exists, it does not mean that it is the one Bradley determines since the principle of composition of such practice could reside somewhere else.

[71] What Bradley does here, in my view, is an attempt at formalism, that is, he tries to conform Shakespeare's individual works to his own notion of ideal form. The particular form, here, is Aristotle's theory of tragedy, according to which the protagonist recognizes his mistakes, for which the word in Greek is hamartia (*ἁμαρτία*) (cf. Aristotle's *Poetics*).

Bradley asks: "'the witches foreknow Macbeth's future; and how can a man be responsible when his future is fixed?' With this question, as a speculative one, we have no concern here; but, in so far as it relates to the play, I answer, first, that not one of the things foreknown is an action" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 345). In other words, the sequence of *events* of Macbeth's life was fixed by the witches, but the sequence of *actions* was to be determined by himself. Bradley, however, also claims that, in Shakespeare, "character is destiny". How can the actions of someone whose character is destiny not be, in a sense, predetermined? We are faced with a problem of terminology. In this particular case, Bradley assumes that character being predetermined does not necessarily imply that his actions will be also predetermined.

While Bradley's argument makes sense, it deviates in part from the aesthetic. As I mentioned, Bradley puts too much emphasis on the responsibility of characters for their actions even after having said that character is destiny. A problem of responsibility says more with respect to ethics than to aesthetics, and an aesthetic reading should not be too much concerned with causes – which is something a criminal judge is concerned with in order to attribute punishment. While responsibility should not be ignored, it should also not be an object of central concern.

> Bradley also claims that Shakespeare would probably have felt that, introducing prophecies of Macbeth's deeds would interfere with the interest of the inward struggle and suffering. . . . however it may be with prophecies of actions, prophecies of mere events do not suggest to people at large any sort of difficulty about responsibility. . . . This whole difficulty is undramatic; and I may add that Shakespeare nowhere shows . . . any interest in speculative problems concerning foreknowledge, predestination and freedom. (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 346)

Let us discuss a few things about this citation. First, prophecies of deeds, as Bradley argues, would *not* "interfere with the interest of the inward struggle and suffering" because the agent of such deeds might be under coercion, and this only heightens the suffering. This time, Bradley admits that the "difficulty about responsibility . . . is undramatic", which seems to slightly contradict his previous claim that "prophecy of event is not prophecy of action", since this last claim means that characters must be accounted responsible for their actions, which would lead us to think that it has significant dramatic impact. Finally, Bradley is right in claiming that "speculative problems concerning foreknowledge, predestination and freedom" are not relevant. Speculation, as I mentioned, is not relevant aesthetically because the aesthetic is not concerned about causes. It is

concerned with the poetic depiction of issues like "predestination" and "freedom", which, by the way, are words that Bradley bluntly identifies, because such issues are the source of psychological and existential concerns, i.e., they are the cause of suffering. The aesthetic is not mainly concerned with the trial of a criminal, and if *Macbeth*, which portrays the goddesses of fate, who utter accurate prophecies, is not about the *poetic* understanding of predestination and freedom, then, I should wonder about what it is. This, again, is coming from someone who claims that "character is destiny", that, in *Macbeth*, "fate . . . works itself out alike in the external conflict and in the hero's soul" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 181) and that "Shakespeare . . . make it seem that . . . [Macbeth] is in the power of secret forces lurking below, and independent of his consciousness and will" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 338). Moreover, Bradley, says that characters that are taken by passion have control over their wills, for instance, that Iago has a "remarkable . . . strength of will" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 218). Here, Bradley means that Iago is fiercely determined to obtain what he wants. I agree with this claim, but it does not mean that he has "strength of will", because the phrase implies that he has total control over his will. Iago is overcome by hatred for Othello, which is a feeling over which he does not have control. Bradley, in my view, is wrong because he confuses *control* of will with *magnitude* of will, and if the suggestion, in *Hamlet*, that will results from witchcraft is to be considered, will is not controllable. Bloom explains that the "Weird Sisters . . . take the place of that will; we cannot imagine them appearing to Iago, or to Edmund, both geniuses of the will. . . . What happens to Macbeth is inevitable, despite his own culpability" (*Shakespeare* 525). Additionally, Macbeth "pragmatically lacks any will, in contrast to Lady Macbeth, who is a pure will until she breaks apart" (*Shakespeare* 522). If Iago and Lady Macbeth are willful, that is, are willing to achieve their goals no matter what, and Macbeth is not, it does not mean that any of them control their wills – or lack thereof. In conclusion, it is hard to pinpoint exactly what Bradley has in mind when he discusses "will" – what he means by saying that "character is destiny" and what is the relation between will and destiny, if he even thinks there is one.

Macbeth is always self-aware, i.e., conscious of his actions. He is not "charmed", he is not under the effect of a spell. His powerful imagination is not, in any way, a sign of any kind of mental disability. He is, after all, a skilled warrior. I am not contesting that Macbeth is the one responsible for doing the deed; it is his own hands, controlled by his own brain, that performs the action, but this does not have significant dramatic and aesthetic relevance. It is only relevant to an ethical

critic who would want to fix the meaning of the play on Macbeth's guilt and ethical responsibility. Therefore, while it is undeniable that it is Macbeth who mechanically commits the murder, I would argue that the instances of coercion seem to join together in way that any sense of self-awareness or responsibility becomes lost. After Macbeth hears the witches' prophecy, he communicates this in a letter to his wife and when the opportunity arises, she coerces him into the act of murdering Duncan. According to Bloom, Macbeth "suffers intensely from knowing that he does evil" (*Shakespeare* 517). Action is relevant because meaning revolves around it, which is why the aesthetic is moral. If the critic starts seeking reasons for which such a character is responsible for such an action, he ceases to be a critic and becomes a judge in a court of law, that is to say, the aesthetic becomes moralizing – rather than moral. McAlindon, in *Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'*, states that the

> causes of suffering in Shakespeare's tragedies are diffuse and involve large abstract forces as well as human error and criminal malice. . . . Accident may contribute to the advancement of the tragic plot, but it would not have the negative effect it does without the characters being what they are. In that sense, character is fate. . . . In *Macbeth* the weird sisters who contrive the hero's downfall merely point him in the way he was already inclined to go (like the 'fatal' dagger). (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 118)

McAlindon says that "character is fate" in the sense that the dagger of Macbeth's mind simply points him in the direction of his action. Just before the murder, an image of a dagger is imprinted in Macbeth's "heat-oppressèd brain" (2.1.37-39). He feels impelled to kill Duncan because of his fear of being rejected by Lady Macbeth; it is as if he were being *indirectly* coerced by Lady Macbeth. Macbeth is taken over, as I will explain later, by a force of mythical dimension. If we insist, however, on attributing the responsibility of the murder to Lady Macbeth, we would be committing the same critical mistake. It is not appropriate for an aesthetic reading to put such a concern at the center of attention, which here must be Macbeth's suffering because of indirect coercion.

Macbeth's *suffering* is the one element that is aesthetically and dramatically relevant. The spirits that control the witches know what people think. How can one win a battle against an enemy who knows what one thinks? Again, the fact that the witches manipulate Macbeth does not mean that he is not the one who performs the action, but, pragmatically, it is if he had not a choice; the problem of ethical responsibility loses its relevance once we acknowledge this. According to

Bloom, between "what Macbeth imagines and what he does, there is only a temporal gap, in which he himself seems devoid of will" (*Shakespeare* 525). It is Macbeth's proleptic imagination that causes his will to be outrun by his "desire or ambition" (*Shakespeare* 528). Therefore, "a force neither divine nor wicked seems to choose him as the trumpet of its prophecy" (*Shakespeare* 533). This monadic compound which seems to form the image of fate in *Macbeth* seems to exercise such a coercive influence upon Macbeth (or any character for that matter)[72] that a discussion about responsibility loses meaning.

The best take on the matter of responsibility is Goddard's: "it makes little difference whether we consider them [the witches] supernatural beings themselves or women who have sold their souls to supernatural beings. The impression in either case is the same: that of demi-creatures, agents and procurers of those powers that, when men's wills falter, pull them down out of their freedom as the earth does the body of a bird whose wings have failed" (*The Meaning of Shakespeare* vol. 2 126). Additionally: "So little, Shakespeare thus makes plain, is there any fatalism involved in the proximity of the Weird Sisters where a resolute will resists. Fire is hot. And fire is fascinating to a child. If the child goes too near the fire, he will be burned. We may call it fate if we will. It is in that conditional sense only that there is any fatalism in *Macbeth*" (*The Meaning of Shakespeare* vol. 2 129). Pragmatically, the witches possess a supernatural force that influences Macbeth somehow. This influence is comparable to that of child that is attracted to fire but is not fully aware of its destructive properties. The problem of responsibility is dissolved in the larger image of fate. With this issue out of the way, let us discuss how the image of fate is formed in *Macbeth*.

6.1.2. Can Fear Be Controlled?

It is when Macbeth is taken by the anxiety of fear that his imagination works best. There are four stages of fear that Macbeth goes through. Each one relates to his imagination in different ways. The first stage begins when the witches first deliver him prophecies, during which he is "rapt" and put in in a state in which "nothing is, / But what is not" (1.3.140-41). Macbeth is "rapt" by the fear of imagining the murder of Duncan. The second stage is related to the fear of sexual

[72] In 1.4, Malcolm says of the prior Thane of Cawdor: "Nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving it. He died / As one that had been studied in his death" (1.4.7.9). Cawdor's death perfectly suited him as if it was carefully prepared by him. Raffel Burton, the editor of The Annotated Shakespeare edition, glosses "studied" as "deliberate, intentionally intending" (23).

failure before Lady Macbeth: "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.49). This leads him to imagine the dagger of the mind engendered by his "heat-oppressèd brain" (2.1.39). The third stage is the fear of being cut off from power. In this stage, his imagination engenders Banquo's ghost during the banquet scene (3.4). The fourth stage is actually the absence of fear: "I have almost forgot the taste of fears" (5.5.9). We also, by act five, do not see any display of his imagination. There is a progression in these instances. In the first, his imagination only gets him "rapt". In the second, he can visualize the illusion of the dagger. In the third, the vision of the ghost pushes him to an extreme degree of anxiety, a "restless ecstasy" (3.2.22). At last, without fear, he also does not seem to have a powerful imagination. Let us take a look carefully at each one of these stages.

The first stage of fear is related to ambition. It is undeniable that Macbeth yearns for glory and greatness:

> I have bought
> Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
> Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
> Not cast aside so soon. (1.7.32-35)

Golden opinions, acquired with genuine effort ("bought") should be relished, not cast aside. Macbeth certainly wants golden opinions. Ambition is a significant part of the moral and figurative background in the *first act*, but it loses its relevance from act two on. This is how he reacts after the witches tell him the prophecy:

> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill, cannot be good: if ill,
> Why hath it given me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man, that function

Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is

But what is not. (1.3.129-41)

We cannot know for sure what horrid image unfixes Macbeth's hair, but it is a reasonable assumption that is he is thinking about Duncan's murder. "Present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings" means that what he is imagining causes more fear in him than immediate threats. It is also noteworthy that his heart beats in an unnatural manner at his thoughts of murder, despite just having made "[s]trange images of death" (1.3.95); Macbeth had just walked out from a battlefield where he killed a lot of people, but the thought of Duncan's murder disturbs him. He is "rapt" by imagination while dominated by ambition.

The relevance of ambition in *Macbeth* is not as large as an ethical reader might think it is. Bradley argues that the "prophecies of the Witches are presented simply as dangerous circumstances with which Macbeth has to deal: they are dramatically on the same level as the story of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, or the falsehoods told by Iago to Othello" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 343). Ambition, fear, imagination, and the prophecies are all different things, but an evident relation among them exists for Macbeth. The witches know of Macbeth's ambition and fear.[73] By prophesizing about something he wants, they are controlling him. According to Banquo, he becomes "rapt" while imagining Duncan's murder, which lead him to think that "Present fears / Are less than horrible imaginings" (1.3.136-37). He anticipates that "present fears", that is, physical threats, are less worse than the anxiety that his imagination is causing him. Also, noteworthy is the fact that he is aware that actions are stalled by consideration or thought ("surmise"). The prophecies are what prompt him to imagine Duncan's murder, and this image engulfs him in horror.

Lily Campbell, in *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*, claims that, in *Macbeth*, "fear" is mentioned 42 times, while ambition, only three (208). It makes more sense to classify *Macbeth* as a tragedy about fear instead of ambition, since, after "the murder of Duncan, the whole play is motivated by the increasing passion of fear" (223). Understanding *Macbeth* as a work predominantly about the dangers of exaggerated ambition is understanding it ethically, not aesthetically. In *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos*, McAlindon states that "nothing might seem more reductive than to consider *Macbeth* as a tragedy of ambition" (*Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos* 197), even though it is still part of the reality of the play and relevant to its meaning. McAlindon also

[73] It is revealed later that the spirits who command the witches know what people think.

points out that "Macbeth's ambition is a desire not so much for power and wealth as for 'greatness'" (*Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos* 198). This greatness is highlighted by the protagonist himself in the letter he sends to his wife and which she reads in 1.5, after the witches had told him the prophecy: "This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee" (1.5.9-11). Macbeth is a noble character in the sense that he is skilled in combat, as is observed by others: "brave Macbeth . . . Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel, / Which smoked with bloody execution, / Like Valour's minion carved out his passage" (1.3.16-19); "I must report they [Macbeth and Banquo] were / As cannons over-charged with double cracks; / So they doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe" (1.3.36-38). Yet, he craves for more, and after the witches tell him that he shall be king hereafter, his ambition increases. Four scenes later, however, he says: "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none." (1.7.45-6). This is where his ambition ends. According to Bloom, if "the masterpiece of ambivalence is the Hamlet/Oedipus complex, the masterpiece of anxiety is what I want to call the Macbeth complex, because that hero-villain is Shakespeare's most anxious. In the Macbeth complex, dread cannot be distinguished from desire, and imagination becomes both invulnerable and malign" (*The Western Canon* 393). Dread indistinguishable from desire means that fear is necessarily associated with imagining having acquired what has been desired. The major role of imagination in *Macbeth*, resides, here, in the association between fear and the imagining of what is desired.

The second stage of fear is related to the transition between the fear associated with ambition and the fear associated with sexual failure. After Lady Macbeth convinces him to kill Duncan, his brain becomes "oppressed by heat", i.e., he is taken over by extreme anxiety because he is afraid of failing before his wife. Just as in *Much Ado about Nothing*, according to Bloom, in which Benedick's defensive wit is wholly inspired by Beatrice's destructive wit (*Shakespeare* 196), Macbeth's yearn for sexual potency is impelled by Lady Macbeth's destructive "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.49). In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Berowne talks about sexual success as a drive that seems to possess mythical roots. Berowne's speech addresses the quintessential aspect of the power of sexuality, particularly to men.[74] Berowne says that love,

[74] "O, we have made a vow to study, lords, / And in that vow we have forsworn our books; / For when would you, my liege, or you, or you, / In leaden contemplation have found out / Such fiery numbers as the prompting eyes / Of beauty's tutors have enriched you with?" (*LLL* 4.3.287-92). Here, Berowne refers to the vows the four lords have taken in the beginning of the play. He alerts his three friends that, in dull ("leaden") contemplation, one cannot find inspiration to write fiery verses ("numbers") as in a woman's beautiful face ("beauty's tutors"). This is related to a

learned in a lady's eyes, runs ("courses") in every physical sense ("every power"), and gives to each sense[75] a "double power" beyond their usual functions and powers:

> A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind.
> A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound,
> When the suspicious head of theft is stopped.
> Love's feeling is more soft and sensible
> Than are the tender horns of cockled snails.
> Love's tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste. (*LLL* 4.3.303-08).

Hence:

> From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
> They sparkle still the right Promethean fire
> They are the books, the arts, the academes,
> That show, contain, and nourish all the world (4.3.319-22)

Women's eyes throw out sparks like the Promethean fire, but the Promethean fire was not Prometheus's; it was the Olympian fire that was stolen by Prometheus. Berowne attributes mythical power to women's eyes: they, just like the Olympian fire, "show, contain, and nourish all the world." Prometheus wanted to steal this power from the gods and give it to men.

Berowne's speech, to Bloom, reveals his narcissism.[76] In the end, the "play ceases to be Berowne's, and threatens ever more intensely his sense of identity, since he becomes another fool

---

major theme of the play, the conflict between sensuous ("eyes") and intellectual ("books") wisdom – "the opposition between the sensuality and materiality of 'truth' and the sterility and blindness of learning from the 'book'" (NCS 64) – as we see in the next lines: "Other slow arts entirely keep the brain, / And therefore, finding barren practicers, / Scarce show a harvest of their heavy toil; / But love, first learned in a lady's eyes, / Lives not alone immured in the brain, / But with the motion of all elements / Courses as swift as thought in every power, / And gives to every power a double power / Above their functions and their offices" (*LLL* 4.3.293-301).

[75] For some reason, he leaves smell out. It is also absent from Bottom's synesthetic cosmological view (*MND* 4.1.205-07).

[76] Specifically, these two lines: "Then when ourselves we see in ladies' eyes, / Do we not likewise see our learning there?", which are from a deleted passage (NCS 195). Bloom argues that the speech is his "rhetorical triumph, and a wonderful parody of all male erotic triumphalism—then, now, and in time to be. . . . [It reveals] the outrageous narcissism that Berowne gorgeously celebrates" (*Shakespeare* 129), but this narcissism is not absolute since it depends on an outward object: "Freud's version of this Shakespearean wisdom was the grim observation that object-libido began as ego-libido and always could be converted back to ego-libido again" (*Shakespeare* 130). Narcissism is being discussed, here, in the sense of observing one's own reflection in the eyes of a woman. This also occurs in *The Merchant of Venice*: "I swear to thee [Portia], even by thine own fair eyes / Wherein I see myself" (*MV* 5.1.242-43). Berowne's source of nourishment fluctuates between himself and women's eyes, the Olympian fire. The human urge for sexual success, regardless of the narcissism, can also be located in Berowne rhetoric. Sexual success means being the object of someone's else's lust. Berowne, however, talks about women's eyes in the way Bassanio refers to Portia's in *The Merchant of Venice*: "from her eyes / I did receive fair speechless messages" (*MV* 1.1.162-63). In this sense, one's heart can be wounded, as Orlando puts it in *AYLI*: "Wounded it is, but with the eyes of a lady" (*AYLI* 5.2.20).

of love, Rosaline's victim" (*Shakespeare* 137). Women's eyes, the Olympian fire, have the power to move men and shape their behavior. This power that women's eyes have to induce men to fall is a two-way perception, as we can see in Rosaline's words.

> They are worse fools to purchase mocking so.
> That same Berowne I'll torture ere I go.
> . . .
> How I would make him fawn, and beg, and seek,
> And wait the season, and observe the times,
> And spend his prodigal wits in bootless rhymes,
> And shape his service wholly to my hests
> And make him proud to make me proud that jests!
> So pair-taunt-like[77] would I o'ersway his state
> That he should be my fool, and I his fate. (*LLL* 5.2.59-68)

Rosaline is aware that she can shape his services wholly to her "hests", that is, her behests or commands, and "make him proud to make me proud that jests", i.e., according to H. R. Woudhuysen, the editor of the AS edition, "to make Berowne so abject that he is proud to make Rosaline feel proud about her jests aimed against him; there may be a sexual pun on *proud* meaning erect" (240). She is aware that she can "oversway", rule his state; Rosaline's is highly aware that she can be his fate, i.e., that she can control his behavior. To these words, the Princess replies: "None are so surely caught, when they are catched, / As wit turned fool" (*LLL* 5.2.69-70). When a wise one is catched, that is, charmed or captivated, one becomes a fool. The beauty of women, in Berowne's own words, mold or shape the behavior of men: "Your beauty, ladies, / Hath much deformed us, fashioning our humours / Even to the opposed end of our intents" (*LLL* 5.2.730-32).

Romeo also refers the power that eyes have to convey meaning: "Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye / Than twenty of their swords" (*Rom.* 2.2.71-72). In short, it is in *the way a woman looks to a man*, revealing attraction or disgust, that lies the indication of sexual success, but women's eyes can only be nurturing, like the Olympian fire, if they convey attraction. Therefore, regardless of the narcissism implicit in lust, what I aim to emphasize is how lust and sexual success are major elements of human nature and to which Berowne attributes mythical origins.

[77] Both the NCS and the AS editions go with "pair-taunt-like", but the OS edition goes with "fortune-like". The note on the NCS edition explains that "pair-taunt-like" means "one holding a winning hand (a double pair-royal, or 'pair-taunt') in the card game post and pair (*OED* post *sb*.^4 2). . . . 'perttaunt-like' has generated much discussion and many different suggested readings, from 'planet-like' to 'fortune-like' . . ., both trying to make a link to the next line's 'fate'" (142). Considering that a hand a player gets in a card game depends entirely on chance, "pair-taunt-like" and "fortune-like" coincidentally have very close meanings, since both convey chance and are related to fate.

Despite Rosaline's lack of sexual interest in Berowne, she has no trouble acknowledging her ability to control his fate.

My point with this discussion of *Macbeth* is to show that what we see in Macbeth's fear of sexual failure seems to be related to those same mythical roots Berowne talks about. In this sense, it is as if the command of a woman were comparable to that of a god, but I will continue the discussion of this issue in the next subsection.

Lady Macbeth's censure seems, in my view, to refer to ancient, atavistic, i.e., deeply rooted psychological feelings regarding sexuality. The Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson, in a lecture entitled "Tragedy vs Evil", claims that the myth of the fall of Adam and Eve, besides being "the story of the coming of . . . self-consciousness to mankind" (16:07), also means that "women make men self-conscious" (16:42) because "sexual selection among human beings has been a primary force of evolutionary development and sexual selection in human beings is primarily conducted by women" (16:50). Furthermore, "the rejection of a man for reproductive purposes by a woman is the most serious form of rejection that's possible from an evolutionary point of view" (16:59). Peterson adds that there is evidence to believe that it was "the sexual forces that women placed upon man that drove rapid human cortical evolution and development of self-consciousness" (17:40). This atavistic fear that Peterson discusses seems to be what *makes* Macbeth murder Duncan against his will: "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" (1.7.46-47). The fear of sexual failure that Macbeth bears is powerful enough to move him to commit an act completely *against his will*:

> Is this a dagger which I see before me,
> The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee
> I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
> Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
> To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
> A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
> Proceeding from the heat-oppressèd brain?
> I see thee yet, in form as palpable
> As this which now I draw.
> Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going,
> And such an instrument I was to use. (2.1.33-43)

If the dagger of the mind is a suggestion that murdering Duncan will fulfill Macbeth's masculinity, it is ironic because the murder has a reverse effect. In the words of Lady Macbeth herself: "Nought's had, all's spent, / Where our desire is got without content" (3.2.6-7). After the murder, Macbeth seems to stop worrying about the censures of Lady Macbeth (and consequently his sexual performance) since he became constantly affected by fear of being dethroned. Before Macbeth had "murdered" sleep, the most immediately important thing to him was not to fail sexually before Lady Macbeth. After he murdered sleep, the only thing that seems to matter to him was to "resurrect" sleep since his wife's sexual demands seemed to have lost all meaning to him.

In the third stage, it is harder to identify exactly what Macbeth is afraid of because the sensation controlling him is a mix of anger and fear. To assume that he is afraid of being deposed from power seems to be a weak misreading. The dread in which Macbeth is thrown is due to the fact that he does not want to be king and that he is not fit to be king. For this reason, in my view, he will be called a tyrant. One of the thanes fighting alongside Malcolm says: "Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him / Do call it valiant fury, but for certain / He cannot buckle his distempered cause / Within the belt of rule" (5.2.13-16).

The fear of the third stage seems to be related to a sense of displacement. This sense will be key in Macbeth's perception that life is tale told by an idiot, i.e., life is pointless. We already see traces of this conclusion by act three:

> let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
> Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
> In the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead
> Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstasy. (3.2.16-22)

There are two entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* relating "ecstasy" to Shakespeare. The entry related to *Macbeth* reads: "The state of being 'beside oneself', thrown into a frenzy or a stupor, with anxiety, astonishment, fear, or passion. . . . 1605: Shakes. Macb. iii. ii. 19 'To lye In restlesse extasie'" (*OED* Ecstasy 1a). Macbeth is in constant state of stupor, almost paralyzed by fear. Later, he says: "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" (3.2.36). The murder of Duncan is not as near as significant to the "murder" of sleep. It is mostly the pain of fear, not of guilt, that

dominates Macbeth from 2.2 on up until act four. In 3.4, he will be practically paralyzed by fear. In the banquet scene, Macbeth is completely overcome by the anxiety of fear and his imagination is at its strongest. He was able to discern the image of dagger from reality, but this time he cannot distinguish the image of the ghost from reality, and it truly disturbs him:

LADY MACBETH . . . Are you a man?

MACBETH Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that

Which might appal the devil. (3.4.58-60)

Lady Macbeth has to alert him that what he is seeing is not real: "This is the very painting of your fear; / This is the air-drawn dagger which you said / Led you to Duncan" (3.4.61-63). This episode impels him to seek the witches.

The fourth stage is actually the absence of fear:

I have almost forgot the taste of fears;

The time has been, my senses would have cooled

To hear a night-shriek and my fell of hair

Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir

As life were in't. I have supped full with horrors;

Direness familiar to my slaughterous thoughts

Cannot once start me. (5.5.9-15)

In the fifth act, he is not afraid anymore because the witches "tricked" him into believing that he would not be killed, and we also do not see any display of his imagination. By act five, Macbeth has a fully tragic personality, completely taken over by anger. When Macduff tells him he is not born of woman, Macbeth is not re-incited by fear, but by rage:

I will not yield

To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet

And to be baited with the rabble's curse.

Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane

And thou opposed being of no woman born,

Yet I will try the last. Before my body,

I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,

And damned be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!' (5.8.27-34)

With all this in mind, I argue that Macbeth's greatness, in contrast to Hamlet – whose greatness is in his consciousness – is not imagination, ambition, or dexterity in combat, but his resilience. Bradley argues that the "greatness of Lady Macbeth lies almost wholly in courage and force of will" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 371). As Bloom notices, however, Macbeth "refuses to follow Lady Macbeth into madness and suicide" (*Shakespeare* 521). Only one with great resilience can "sup full with horrors" and withstand that which can "appall the devil".

At first, Macbeth might strike an audience as "pathetic" in the current sense of the word.[78] Justin Kurzel's 2015 film adaptation of *Macbeth* depicts the banquet scene (3.4 in the play) as a very awkward moment for the guests, but especially for Lady Macbeth, who is embarrassed by her husband's desperation at supposedly seeing a ghost. If the audience acknowledges Macbeth's anxiety and suffering, however, sympathy can be nurtured for him. The feeling of undeserved suffering, i.e., the full meaning of pathetic, is evoked.

Nuttall argues that "Macbeth, it is often said, is in danger of slipping from the tragic because its hero is so wicked, with the consequence that the conclusion is too 'poetically just' – the dead butcher brought down – and so perhaps a matter as much for satisfaction as for pity or terror" (*Why does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* 77). Another way of phrasing it is saying that the line separating a tragic hero from a comic villain is very thin. It is more evident in Macbeth's case because we see him transitioning from a wavering comic character to a fully tragic one. It is noteworthy that protagonist himself acknowledges this:

> I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on th'other – (1.7.25-28)

[78] The word "pathetic" has a mostly pejorative connotation in current English. This negative sense exclusively associates the pity evoked by suffering with something pitifully inferior or laughable or something that must be scorned instead of sympathized with. The word is Greek, and originally meant "*incident, accident* . . . *what one has experienced*, good or bad, *experience* . . . in bad sense, *misfortune, calamity* . . . of the soul, *emotion, passion* . . . *sensation* (including pleasure and pain) . . . *incidents* of things, *changes* or *happenings* occurring in them" (Liddell-Scott 1285). The German philosopher Friedrich Schiller discusses pathos in its sense associated with tragedy what calls "pathetic sublime", the sensation evoked by a tragedy when we watch undeserved suffering (cf. *Friedrich Schiller* and *Aesthetical and Philosophical Essays*). In the current sense, the feeling of pity is present, but in a necessarily negative way, which is quite distant from the pity involved in the undeserved suffering we identify in tragic characters. As Helena, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, says, love that is not corresponded should be pitied, not despised: "miserable most, to love unloved: / This you should pity rather than despise" (*MND* 3.2.234-35).

Macbeth explicitly states that he has ambition (or imagination), but no will. The metaphor here is intent = a horse being ridden over an obstacle. Regardless of its interpretation,[79] the resulting failure, that is, falling down from a horse, is comical. Macbeth therefore has, if not a fully comic nature, at least a certain tendency toward one before the murder, i.e., he does not aim to impose his will from the start as other Shakespearean tragic characters do. It is Lady Macbeth who first impels him to change his nature. Although she says that her husband's "nature . . . is too full o'th'milk of human kindness" (1.5.15), Macbeth does not possess a genuine comic nature because, as a skilled warrior, he kills people. Direct infliction of violence, in my view, prevents a character from being fully comic. If he had not had been induced to commit the murder, he would have pushed toward a comic stance since he would have accepted the humiliation imposed by Lady Macbeth, i.e., it would have corresponded to him falling off his horse. He would not have begun his transition into a tragic personality had not he resisted the anxiety of his "heat-opressèd brain".

The murder of Duncan is a turning point: "Had I but died an hour before this chance, / I had lived a blessed time, for from this instant, / There's nothing serious in mortality" (2.3.84-86), i.e., there is nothing serious in human existence from this point on. After the murder, Macbeth keeps doing and saying things that express that he is not yet fully evil because he is transitioning from the partial comic to the full tragic. Shortly after Duncan's murder, Macbeth begins to be taken by rage and initiates his transition of nature by killing the two guards: "O, yet I do repent me of my fury / That I did kill them" (2.3.99-100). In 3.2, he says: "Things bad begun, make strong themselves by ill" (3.2.55). Finally, in 4.3, he says that he is "yet but young in deed" (3.4.144) and sets out to see the witches.

By act five, when fully transitioned, he says: "I 'gin to be aweary of the sun / And wish th'estate o'th'world were now undone" (5.5.48-49). In act three, he had said something similar:

> But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
> Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
> In the affliction of these terrible dreams
> That shake us nightly. (3.2.16-19)

[79] "Two interpretations of Macbeth's images have been offered: (1) continuing the equine images of 22-3, Macbeth distinguishes his intent to murder, which he imagines as an unspurred horse, from his ambition to be king, which he imagines as an eager rider who overdoes his vault ('o'erleaps') and thus fails to land in the saddle; (2) horse and rider together fall when the pair fails to over-leap an obstacle. . . . Lady Macbeth's entrance interrupts the speech, but the audience may supply 'side' (of the imaginary horse or obstacle) as Macbeth's next (unspoken) word" (NCS 133).

At this movement, however, he is still fearful. By act five, he is fearless. There is no irony here: he will die trying to undo the frame of things or the state of the world before he is taken over by fear again. By act five, he is a fully tragic personality and is willing to impose his will no matter what, which can only end in ruin.

Macbeth controlled by fear raises the question of how much we can control what we want to feel, i.e., our will. This issue appears in sonnet 29. In this poem, the speaker resents his misfortune: "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes / I all alone beweep my outcast state, / And trouble deaf heav'n with my bootless cries, / And look upon myself, and curse my fate". The speaker acknowledges his insufficiency by wishing himself "like to one more rich in hope, / Featured like him, like him with friends possessed, / Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope". The speaker, therefore, wishes for good looks ("Featured like him"), for more friends ("like him with friends possessed"), to be more skilled ("this man's art") and also for a broader range of opportunities ("that man's scope"), but the most important thing the speaker wishes for in more "quantity" is hope. According to Burrow, to be "one more rich in hope" means to be "someone blessed by having a greater capacity for hope" (Burrow 438). The fact that the speaker does not exert control over looks, the number of friends and the range of opportunities available is evident to a certain degree. The uncertain control over the "amount of hope" he possesses, however, is not at all evident. Can the speaker change his behavior so that he becomes more hopeful? If we do not have control over how hopeful we are, we end up frustrated because we realize our insufficiency, i.e., our limitation regarding our own will. The correspondent element of "hope" in *Macbeth* is fear. Just as the speaker of sonnet 29 would like to have more hope, Macbeth would probably like to have less fear, but neither of them is able to control this psychological feature in themselves. If Macbeth were able to control his own fear and to wipe it out of his psyche, could his story have ended differently?

6.1.3. Disturbing the Concealment: The Role of Lady Macbeth

According to Bloom, so "much are the Macbeths made for sublimity, figures of fiery eros as they are, that their political and dynastic ambitions seem grotesquely inadequate to their mutual desires. Why do they want the crown?" (*Shakespeare* 522). Why does Lady Macbeth want to become queen? The best answer to this seems to be provided by an Old Lady, a friend of Anne Bullen, in *King Henry VIII*: "You that have so fair parts of woman on you, / Have too a woman's

heart, which ever yet / Affected eminence, wealth, sovereignty" (*H8* 2.3.27-29).[80] "To affect" here means to yearn for: it is in the nature of women to yearn for eminence, wealth, sovereignty. What drives Macbeth's will to commit the murder from 1.3 to 1.7 is ambition. His ambition, in turn, is driven by the need to satisfy his wife sexually. From 1.7 to 2.2, what drives Macbeth is fear of sexual failure. Macbeth goes from being ambition's fool to being, as Philio, one of Antony's followers, puts it when referring to Cleopatra's dominance over Antony, a strumpet's fool: "The triple pillar of the world transformed / Into a strumpet's fool" (*Ant.* 12-13). Perhaps "strumpet" is a reductive way of understanding Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra, but this derogatory qualifier comes as a retort to the immense power that women can exert over men.

The relationship paradigm between the Macbeths is similar to that between Katherine and Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, i.e., the husband obeys the wife lest their relationship crumbles. Berry, in the article "*Macbeth*: The Sexual Underplot", claims that "Lady Macbeth's imposition of will over her husband has a subtext of sexual suasion" (102). The passage from the play Berry uses as evidence for this claim is this:

> To beguile the time,
> Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
> Your hand, your tongue; look like th'innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
> Must be provided for, and you shall put
> This night's great business into my dispatch,
> Which shall to all our nights and days to come
> Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom. (1.5.61-68)

Berry argues that 1.5.64-68, "following the sequence *beguile, bear welcome in your eye, Your hand, your tongue*, reads like a scarcely veiled sexual promise. Why 'nights'? And why the order, 'nights *and days*'?" (103). He also discusses the association between the images of hell and of female genitalia, as discussed in the previous chapter. There is therefore an ambivalence in the experience of sexuality in the sense that it is *simultaneously* painful and pleasurable.

We could also understand the ambivalence of sexuality in the sense that it can be a source – although not simultaneously – of both glory and ruin, success and failure. Sexual failure on Macbeth's part is reflected in Lady Macbeth's own words: "Nought's had, all's spent, / Where our

[80] The play tells the story of how Henry and Anne met and depicts the birth of queen Elizabeth.

desire is got without content" (3.2.6-7). Lady Macbeth has attained her "desire" (that is, becoming queen), but "without content" (without sexual satisfaction). According to Berry, "spent" has the senses of "expenditure, loss and waste, and sexual discharge" (110). As the main plot unfolds, the sexual underplot has its final statement, according to Berry, in the sleep-walking scene (5.1) because it is the "terminal revelation of Lady Macbeth's mind" (111). The effect of lack of sexual satisfaction is also seen in Ophelia. As Bloom, explains, famously "a paragon of courage and so no coward, Macbeth nevertheless is in a perpetual state of fear. Of what? Part of the answer seems to be his fear of impotence, a dread related as much to his overwhelming power of imagination as to his shared dream of greatness with Lady Macbeth" (*Shakespeare* 530). The sexual underplot in *Macbeth* reveals the reciprocal influence that sexual performance has in relation to will. Reciprocal in the sense that sexual success stimulates will while failure crushes it; and this influence has mythical roots.

Macbeth's hesitation to kill Duncan is comparable to Orestes' hesitation to kill Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*.[81] Orestes hesitates to kill his mother, but is reminded of his task by Pylades, who reminds Orestes of the oracles and oaths engendered by Apollo:

> ORESTES
> What shall I do, Pylades? Be shamed to kill my mother?
> PYLADES
> What then becomes thereafter of the oracles
> declared by Loxias at Pytho? What of sworn oaths?
> Count all men hateful to you rather than the gods.
> ORESTES
> I judge that you win. Your advice is good. (*The Libation Bearers* 899-902)

Likewise, Macbeth hesitates to kill Duncan but is re-prompted by Lady Macbeth. It is possible to suggest a similarity between Lady Macbeth and Apollo – who had commanded Orestes to kill

[81] *The Libation Bearers* is the second play of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy, taking place many years after the murder of Agamenon. It details the revenge of Electra, Agamemnon's daughter, and Orestes, his son, who returns to Argos, with his cousin Pylades, to take revenge on Clytemnestra, their mother, as an order from Apollo, for killing Agamemnon. The siblings invoke the aid of Agamemnon's ghost in their plan to avenge their father. Orestes then slays Aegisthus (Clytemnestra' current husband), but his subsequent murder of Clytemnestra is committed reluctantly at Apollo's bidding.

Clytemnestra. Lady Macbeth's command would, in this way, be comparable to that of a god's. The exchange in *Macbeth* in which Lady Macbeth resembles a goddess follows:

> Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting I dare not wait upon I would,
> Like the poor cat i'th'adage?
> MACBETH Prithee, peace.
> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more is none.
> LADY MACBETH What beast was't then
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man.
> And to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man. . . .
> MACBETH If we should fail?
> LADY MACBETH We fail?[82]
> But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
> And we'll not fail. . . .
> MACBETH Bring forth men-children only,
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males. (1.7.41-74)

According to A. R. Braunmuller, the editor of NCS edition, "screw your courage to the sticking-place" means to "tighten, make taut, your courage to the limit. The underlying metaphor may be from tightening the tuning pegs of a stringed instrument or from winding up the cord on a crossbow. . . . The 'sticking-place' may also be the place at which a moral individual hesitates or the place beyond which a moral individual refuses to go or a stab-wound" (NCS 135). Lady Macbeth is telling him to become steadfast and sturdy so as to proceed with the murder. Her command has a clear sexual connotation. Her first response to Macbeth's refusal shows that, at

[82] "**We fail?** F[irst Folio]'s question mark (which stood for both modern '?' and '!') can represent either interrogation (sincere or scornful) or exclamation (surprised, scornful, or resigned)" (NCS 135). There does not seem to be ambiguity here therefore.

first, there is an agreement to a certain point at least as to the condition of one who kills to obtain what one wants: it is not a person, but a beast. And yet, Lady Macbeth quickly turns that over and convinces Macbeth that a beast is something more (in the sense of being better) than a man. Macbeth compares mankind to dogs (3.1.91-100), which is reductive when considered in isolation. Portia's cosmological view, like Timon's – we are all thieves – therefore, is somewhat reductive, but, however reductive, still holds truth. The point of the metaphor (man = dog) employed by Macbeth, in my view, is to remind us that, while we cannot be reduced to dogs, we still cannot escape our animalistic condition. Lady Macbeth's command is godlike, i.e., Lady Macbeth *creates* moral meaning by giving commands and having them obeyed.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony blames the gods for clouding his judgement and for being led into committing mistakes:

> But when we in our viciousness grow hard —
> O, misery on't! — the wise gods seel our eyes,
> In our own filth drop our clear judgements, make us
> Adore our errors, laugh at's while we strut
> To our confusion. (*Ant* 3.13.114-18)

Just as Antony was Cleopatra's fool, so Macbeth is Lady Macbeth's fool and is strutting to his own confusion, that is, his own ruin. As already mentioned earlier in this chapter, Berowne, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, attributes the influence of sexuality in human will to mythical roots, and we see another instance of this in Lady Macbeth's command to her husband, which is comparable to that of a god.

The subjugation of men to women is portrayed with comic sense elsewhere in Shakespeare. Just like *The Comedy of Errors* (briefly discussed in chapter 1), *The Taming of the Shrew* is also often classified as a farce. 2.1, one of key scenes of the play, is often staged as a "fight" between Katherina and Petruchio:

> PETRUCHIO Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting?
> In his tail.
> KATHERINA In his tongue.
> PETRUCHIO Whose tongue?
> KATHERINA Yours, if you talk of tales, and so farewell.
> *[She turns to go.]*

PETRUCHIO What, with my tongue in your tail? Nay, come again. (2.1.209-12)

In *A Lover's Complaint*, the encounters of the young man (with whom the main character is in love with) with other women are characterized as "battles":

The accident which brought me to her eye
Upon the moment did her force subdue,
And now she would the cagèd cloister fly:
Religious love put out religion's eye.
Not to be tempted would she be immured,
And now to tempt all liberty procured. (*A Lover's Complaint* 247-52)

Pain, for most of Shakespeare's couples, seems to also be a necessary element of sexuality.

In *Love's Labours' Lost*, Berowne and Rosaline engage in what Leonato, referring to Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*, calls "skirmish of wit" (*Ado* 1.1.47):

BEROWNE Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?
ROSALINE Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?
BEROWNE I know you did.
ROSALINE How needless was it then
To ask the question!
BEROWNE You must not be so quick.
ROSALINE 'Tis long of you that spur me with such questions.
BEROWNE Your wit's too hot, it speeds too fast, twill tire.
ROSALINE Not till it leave the rider in the mire.
BEROWNE What time o'day?
ROSALINE The hour that fools should ask.
BEROWNE Now fair befall your mask.
ROSALINE Fair fall the face it covers.
BEROWNE And send you many lovers.
ROSALINE Amen, so you be none.
BEROWNE Nay, then will I be gone. (*LLL* 2.1.113-25)

This war of wits is, of course, prompted by sexual tension and ends up also enhancing it. This delight in sexual tension shows, in my view, a delight in pain. This instance of Shakespearean wisdom is reformulated by Freud in the essay "The Economic Problem of Masochism", in which

he claims that "unpleasure ought thus to coincide with a heightening, and every pleasure with a lowering, of mental tension due to stimulus . . . [but it also] cannot be doubted that there are pleasurable tensions and unpleasurable relaxations of tension. The state of sexual excitation is the most striking example of a pleasurable increase of stimulus of this sort" ("The Economic Problem of Masochism" 159-160). Love's labor is a building up of tension, at least from Berowne's end: "My love to thee is sound, *sans* crack or flaw" (*LLL* 5.2.415), he says after acknowledging that he had been outsmarted by Rosaline. She, notwithstanding, does not seem to actually have been interested in him anyway: "*Sans* '*sans'*, I pray you" (*LLL* 5.2.416). Love's labor, i.e., sexual tension, is thus lost in the end.

Pain seems to an element that is almost always present in human relations. What varies is the manner and the degree of how pain is received. In general, in a relationship between husband and wife, if the husband tolerates the pain of obeying his wife, the current cycle of pain is maintained, which results in a comic sense, i.e., salvation. In *Macbeth*, however, the relation is inverted: by yielding to his wife's requests, Macbeth has brought on destruction. If Macbeth had not obeyed his wife, he would have been a comic character, facing the pain of humiliation before his wife, but meeting salvation nevertheless.

6.2. Macbeth's Final Soliloquy: The Core of the Shakespearean Tragic Sense

Macbeth had a chance to avoid stepping into the tragic side of the border. Had he not given in into Lady Macbeth's yearn for royalty, he would have undergone the shame of the humiliation from his wife, but he also would have spared at least a few innocent Scottish lives. The fear of failing his wife (among other reasons), however, led him to murder Duncan. After the murder, there was no turning back: Macbeth was on his way of consolidating a fully tragic nature.

6.2.1. Childlessness and Hatred

Hatred, anger, and the yearning for royalty and revenge against time that follows from the Macbeths' part seems to be related to childlessness. In 4.3., Macduff says that Macbeth "has no children" (4.3.218). The question of parental status is highly relevant because it seems to be intimately related to hatred. According to what Tom Clayton argues in "Who 'Has No Children" in *Macbeth*?", the

> ambiguous question of parental status is forced tantalizingly upon any interpreter's attention, critical or theatrical, at several points. Presumably we are meant to believe that Lady Macbeth has "given suck" (1.7.54), as she says she has; and though Macbeth tells her to "Bring forth men-children only!" (1.7.72), there is no evidence in the received text of when she might have had this experience of breast-feeding . . . , and no explicit reference made to a child or children dead or alive begotten by Macbeth *or* born to Lady Macbeth. (Who "Has No Children" in *Macbeth*? 93)

Clayton also argues that

> Macbeth's barrenness is significant as an unspecified but implicit motive for his killing others and their children, and it is significant in another—perhaps more—important way as symbolizing a moral desiccation and a spiritual sterility contrasting with the symbolic green thumbs (or fingers) of the "gardener"-kings, both Duncan the unfortunate and too trusting, who in 1.4.28–29 says he has "begun to *plant* thee [Macbeth], and will labor / To make thee full of *growing*"; and his son and heir, Malcolm, who, summing up his immediate obligations and responsibilities at the end of the play, says,
>
> > What's more to do
> > Which would be *planted* newly with the time,
> > . . . . .
> > . . . This, and what needful else
> > That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,
> > We will perform in measure, time, and place.
> >
> > (5.9.30–31, 37–39, emphasis added) (Who "Has No Children" in *Macbeth*? 95-96)

Clayton emphasizes that the rage that begins to build up in Macbeth from 2.2. on is associated with a hatred that stems from childlessness regarding the Youth from the sonnets.[83] Freud suggested that "many subtle interrelations in the plot . . . point to a common origin of them in the theme of childlessness" ("Some Character-Types Met With In Psycho-Analytic Work" 322). Bloom argues that what

> Freud hints at is the essence of the play: childlessness, empty ambition, the butchery of the fatherly Duncan, so mild and good that neither of the Macbeths feels even a touch of *personal* ambivalence about him. But however they became childless, their revenge against

[83] Cf. Shakespeare's initial sequence of 17 sonnets.

> time is usurpation, murder, and an attempt to cancel the future: all of those tomorrows and tomorrows and tomorrows whose petty pace so oppresses Macbeth. (*The Western Canon* 390-91)

The rage in Macbeth, however, only seems to develop after the murder. It is highly suggestive that there is a subtly concealed hatred in Lady Macbeth, resulting from childlessness, that drives her to scold Macbeth and convince him to commit the murder. Macbeth's hatred for the world, therefore, develops as a consequence of Lady Macbeth's primeval hatred.

We must bear in mind, however, that the reality of *Macbeth* is shrouded in ambivalence. Is the act of bearing children an exclusively positive one? Bearing children is a form of enabling the future, that is, of enabling tomorrows and tomorrows and tomorrows. The text itself seems to associate childbearing with time. "To plant" is twice associated with producing offspring. "Seeds" appears twice, once associated with childbearing (3.1.78), another with the mystery of time (1.3.56), but time is not exactly a joyful entity that disseminates good in *Macbeth*. In this sense, time is as ambivalent as producing offspring for a simple reason: to bring children into the world is to bring more hatred – and more ambivalence – into the world. I rephrase my question: is childbearing devoid of ambivalence, that is, is it an act of pure love and selflessness? The hatred associated with not bringing children into the world, in the case of the Macbeths, might be isolated, i.e., unambivalent. That is to say that it is an exclusively negative hatred, but this does not interfere with the natural ambivalence of having children. The ambivalence of hatred, therefore, lies in Macbeth's rage. According to Bloom, "Shakespearean ambivalence . . . diverts self-hatred into hatred of the other" (*Shakespeare* 190). After the murder, Macbeth is taken by a rage that would lead him to "undo the state of the world" or "disjoint the frame of things". Macbeth, however, is part of the frame of things itself – or of the state of the world. In conclusion, his hatred is highly ambivalent, and, after the murder, Macbeth sets out to destroy the world, but the upshot of this objective will be self-destruction.

6.2.2. Time and Ambivalence

Ambivalence is an element of human psyche, a notion formally developed in psychology and psychoanalysis. According to Bloom, "ambivalence, popularized by Sigmund Freud, remains central to Shakespeare, and to a scandalous extent was Shakespeare's own invention"

(*Shakespeare* 11). Let us briefly discuss how ambivalence is represented in Shakespeare through the analysis of a few characters.

In chapter 2, I discussed the ambivalence of hatred in the relationship between Shylock and Antonio. It is important to have in mind that ambivalence is the simultaneous occurrence of two opposing elements, and not two sequential and distinct moments: for example, one loves a person today and on the next day one hates that same person. Ambivalence, therefore, is simultaneous loathing and delight. The reality of *Macbeth* is replete with in ambivalence. It is an element of the human psyche that seems to mold human affections in specific ways.

The ambivalence of sexuality is in that the drive to satisfy sexual needs is so strong that it can also be destructive. It is not surprising that Berowne compares lust to the Olympian fire – whose theft had negative consequences to Prometheus – and Imogen, to a horse with wings (*Cym.* 3.2.48),[84] which, albeit the closest resemblance being Pegasus, is also reminiscent of Icarus. One specific feature of Shakespearean tragedy is an extreme revulsion toward sexuality, which is mostly observed in the protagonists, as discussed in the previous chapter. A primary form of it, however, does not necessarily entail tragedy. As discussed previously, "hell" is used as an image for female genitals. This image associates a negative sense with a source of pleasure to men. That is to say that sex simultaneously aggravates and causes pleasure. In *King Lear*, this association becomes structural: Lear grows to hate the structure of reality for not being loved as much as he needs and wants. The image he uses for that hatred is, again, hell, referring to the female genitalia.

The ambivalence of death is in that it is a relief from a worse pain. This is what is suggested by both Romeo and Juliet – as discussed in the Introduction – and Antony and Cleopatra: "I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and / Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now / All length is torture" (*Ant.* 4.14.44-46). Antony says this after he is told of the supposed death of Cleopatra. The pain of death is lesser than the pain of not being able to have one's will fulfilled. And this is Cleopatra: "If thou and nature can so gently part, / The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, / Which hurts, and is desired" (*Ant.* 5.2.288-90). When one is tortured, death becomes a desired pain, as Cleopatra says, a lover's pinch. There is no metaphysics here: death is horrible in itself, as Claudio, in *Measure for Measure*, tells us:

Ay, but to die and go we know not where,

[84] Imogen is the daughter of king Cymbeline in the play named after the king. *Cymbeline* is one of the last plays Shakespeare wrote and is currently classified as a romance.

To lie in cold obstruction and to rot,
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod, and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice,
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world, or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling; 'tis too horrible.
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death. (*MM* 3.1.118-32)

Does death end the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to? Or does it take us to the undiscovered country, where we face even worse shocks? The ambivalence of death, again, is in that it is a destructive relief. In other words, death is necessarily destructive, but it also can be relieving, as we seen in Richard's account in prison:

Then am I kinged again, and by and by
Think that I am unkinged by Bullingbrook,
And straight am nothing. But whate'er I be
Nor I nor any man that but man is
With nothing shall be pleased till he be eased
With being nothing. (*R2* 5.5.36-41)

It is, therefore, similar to sex in the sense that it is relieving. Is this why, to Isabella, sex equals death? We also see this in in this dialogue between Casca and Brutus in *Julius Caesar*:[85]

CASCA
Why, he that cuts off twenty years of life
Cuts off so many years of fearing death.

[85] In this play, Shakespeare recounts the fall of one of ancient Rome's most famous generals. Brutus and Cassius devise a plot against Julius Caesar, which results in his being stabbed by several other characters. The play culminates with Antony and Octavius' final triumph over the rebellious plotters.

BRUTUS

Grant that, and then is death a benefit.

So are we Caesar's friends, that have abridged

His time of fearing death. (*JC* 3.1.105)

To Casca and Brutus, death becomes a gift., a benefit: killing Caesar would be good to him since they would shorten the amount of time that he would have spent fearing death. However ironical Casca and Brutus might be in their remarks here, what they say holds a pragmatic truth.

The other entry in the *OED* relating "ecstasy" to Shakespeare (I discussed the first one in the previous section) reads: "By early writers applied vaguely, or with conflicting attempts at precise definition, to all morbid states characterized by unconsciousness, as swoon, trance, catalepsy, etc. . . . 1604: Shakes. Oth. iv. i. 80, 'I..layd good scuses vpon your extasie [Stage direction to line 40: Falls into a trance]' (*OED* Ecstasy 2a). The meaning of "ecstasy" employed by Shakespeare entails a strong pain capable of rendering one beside oneself. It is not, however, unambivalent pain, i.e., it is bound to the excitement of anxiety, which, as Freud indicated, in his essay about masochisms, is pleasing. What Freud posits, however, has been suspected long before by poets. There is a deep ambivalence in excitement, that is, there can be *simultaneously* pain in pleasure and vice-versa. Bloom contends:

> Shakespeare's sense of ambivalence is not Freud's, though clearly Freud . . . founds his account of ambivalence upon materials initially supplied by Shakespeare. Primal ambivalence, whether in Shakespeare or in Freud, need not result from social over determinations. . . . Freudian ambivalence is simultaneous love and hatred directed toward the same person; Shakespearean ambivalence, subtler and more frightening, diverts self-hatred into hatred of the other, and associates the other with lost possibilities of the self. Hamlet, whatever his protestations, is truly not interested in revenge, since no one could be more aware that in revenge all persons blend into one another; (*Shakespeare* 189-90)

Additionally, ambivalence, "the peculiar mark of Hal's [in the two parts of *King Hery IV*] psyche, means something very different in the fencing relationship of Beatrice and Benedick [in *Much Ado About Nothing*]" (*Shakespeare* 192). Furthermore, the "ambivalence in her [Beatrice's] will is the play's ultimate strength, the fountain of its comic exuberance. The longer you ponder Beatrice, the more enigmatic she becomes" (*Shakespeare* 196). Moreover, the

> fascination of Beatrice is founded upon her extraordinary blend of merriment and bitterness, in contrast to the simpler Kate the Shrew. Beatrice has more affinity to the dark Rosaline of *Loue's Labour's Lost*, though Rosaline's merriment is not very innocent. Shakespearean foregrounding rather subtly allows some clues for Beatrice's nature, and perhaps for her negative obsession with Benedick, who is at once the only threat to her freedom and the inevitable path out of her incessant toughness of spirit. (*Shakespeare* 197)

Finally, what seems to explain "her [Beatrice's] vitalizing firepower, her continuous verve and drive, the 'merriment' that at once dazzles and wears out her world" (*Shakespeare* 198) is the ambivalent nature of her will. The couple does not reach a full agreement at the closing of the play:

> BENEDICK I will have thee, but by this light I take thee for pity.
>
> BEATRICE I would not deny you, but by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told, you were in a consumption. (*Ado* 5.4.91-95)

Her blend of merriment and bitterness that simultaneously dazzles and wears out her world can only be partially contained by Benedick, for whom she will never cease to nurture negative sentiments, but who is also able to compel her to willingly tame her incessant spirit.

Prince Hal, in the two parts of *King Henry IV*, as Bloom suggested, is, on the other hand, different from Beatrice. While Beatrice's ambivalence fuels the comic sense of *Much Ado about Nothing*, Hal's – probably the most ambivalent character created by Shakespeare – ambivalence shows itself to be much darker. He interacts with both Henry IV, his father, and Falstaff ambivalently. He navigates between the world of violence and politics (represented by the king) and the world of pleasure and play (represented by Falstaff) – both necessarily opposite – seamlessly. He is not, however, an insensitive monster who only aims to take avail of both his father figures because he actually feels affection for them both, but, at the same time, he knows that both of them will have to be eliminated in order for him to move on. Hal is not a double-faced man (which would mean that he is a mere deceiver), he is, as Falstaff indirectly calls him, a "double man" (*1H4* 5.4.133). Hal is completely self-aware:

> PRINCE
>
> I know you all, and will a while uphold
>
> The unyoked humour of your idleness.
>
> Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
>
> Who doth permit the base contagious clouds

To smother up his beauty from the world

. . .

So when this loose behaviour I throw off,

And pay the debt I never promisèd,

By how much better than my word I am,

By so much shall I falsify men's hopes. (*1H4* 1.2.155-71)

He knows that he will leave behind the rowdy lifestyle of Eastcheap, which Falstaff had seduced him into, to accept his duty of becoming king. In *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, Hal's ambivalence is expressed most sublimely in the scene in which he takes the crown, lying beside the apparently dead king, and puts it on his head:

Why doth the crown lie there upon his pillow

Being so troublesome a bedfellow?

O polished perturbation! Golden care!

That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide

To many a watchful night – sleep with it now!

Yet not so sound, and half so deeply sweet

As he whose brow, with homely biggen bound,

Snores out the watch of night. O majesty!

When thou dost pinch thy bearer, thou dost sit

Like a rich armour worn in heat of day,

That scald'st with safety; by his gates of breath

There lies a downy feather which stirs not:

Did he suspire, that light and weightless down

Perforce must move. My gracious lord, my father!

This sleep is sound indeed, this is a sleep

That from this golden rigol hath divorced

So many English kings. Thy due from me

Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood,

Which nature, love, and filial tenderness

Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously.

My due from thee is this imperial crown

Which, as immediate from thy place and blood,
Derives itself to me.
[*Putting it on his head*] (*2H4* 4.2.151-73)

Another relevant element in this scene is the ambivalence of the crown itself. The crown is like an armor that "scald'st with safety", i.e., it burns the one it is supposed to protect, which is a key element of the ambivalence of kinghood, as we see in *Macbeth*. The King notices Hal's hastiness in presuming his death: "Is he so hasty, that he doth suppose / My sleep my death?" (*2H4* 4.2.190-91). Hal is found by Warwick, who reports how affected he was by grief:

My lord, I found the prince in the next room,
Washing with kindly tears his gentle cheeks,
With such a deep demeanour in great sorrow
That tyranny, which never quaffed but blood,
Would, by beholding him, have washed his knife
With gentle eye-drops. (*2H4* 4.2.211-16)

The King, even while in a weakened state, is aware of Hal's nature:

Thou hidst a thousand daggers in thy thoughts,
Whom thou hast whetted on thy stony heart
To stab at half an hour of my life.
What, canst thou not forbear me half an hour? (*2H4* 4.2.235-38)

Then, after a long speech, Hal, because of his double nature, manages to seduce the dying king: "God put in thy mind to take it hence, / That thou mightst win the more thy father's love, / Pleading so wisely in excuse of it" (*2H4* 4.2.306-09). Hal's "double man", therefore, is revealed by his heightened ambivalence. He wants power, but, for him to have power, the king has to die. He also genuinely feels grief for his father which also allow a glance into his ambivalent nature.

Coriolanus provides another instance of it when Aufidius phrases greatly the association between power and ambivalence:

So our virtues
Lie in th'interpretation of the time,
And power, unto itself most commendable,
Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair
T'extol what it hath done. (*Cor*. 4.7.49-53)

Power, which in itself seems good, is doomed to fall into a tomb as much as to be talked about. Macbeth phrases this as "going back is the same as moving forward": "I am in blood / Stepped in so far that should I wade no more / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (3.4.136-38). The ambivalence of power is in that, like sex, the unrelentless search for success can bring ruin.

My point with this discussion is to show that ambivalence seems to be an inescapable condition for the psyche of many Shakespearean characters. The most patent instance of ambivalence in *Macbeth* is the witches' firs equivocation: "Fair is foul and foul is fair", which can be understood in several ways. First, the linguistic view. If two terms of opposed semantic values are equivalent, they lose their meaning. We need semantic parameters to establish meaning, i.e., we need to able to differentiate inside from outside, above from below and fair from foul. If we cannot, then, there is no meaning at all – which is what Macbeth concludes. As Bradley explains, moral "distinctions do not . . . exist for her [Lady Macbeth]; or rather they are inverted: 'good' means to her the crown and whatever is required to obtain it, 'evil' whatever stands in the way of its attainment" (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 370). A purely linguistical interpretation of the equivocation results in an inversion or nullification of semantic values. After all, if a "supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good" (3.1.129-30), then, what is it?

Another way to understand the equivocation is in terms of external conflict, i.e., between Macbeth and the world, which we could call dialectic. It can be observed when Macbeth says the equivocation: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.36). "Foul" refers to weather, while "fair" refers to his success in battle. In this sense, fair (what is good to Macbeth) is foul (is bad to the world). After Macbeth wins the skirmish against the prior thane of Cawdor, Duncan decides to promote him and announces: "What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won" (1.2.67). Therefore, what is foul to Cawdor is fair to Macbeth. There is, however, irony in this line in the sense that Duncan will be murdered by Macbeth, who will usurp the crown. What is foul to Duncan, therefore, is fair to Macbeth. Macbeth's killing spree unfolds, and the next victims are Banquo, Lady Macduff, and her children. Only after Macbeth is killed, Macduff pronounces: "The time is free" (5.9.22). From this, we infer that foul (what is bad to Macbeth) is fair (is good to the world). In short, what is good to Macbeth is bad to the world and vice-versa.

The equivocation can also be read in terms of internal conflict, which reveals the ambivalence of the human psyche. It is present, for example, in the image of the dagger, which, according to Bloom, receives "impetus from Macbeth's will. Yet he cannot control his own

imaginative thrust" (*Macbeth*: *Dagger of the Mind* 23). The dagger is Macbeth's will, ambition, and even sexual desire, but the dagger can also be an image for pain, as is revealed by Hamlet, when, on his way to confront his mother, he declares he "will speak daggers to her but use none" (*Ham*. 3.3.357), especially if we consider that Macbeth is under coercion. The dagger, therefore, represents something good, positive, fair, and, simultaneously, bad, negative, foul. Bloom claims that for

> Macbeth, to fantasize is to have leaped the gap over the will and be on the other side of having performed the act. The time is not free until Macbeth is slain, because temporal forebodings are always realized in his realm, even before he has usurped power . . . . the Macbeth complex barely hides the desire for self-destruction. Freud named it the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, but I prefer the doom-eagerness and atmospheric intensity conveyed by the Macbeth complex. (*The Western Canon* 393)

What Bloom is saying here is that ambivalence pervades even imagination. In *Macbeth*, temporal forebodings are always realized, i.e., what is imagined is a fact, *even if it has not yet happened*. This is why Macbeth is "rapt" in state in which "nothing is / But what is not" (3.1.140-41). What Macbeth imagines is already a reality *to him*. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud explains what was to become his "death drive":

> *It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life . . . it is possible to specify this final goal of all organic striving. It would be in contradiction to the conservative nature of the instincts if the goal of life were a state of things which had never yet been attained. On the contrary, it must be an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that '*the aim of all life is death*' and, looking backwards, that '*inanimate things existed before living ones*' . . . The hypothesis of self-preservative instincts, such as we attribute to all living beings, stands in marked opposition to the idea that instinctual life as a whole serves to bring about death. Seen in this light, the theoretical importance of the

> instincts of self-preservation, of self-assertion and of mastery greatly diminishes. They are component instincts whose function it is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself. . . . What we are left with is the fact that the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion. . . . Hence arises the paradoxical situation that the living organism struggles most energetically against events (dangers, in fact) which might help it to attain its life's aim rapidly—by a kind of short-circuit. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 36-39)

Freud interprets an organism's drive to avoid danger only as a way of avoiding a short-circuit to death. That is to say that an organism seeks to die in its own fashion. If Macbeth has desire for self-destruction, every tragic character has one because every one of them wants to establish a new cycle of pain – while comic characters just accept the established one. Macbeth, as I have argued, by act five, is a fully tragic personality. He wishes the world would be undone and will die with a harness in his back (5.5.49-51). He will die, but on his own terms, in his own fashion. As a fully tragic character, he will attempt to impose his will and his own cycle of pain, even if such attempt is doomed to fail from the start. This is the Macbeth complex, the complex, I argue, of all Shakespearean tragic characters. Bloom states that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is a rereading of *Macbeth* (*The Western Canon* 375). In this sense, instead of using Freud's death drive to analyze *Macbeth*, we should be using the Macbeth complex to analyze *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Bloom explains that, in "*Macbeth*, the ambivalence is so prevalent that time itself becomes its representation" (*Western Canon* 390). In *All's Well that Ends Well*, a lord seems to anticipate what would become the structure of reality in *Macbeth*: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together. Our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not, and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues" (*AWW* 4.3.71-74). According to Goddard, from

> end to end, *Macbeth* is packed with these Delphic effects as is no other work of Shakespeare's: words, acts, and situations which may be interpreted or taken in two ways at the peril of the chooser and which in the aggregate produce an overwhelming conviction that behind the visible world lies another world, immeasurably wider and deeper, on its relation to which human destiny turns. As a face now reveals and now conceals the life behind it, so the visible world now hides this other world as does a wall, now opens on it

> as does a door. In either case it is *there*–there not as a matter of philosophical speculation or of theological tradition or hypothesis, but there as a matter of psychic fact.
>
> Scholars who dismiss the supernatural element in *Macbeth* as stage convention or condescension to popular superstition stamp themselves as hopelessly insensitive not merely to poetry but to sincerity. Not only the plot and characters of the play, which are up to a certain point the author's inventions, but its music, imagery, and atmosphere—effects only partly under his conscious control—unite in giving the impression of mighty and inscrutable forces behind human life. (*The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Vol. 2 118)

That "other world" *is there*, it is physically present, as a matter of psychic fact. Ambivalence is a psychic fact; it is the simultaneity of pleasure and pain which usually results from experiencing reality. In *Macbeth*, it is crucial, nonetheless, to notice that *ambivalence is intimately related to nature*. Ambivalence, therefore, as a psychic fact, is part of the image of physical nature, which is mostly condensed in an extended image of time. As McAlindon suggests, the "most important insight furnished by the play is that the equivocating witches and the malignant spirits that tend on mortal thoughts are potent precisely because they are in tune with the bewildering doubleness of the natural order" (*Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos* 200). Ambivalence is, in other words, part of the larger image of fate devised in *Macbeth*. It seems that the major trope governing the play is metonym; time (a metonym of nature) is the ruling entity, and ambivalence is a composing element of it – which makes it a metonym of time. Finally, sexual lust, hatred, and fear of death are composing elements of ambivalence, i.e., these elements are metonyms for ambivalence. The image of fate, thus, is a sequence of metonyms.

6.2.3. The Witches, the Spirits and Fate

Ambivalence, again, in all its several forms, along with all the other elements that compose the image of fate, pervades the entire play. The witches seem to serve the purpose of personification of fate so that Macbeth and Banquo, mere mortals, would interact with fate through characters with human resemblance. Laura Shamas, in *"We* three*"*, a book dedicated to the witches in *Macbeth*, details key classical antecedents incorporated into the witches. She suggests that

> the Sisters here appear to function as special Seers, or the Fates – not as real women. This correlates to the definition of the "Wyrdes or Weirds" who were: "The Anglo-Saxon fates, usually three sisters, who weave the destiny of man. Originally, they were closely parallel

> to the Norns [. . .] Wyrd is sometimes mentioned as the goddess of Fate, mother of the Norns" ("Wyrdes"). (10)

Shamas also expounds that the *Oxford English Dictionary Online 2006* lists that the noun "weird" (a qualifier for the sisters) has two greatly "relevant meanings which were in use before Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*: '1. The principle, power, or agency by which events are predetermined; fate, destiny. […] 2.pl. The Fates, the three goddesses supposed to determine the course of human life'" (14). Moreover:

> The adjective form actually changes spelling three times in Shakespeare's dramatization of *Macbeth*: "The evolution of the forms found in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was app. from **weyrd* to *weyard* (retained in Acts III and IV in the First Folio) and *weyward* (used in Acts I and II); the latter was no doubt due to association with *wayward*, a word used many times by Shakespeare)" ("Weird" a.). . . . Practically speaking, the three different forms of "weyrd," "weyward," and "weyard" found in transcriptions of the script were probably prosody notations for future productions—what would be termed "production notes" today—to ensure a two-syllable pronunciation of the word. Many modern scholars notate it as "weïrd" to ensure the same dissyllabic diction (Muir *Arden* 14n32) . . . The archetypal implications of these three variations are worthy of further exploration: thus, Shakespeare's Weird Sisters are both uniquely 'weird' and 'wayward.' It is significant that there are three variations of the adjective; this is in keeping with the significance of the number 'three' in *Macbeth*. (15)

Furthermore, "weyward" or "wayward"

> meant "self-willed" in the fourteenth century, and by the sixteenth century, it had become "capriciously willful." Yet its linguistic roots reveal a deeper meaning: "Wayward" is an aphesis of "*awayward (XIV)*, f. AWAY + WARD; the sense of development was prob. infl. by the notion of the word being f. WAY, as if bent on going one's own way; cf. FROWARD" (*Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* 995). So the Folio variant spelling of "the weyward sisters," the first recorded pairing of this adjectival variation "weyward" to the noun "sisters" in the English language, further defines the trio. The Weird Sisters possess otherworldly prophetic powers, and "weyward" connotes that the trio has an independent track, a path of their own; their movement is seemingly centrifugal—that of

> "going away from" as opposed to "coming to" us. The impression is one of purposeful retreat away from the center (15-16)

Wayward means either "going one's own way" or "going away from the center". Pragmatically, the two senses are basically the same because going one's own way means avoiding a centralizing order. Waywardness, therefore, has a connotation of randomness, unpredictability, or uncertainty. Waywardness hints at chance, which was, as explained in chapter 4, Hamlet's major image for the reality of human will. Waywardness, additionally, also hints at hollowness because of the absence of centralization and the ensuing centrifugal aspect attached to it. "*Macbeth* . . . seems less set in Scotland than in the *kenoma*, the cosmological emptiness of our world as described by the ancient Gnostic heretics" (*Shakespeare* 518). Chance, thus, is also imbued in the complex of fate personified by the witches. Orson Welles, in his 1948 adaption of the play, seems to suggest that the sense of cosmological emptiness, the major element in *King Lear*, is also in *Macbeth*, as is suggested by his final soliloquy. In Wilde's film, during the scene in which Macbeth is delivering the soliloquy, an empty, dark space, populated only by fog, is depicted while Macbeth's voice is overheard.

Further on her book, Shamas explores several "related characters and motifs from fairy tales . . . as well as the significance of the number three related to the bard's Weird Sisters" (70). Shamas lists eleven trinitarian archetypes scattered across many mythologies. As goddesses of destiny, she arranges them in three categories: trios related to prophecy, to inspiration and to the underworld (70 ff.). As Shamas explains, as "part of their myths, trinitarian archetypes related to 'Fate' may have a symbol, prop, or 'life-token,' which represents a record of destiny, whether it be a 'book of fate' in which a child's destiny is inscribed, or cloth or yarn which is spun, as with the Wyrds, the Norns and the Fates" (71). Moreover, "the Muses and the Graces are associated with the Weird Sisters as female trinitarian sister figures; these trios 'inspire' action or inspire a commitment to an aesthetic. . . . Finally, the Erinyes/Furies and the Gorgons . . . [are] related to 'infernal' aspects of the Weird Sisters" (78-79). Additionally, Shamas expounds:

> "Time is threefold [. . .] past, present and future [. . .]" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 993). Clearly, the Weird Sisters do embody this function in *Macbeth*, even beyond their direct representations of these three phases of time/fate with their predictions in Act 1, Scene 3. In Act 1, they will meet "ere the set of sun" (1.1.5). They symbolize "midnight" in Act 4, Scene 1 (line 48). . . . Perhaps the key to the threeness of the bard's Weird Sisters is as a

> unified system: concomitantly independent, and intra-dependent in their "waywardness." (96)

Shamas concludes: "In eleven trinitarian archetypes (the Wyrdes, the Norns, the Fates, the Moirae, the Parcae, the Sibyls, the Muses, the Graces, the Erinyes/the Furies and the Gorgons), and in the four related classical figures of Circe, Medea, the Pythoness and Cassandra, there are significant symbols, motifs, and characterizations which seem to have been subsumed into Shakespeare's Weird Sisters" (97). The image of fate associated with three women is not, therefore, something exclusive of Greek culture. While death was the major notion conveyed by Moira in Greek literature,[86] it is not the exclusive element in the Weird Sisters.

In *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos*, McAlindon explains how the threeness and the doubleness of the witches pervades the play textually. He claims that one of the most remarkable features of *Macbeth* "is the way in which number symbolism co-operates with nature symbolism in the process of signalling key ideas relating to the tragic theme of disunity and chaos" (*Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos* 200). According to him, "doubleness as a numerical phenomenon is heavily stressed throughout, and at the start it is projected in such a way as to illuminate the whole nature of the impending tragedy" (201). It is noteworthy that all equivocations fit the symbolism of "doubleness". Furthermore, the

> witches' threeness, like their doubleness, is encoded in the play at every level of expression. . . . [Shakespeare] addressed the problem of encoding threeness in an astonishingly thorough and inventive manner. Character grouping at a secondary level, and also emblematic imagery, provide periodic echoes of Act I's opening emphasis on 'we three'. The Porter admits three imaginary sinners into Hell . . . (II.iii.4-17). Macbeth hires three murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance, the third apparently an afterthought to 'make assurance double sure' (IV.i.83). And in Macbeth's final meeting with the witches, his demand for 'more' (line 103) of their 'more . . . than mortal knowledge' (I.v.2) is answered by three equivocal apparitions and then by 'a show of eight kings . . . Banquo following' – a group of nine, the witches' favourite multiple of three. (*Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos* 205)

Moreover, threeness

[86] Cf. Michael Clarke's *Flesh and Spirit in the Songs of Homer*.

> is mirrored also in action and time. The witches make three appearances in all . . . Duncan . . . is murdered at 3 a.m., and the Porter and his friends carouse until the same hour. Macbeth commits three major crimes: the murders of Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff's family; and one of the most striking – and generally unnoticed – facts about the first crime is that it involves two additional and entirely unplanned murders: little did Lady Macbeth think when she sent the terrified Macbeth back with the daggers that he would spontaneously kill the two grooms. The Macbeths appear as king and queen for the first time at the beginning of the third act . . . and Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking is seen by the Doctor only on the third night (V.i.1). (*Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos* 205-06)

McAlindon offers even more evidence, but this suffices to show that the presence and the influence of the threeness of the witches and the doubleness of ambivalence. There is also, in the play, a suggestion of ambiguity between threeness and doubleness: "'Tis two or three, my lord, that bring you word / Macduff is fled to England" (4.1.140-41). This ambiguity, rather than weakening, reinforces the integrity of a complex image formed by several elements. The influence of the witches, then, occurs even in their physical absence, since they only show in three of the 28 scenes,[87] of which they speak to Macbeth in two. More importantly, as McAlindon points out, "threeness is mirrored also in action and time". This is relevant because it reveals an intimate relation between the witches and time and also dissolves the responsibility of action. In short, the complex of fate permeates the play from beginning to end.

The witches encompass a wide array of ideas and images. Braunmuller suggests that the "play's first word ["when"] concerns time, a topic that will become increasingly important and is always more significant than place, 'Where'" (NCS 102). There is, however, enough evidence to support that space is as important as time in the play. As I showed, their threeness pervade the world of the play, but the witches also have the ability to control air:

> SECOND WITCH I'll give thee a wind.
>
> FIRST WITCH Thou'rt kind.
>
> THIRD WITCH And I another.
>
> FIRST WITCH I myself have all the other,

[87] Considering that 3.5 was not authored by Shakespeare, the play has 27 or 28 scenes depending on the edition. The last two scenes are separated or joined together, that is, depending on the edition, the last act has either eight or nine scenes. Both the New Swan and the New Cambridge Shakespeare editions list nine scenes for act five. The Annotated Shakespeare edition, by Yale UP, however, lists eight. The number of scenes, here, is remarkably significant if we consider the numeric symbolism and that 27 is another multiple of three.

> And the very ports they blow,
> All the quarters that they know
> I'th'shipman's card. (1.3.10-16)

Macbeth says that "what seemed corporal, / Melted, as breath into the wind" (1.3.79-80); "When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air" (1.5.3-4); "Infected be the air whereon they ride" (4.1.137). They have the power to *control* winds. These lines, from the first scene, can be read as an order: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair, / Hover through the fog and filthy air". The witches are ordering that by which they refer to as "fair is foul, and foul is fair" to hover through air. "Hover through the fog and filthy air" seems to serve three purposes. It is an order from the witches to the doubleness; it is an imperative to themselves, according to which a possible gloss would be: "Let us hover through the fog and filthy air"; and it also functions as a stage direction.[88] Their command, therefore, is a way to *spatially* permeate the physical world of the play with the presence of doubleness. Witchcraft, elsewhere in Shakespeare, is also related to the power to control nature: "His mother was a witch, and one so strong / That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs, / And deal in her command without her power" (*Temp*. 5.1.269-71). The witches control and ride the winds at will and scatter the doubleness of ambivalence in, literally, the whole world of the play – which is seen textually in the pervasiveness suggested by the numeric symbolism; hence, the ambivalence is in space itself.

We see that the witches also encapsulate fate, ambivalence, time, space, and waywardness. In addition, McAlindon states that

> theme of the deed in turn is incorporate in that of time. The connection can be inferred from the use of legal terminology which identifies the allotted span of life as a lease (IV.i.99), copyhold (III.ii.38), or bond (line 49) granted to the individual by Nature as Time. . . . In *Macbeth*, time itself is the ultimate arbiter of justice, and comprehends in itself all the binding laws against which the hero rebels. . . . In no other tragedy of Shakespeare is time so comprehensive in its significance or so continuously implicated in what is said and done. The term itself spreads out in every direction so that it signifies all humans and the world

[88] It is widely known that stage directions, in Shakespeare, are scarce and that they are found mostly in the lines. The possibility of it being a stage direction brings a certain ambiguity to it. An example of this is Lear's first line when he reenters the stage with Cordelia in his arms: "Howl, howl, howl, howl!" (5.3.231). There are productions in which the actor enters actually howling instead of saying the words multiple times, which would rather configure an order to the other characters. Considering the ambiguity of stage directions in Shakespeare, both possibilities are reasonable, just like the two possibilities for the witches' order.

> in general ('To beguile the time, / Look like the time'), history ('the volume of . . . time', 'recorded time'), and a natural order which is also a corrective order: 'Time thou anticipat'st my dread exploits' (IV.i.144). (…) Such indeed is the emphasis on the necessary relationship between time and place that all references to time alone effectively signify the entire 'frame of things' (III.ii.16). (*Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos* 214-15)

The "frame of things", in my view, is another expression for the structure of reality. If the witches pervade space, there is, therefore, an intimate relation between fate and nature. Time and space are composing elements of nature, but in the hierarchy of *Macbeth*, time seems to prevail. Time, therefore, as a metonym for fate, pervades the reality of the play, the "frame of things" (3.2.16) or "th'estate o'th'world" (5.5.49). According to Bloom, no "critic has been able to distinguish between death, time, and nature in Macbeth; Shakespeare so fuses them that all of us are well within the mix" (*Shakespeare* 523). One of the associations between time and death is in "all our yesterdays have lighted fools / The way to dusty death" (5.5.21-22). Bloom also adds that "is a highly metaphorical time" (*Shakespeare* 540). *King Lear* is ruled by hollowness, an anarchic theology. *Hamlet* seems to be ruled by chance, a chaotic providence. *Macbeth* is ruled by a demiurgical time, a wayward entity. All these images can be deemed as fate and are related to the Shakespearean tragic sense, but the images of *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, in a sense, are limited, because they are elements encapsulated by the complex image of fate devised in *Macbeth*. This image evokes what Bloom calls "the tragic sublime itself":

> we hardly can avoid seeing Macbeth himself as the victim of a beyond that surmounts anything available to us. His tragic dignity depends upon his contagious sense of unknown modes of being, his awareness of powers that lie beyond Hecate and the witches but are not identical with the Christian God and His angels. These powers are the tragic sublime itself . . . Critics have never agreed as to how to name those forces (*Shakespeare* 534)

According to Bloom, in *Macbeth*, death, time, ambivalence, and nature cannot be distinguished. To this equation, I would add space, as another element of nature, and sex and hatred as compositional elements of ambivalence. These are the elements that comprise the whole and complex image of fate in the play.

There seems to be, however, an emphasis from Macbeth's part on time. Time, therefore, seems to take the lead so that it becomes the main metonym for nature or fate, i.e., time is the "frame of things" (3.2.16) or "th'estate o'th'world" (5.5.49). The image of fate resembles the

Greek notion of *physis*,[89] which, to the Greeks, was the natural law of the gods. The entity controlling the witches, in *Macbeth*, seems to represent a kind of natural law, but, of what gods, we do not know.

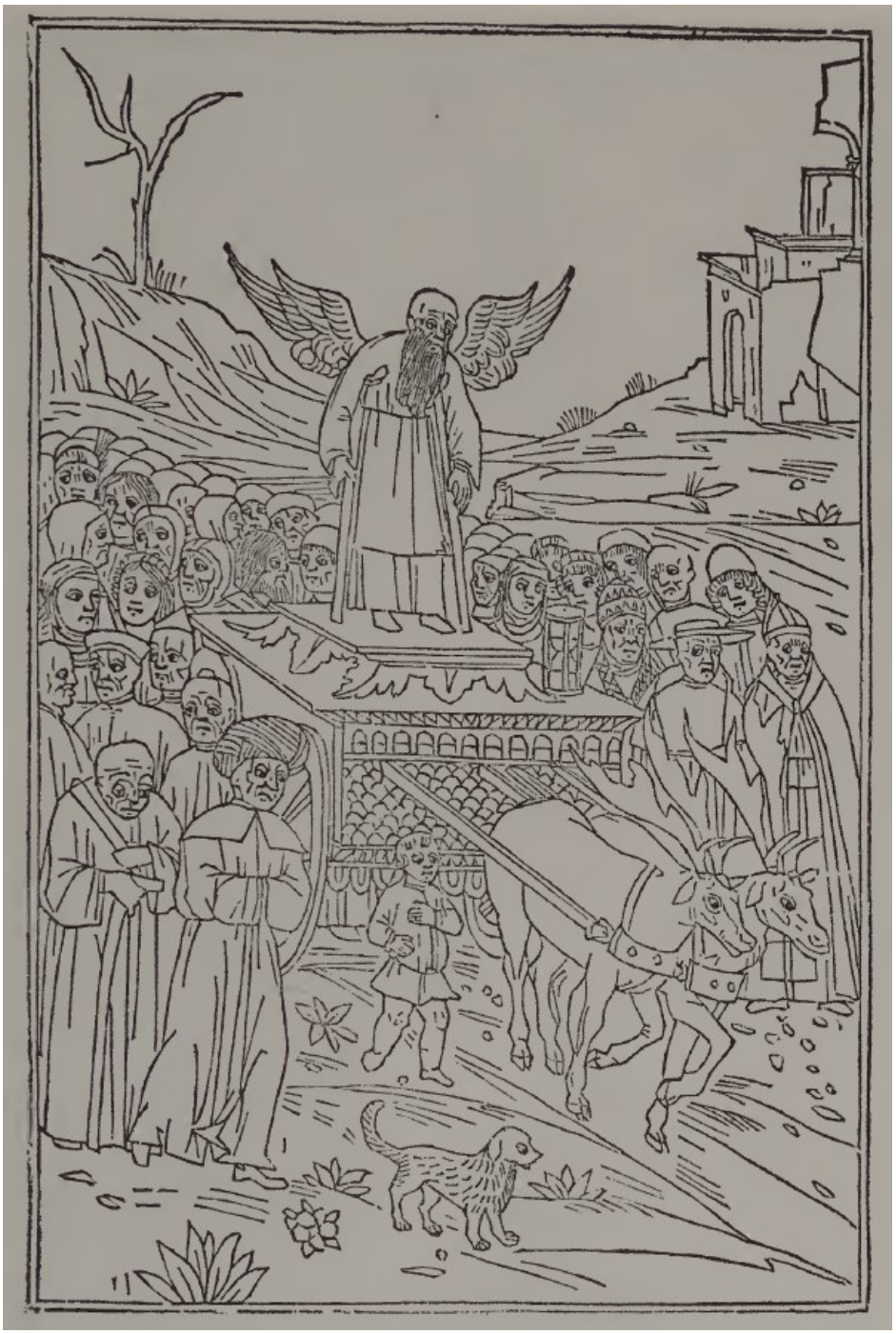
The 2017 production of the play by the Stratford Festival, directed by Antoni Cimolino and Shelagh O'Brien, provides an interesting insight on these unknown forces and how they communicate with Macbeth. In the production, a pair of hands emerges from a cauldron in which the witches throw different ingredients. The pair of hands, an element that resembles humanity – so as to allow a familiar figure – emerges from an obscure realm.

The power that controls the witches are called their "masters" or "spirits", but it is not possible to know what kind of entity or being it is. Whatever is it that controls the witches has control over space and time. The witches are mediators for the supernatural and obscure forces that control reality in *Macbeth*. Banquo says that they "can look into the seeds of time" (1.3.56). These forces are so powerful that they are aware of people's thoughts. Macbeth says that the witches have "more in them than mortal knowledge" (1.4.3). Lady Macbeth summons "spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts" (1.5.38-39). "Mortal", here, means both "murderous" and "human" since the spirits would be "immortal". The witches themselves say that the apparitions know peoples' thoughts: "He knows thy thought" (4.1.69). Macbeth is fighting against something that knows what he thinks, and he does not even know what the enemy looks like. How could he possibly win?

6.2.4. Removing the Concealment of Fate

Time had a sort of hierarchical predominance in the imaginative realm or general cultural perception in Elizabethan England:

[89] According to Greene, there are two notions of primeval law in Greek culture, *nomos* and *physis*. *Physis* is the "'the unwritten and steadfast laws of the gods, whose life is not of to-day or yesterday but of all time'; . . . [*nomos*] is the human law . . . [while *physis* is] the law of nature which the gods themselves express and uphold" (140). Some of the entries for νόμος (*nomos*) in the Greek-English lexicon are: "*that which is in habitual practice*, *use* or *possession* . . . *usage, custom*" (1180). For φύσις (*physis*): "*origin* . . . *nature*, *constitution* . . . of the mind, one's *nature*, *character*. . . *the regular order of nature*" (1964-65). *Nomos* is the artificial law created by humanity, while *physis* is the natural law created by the gods.



The Triumph of Time, from Francesco Petrarca, *Opera*, 1508 (Folger Shakespeare Library). In the early modern period Time was typically depicted as an old man, usually winged and sometimes on crutches. Missing from this illustration are two other emblems, the hour glass and the scythe. (*WT* NCS 35)

Macbeth emphasizes time in the final soliloquy, but it seems to me that all physical components – time, space, and light – of the image of fate are equally important in the naturalistic part of the image. The first scene has at least one instance for all the elements that pervade the play textually and that appear in the final soliloquy:

FIRST WITCH When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
SECOND WITCH When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost, and won.
THIRD WITCH That will be ere the set of sun.
FIRST WITCH Where the place?
SECOND WITCH Upon the heath.
THIRD WITCH There to meet with Macbeth.
. . .
ALL Fair is foul, and foul is fair,
Hover through the fog and filthy air. (1.1.1-13)

The elements are: time ("when"), space ("heath", "air"), light ("lightning"), sound ("thunder"), rage ("hurly-burly"), doubleness ("lost, and won"), threeness ("thunder, lightning, or in rain") waywardness ("ere the set of sun") and ambivalence ("Fair is foul, and foul is fair"). The final soliloquy also contains all these elements, under the hierarchy of time:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle,
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing. (5.5.18-27)

The images for time are: tomorrow, day, syllable (of time), yesterdays, and hour. For space: creeping, pace, walking, strutting, dust, and stage. For sound and rage: recorded (meaning "told" or "narrated"), tale (which is told), fretting and sound and fury. For light: illumination or lighting (by yesterdays), candle and shadows. For doubleness: ("day to day", "out, out"). For threeness: "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow". Time, however, as mentioned previously, is at the top of the hierarchy, perhaps because all the other sets of images depend on it. The images of sound

depend on time because every sound has a duration, as well as the light of a candle, which is brief. Space seems to be intimately related with time in the sense that both comprise nature and is experienced over time. Rage, as light, is also temporary.

The prevalence of time is indicated by the repetition in the first line: "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow". Tomorrows go on until "the last syllable of recorded time", while human life is a "brief candle". Yesterdays are the agents responsible for illumining the path of human life to death – "yesterdays have lighted fools / The way to dusty death". There is a suggestion of a calm, slow and imperceptible movement of time (that creeps in a petty pace) compared to that of human life, which is short (brief), noisy and troublesome (struts, frets and is full of sound and fury). Time has an imposing demiurgical figure attached to it. Human life, on the other hand, is a shadow, that is, merely a projection, created by light (which is controlled by time), of something else supposedly more important. Human life is also a poor player strutting and fretting on the stage.[90] According to Braunmuller, "poor player" means simply "bad actor" and the "underlying theatrical metaphor suggests that the player's willingness to adopt a feigned passion makes him lose his individuality" (NCS 229). Bloom indicates that "a sense of always being after the event, like a bad actor who invariably misses his cues, is the peculiar condition of Macbeth himself" (*The Western Canon* 390).

Perhaps it is this sense of displacement, i.e., of missing cues, that leads Macbeth to conclude that human life is also a tale that does not mean anything. By displacement, I do not mean simply that everyone can find happiness in life by learning how to adapt to circumstances – this would be an ethical reading – but a sense of not belonging or not willing to be somewhere one does not belong. Macbeth is a tyrant because he is not liked by the people of Scotland. Vincentio, in *Measure for Measure*, makes a law according to which those who have sex outside marriage must face a death sentence, but Vincentio is liked by the people of Vienna. Why is Macbeth not liked by the people of Scotland? What does make Macbeth a bad king? Having usurped the crown does not seem to be enough to make him be called a tyrant, and I hardly think that the awareness, by the other thanes, of the usurpation would change anything in this regard – since usurpation is the essence of political dispute. The text does not tell us what it is exactly that makes Macbeth a bad king. All we know is that, by 3.6, he is already being called a "tyrant". This mystery regarding

[90] Let us not forget that the stage is Shakespeare's all-encompassing metaphor for life: "All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players" (*AILY* 2.7.139-40); "When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools" (*Lear* 4.5.174-75).

his failure as a king is in accordance with the mystery of the invisible and pervasive forces of the play: has Macbeth become a tyrant because he was a bad king, or he was a bad king because he was a tyrant since the beginning? Regardless if Macbeth is insane or possessed by "valiant fury", one thing is for certain: he cannot rule. After the murder of Duncan, the only thing that seems to matter to Macbeth is to end his fear since he does not mind about kinghood; he does not want to be king. Although this is speculative from my part, what Macbeth seems to lack is the capacity for enjoying the killings – outside of war, that is. All the murders he commits are, in a sense, required for a position of power – since, as I argued, usurpation is a requirement for any politics, but Macbeth has a problem usurping power from Duncan. Perhaps people hate him because he is *afraid* – i.e., he does not enjoy any of it – of making his subjects and vassals suffer (which is another essential trait of politics)? According to Lady Macbeth, his "nature . . . is too full o'th'milk of human kindness" (1.5.15).

Throughout the play, Macbeth acknowledges that and tries to become "seasoned", rather than remain "young in deed". The meaning of *Measure for Measure*, therefore, reverberates here, although indirectly. Vincentio enjoys torturing his vassals, but Macbeth does not. Macbeth tries to change that and is unsuccessful, but the reason why he is unsuccessful remains a mystery. Human life, i.e., existence itself, Macbeth concludes, is devoid of all meaning because it simply cannot win the fight against fate. Braunmuller points out that "It is a tale / Told" has influence form the biblical plasm: "Compare 'For when thou art angry, al our dayes are gonne; we bring our yeeres to an ende, as it were a tale that is tolde' (Ps. 90.9), prescribed for the burial service by the Book of Common Prayer" (NCS 229). The influence might be Christian, but Macbeth's knowledge is not necessarily religious. As Bloom points out, "Shakespeare, as always, evades both faith and doubt" (*Shakespeare* 420). Macbeth's knowledge is pragmatic, i.e., it is wisdom abstracted independently from a religious environment. If Macbeth were Christian – an actual Christian in the sense of embracing and acting on Christian wisdom, and not simply in the sense of growing up in a Christian cultural environment – he would consider life as a gift, and not as something that signifies nothing. "Told", also as suggested by Braunmuller, might be a pun on the "toll" of a bell (NCS 229). Then again, the bell is not religious imagery; it is an image for time. The meaning of human life "[s]ignifying nothing" is hence intimately related to a perception of the powerlessness of men in relation to time – and ultimately to fate. In Robert Frost's poem, used as one of the epigraphs, the same depressive or melancholy sense is conveyed in a setting with similar imagery:

the speaker (just like Macbeth's player) walks in dim-lit setting while listening to "an interrupted cry" ("sound and fury") and observing the "luminary clock against the sky" proclaiming "time was neither wrong nor right". Likewise, in *Macbeth*, time is neither wrong nor right, neither good nor evil; it is nature, reality, and fate.

The only elements for which I did not provide an instance in the soliloquy are waywardness and ambivalence because they seem to be hidden in the last line. Lawlor argues that the equivocation ("Fair is foul, and foul is fair") suggests an "equal balance of alternatives [that] in fact nullifies choice" (*e* 145). If one aspect is, at the same time, fair (his resilience is what allows Macbeth to obtain the crown, which brings him glory) and foul (it also makes him miserable and brings him ruin), and he exercises little or no control over it – which was Bradley's notion of fate – then Macbeth is bound by ambivalence. Waywardness is embedded in it in the sense that the uncertainty between foul and fair also evokes uncertainty and meaninglessness. If good is bad and bad is good, then, there is neither actual good nor bad. We then understand why Macbeth concludes that life is meaningless. Macbeth's final soliloquy is the most comprehensive and accurate depiction of reality – or nature or fate, whatever we might want to call it – from a tragic perspective, i.e., the perception of reality from a fully tragic character. It is, as Bloom notes, the tragic sublime itself.

Fate, the image of reality provided by Macbeth's imagination, is what evokes the tragic sublime. Macbeth's realization is owed to the structure of the reality of the play, i.e., Macbeth's imagination allows him to glimpse at fate, i.e., the heart of structure of reality. In this image, time (an outward element) and ambivalence (an inward element) seem to be intimately correlated, but this association does not seem to be a straight metaphor. Time has some sort of dominating hierarchy, and the governing trope of the relations within the image of fate is metonym. Time is a metonym for nature, and ambivalence, for time. If time controls ambivalence, a psychic element, there is a suggestion that time (which represents fate) also controls human will. The ruling factor in Macbeth's change of nature, therefore, is fate.

Despite all the external (the teasing of the witches and the provocations of Lady Macbeth) and internal (the "heat-oppressèd brain") influences on Macbeth, he still has mechanical control over his actions. That is to say that the electrical impulses of his brain are not controlled by an external or supernatural entity. Therefore, mechanically, he has free will. Pragmatically, however, he does not because he kills Duncan unwillingly. What he wanted was to fulfill Lady Macbeth's

will. That, in my view, seems to be the major reason why he carried out the assassination. He does not want to kill Duncan, but, at the same time, he wants to satisfy Lady Macbeth. The outcome, however, is ironic, as we observe the sexual underplot, suggested by Berry, unravel. Macbeth performs an action unwillingly to achieve a goal different from the direct upshot of the performed action, i.e., he kills Duncan to satisfy his wife (even if temporarily), but he unwillingly becomes king. I would argue that, pragmatically, he does not have free will. He had decided that he would not carry out the assassination before being convinced by Lady Macbeth because he did not want to be king, but he also wanted to be a man before his wife. He regrets the assassination immediately because he is aware that he had "killed sleep". Will, therefore, is not related to the actual mechanical action. Macbeth's will not to fail before Lady Macbeth was so overwhelming that, pragmatically, his lust, in the image of the dagger, took control of him, rendering the mechanical action a mere automatic or inevitable consequence of his will. The witches are simply the medium through which those superior powers that control the world communicates with Macbeth. This unknown and overwhelming power is scattered throughout the physical (time, space, and light) and psychic (ambivalence) reality of the play. This whole complex of elements configures an image we can call fate, and which indirectly coerces Macbeth to kill Duncan. After the murder, Macbeth changes. The loss of fear, as discussed in the previous section, is one of the main factors that corroborate Macbeth's change, which is of nature, unlike Hamlet's or Edmund's, as discussed in chapter 4. It is so because even after discovering that the prophecies of the witches in act four were misleading and that Macduff could kill him, he pushes on:

> MACBETH I will not yield
> To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet
> And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
> Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane
> And thou opposed being of no woman born,
> Yet I will try the last. Before my body,
> I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
> And damned be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!' (5.8.27-34)

The most important thing to Macbeth, before the murder, was pleasing his wife. After he changes, he forgets about his wife's satisfaction and only cares about ending his suffering, which is prompted by his fear. After he loses his capacity to feel fear, however, he ceases to see meaning

in life. This is why he pragmatically concludes that life is meaningless, even though, mechanically, he is in control of his actions.

Conclusion. The Reality of Shakespearean Drama: The Comic and the Tragic Juxtaposed

> [O]ur world is not the same as Othello's world. You can't make flivvers without steel – and you can't make tragedies without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave.
>
> –Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

> Yet 'tis the plague of great ones,
> Prerogatived are they less than the base;
> 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death
>
> –William Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.3.275-77

A character with a comic nature *is willing* to accept the currently predominant cycle of pain. A personality with a tragic nature, on the other hand, *is not willing* to accept the ongoing cycle and attempts to establish a new one, but necessarily fails. As indicated in the Introduction, Falstaff is the best example of the first kind, while Hamlet, of the second. I intended to show that there seems to be a tendency of the tragic to temporarily predominate over the comic.

I deviate from many critics and claim that, in Shakespearean drama, it is not possible for a character to be both comic and tragic at the same time. In tragedy, the conflict exits because of the hero, and, if the hero is eliminated, the conflict also ceases to exist. This conflict exists because the tragic hero seeks to establish his own order. There is not a comic villain in all of Shakespeare's comedies, which does not mean that there is not a conflict of some kind. Of the comedies discussed, comic villains are present only in four plays: *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest*,[91] *Much Ado*

[91] *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* are currently categorized as romances. *Pericles*, however, is the only play that seems to fit the category considering chivalric romance as a genre that presents fantastic stories about knights-errant with heroic qualities who go on adventures. *Cymbeline* presents features more common to histories. In *The Winter's Tale*, death is caused indirectly by Leontes's obsession. If the death of Mamillius is supposed to be calamitous, then, *The Winter's Tale* is the best candidate in Shakespeare to be considered a tragicomedy, although I strongly disagree with such categorization because, at the end, salvation is achieved nevertheless. It is indisputable,

About Nothing, and *As You Like It*. In the two last plays, the villain simply gives up his efforts and drops out. The conflicts that fuel these plays are solved by the comic nature of the characters; that is to says that the comic concealment seems to be present in the acceptance of cuckoldry by the part of the husbands.[92] Shylock is the only one that insists for some time, but ends up consenting to conversion, however destructive that may be to him.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, there is threat of bloodshed (although not incited by the will of a single character), which is nullified at the end (resulting in salvation), besides the reconciliation of the servants with their masters, which is an indication of some sort of concealment for their tolerance of pain. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherina and Petruchio reconcile, which shows acceptance of one or both sides, although the comic concealment seems to be present in Kate's irony at the end, showing that it is Petruchio, and not her, the one who submits. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, there is conflict between the four couples, but especially between Berowne and Rosaline. Their relationship is ambivalent and rather aggressive, and, at the end, the four men endure the suffering of not being able to marry the women, who seem to suffer less. Likewise, there is significant hostility in the conflict between the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but they all reconcile in the end and their hatred is concealed. Vincentio is an ironic hero (just like Helen is an ironic heroine in *All's Well that Ends Well*), which is a feature that approximates him to the border that separates the comic from the tragic. Shylock is the character who is the closest to that border.

When there is a comic villain present, he resembles a tragic hero in the sense that their elimination reestablishes the *status quo* – although the only substantial example we have of this, in Shakespeare, is Shylock. The resolution of conflict in comedy happens through acceptance – not exactly resignation because there is a *need* for acceptance, which translates into a *need for pain* – from one side, whereas, in tragedy, through destruction, in either one or both sides. If a tragic hero seeks to establish his own order, other characters try to prevent him from doing so by attempting to maintain the current order.

According to Bloom, "Coriolanus's concept of his own honor has been outraged by his banishment, while Timon's outrage stems from an all-but-universal ingratitude. Both Coriolanus

---

however, that there is a major change in mood in the movement from Sicilia to Bohemia. The first part of *The Winter's Tale* is considerable tragic, but, in the second one, the comic prevails, despite the deaths of two characters. Finally, *The Tempest* seems to follow the general rules of Shakespearean comedy.

[92] "BENEDICK . . . Prince, thou art sad, get thee a wife, get thee a wife, there is no staff more reverend than one tipped with horn" (*Ado* 5.4.114-16). The reference to cuckoldry is in the staff tipped with a horn.

and Timon are outrageous, but because of their conviction that they have been outraged, we join ourselves with them at crucial moments" (*Shakespeare* 581). In fact, all Shakespearean tragic heroes seem to have a conviction that they have been outraged. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the couple cannot tolerate the pain of living without one another, and so they prefer the pain of death. *Romeo and Juliet* removes the concealment of the hatred inherent to human nature, observed in the enmity of the two rival families, the Montagues and the Capulets, which would rather see their children die than love each other. In *Julius Caesar*, the protagonist's death is an imposition (from Caesar's part) because he holds up his prominence just before his death in the somewhat arrogant speech he delivers at *JC* 3.1.58-70, after which he dies boldly: "CAESAR . . . Then fall, Caesar" (*JC* 3.1.77). Likewise, Antony and Cleopatra kill themselves to avoid the humiliation from their enemies' part; that is to say that they impose their own wills instead of accepting the imposition of others'. *Antony and Cleopatra* removes the concealment of the vanity and pride of those who prefer death to humiliation. Similarly, Coriolanus' imposition is in that he defies an angry mob because he thinks he deserves the citizens' support by default. Coriolanus, like Caesar, is arrogant, but this scarcely matters for the determination of his tragic nature, which is exposed in his "death wish", suggested by his defiance of an angry mob. In *Timon of Athens*, the protagonist deliberately refuses an aided return to civilization, and, by doing so, harms that which harmed him in the first place. He then moves on to a self-willed and mysterious death; these are his impositions. The concealment that Timon removes is that of hypocrisy, revealing that people ruthlessly take advantage of others – even friends – when they can. *Coriolanus,* like *Julius Caesar*, seem to remove the veil of arrogance. Finally, Othello cannot accept the pain of cuckoldry and kills Desdemona in an attempt to soothe his pain, but shortly after is informed that he made a mistake, which causes him even more pain, and so he kills himself. In *Othello*, however, there seems to be a greater evil than the protagonist himself: what *Othello* seems to unveil is that the devil incarnate, Iago, walks among us.

There is a sort of "suicidal" tendency in Shakespeare's tragic heroes that reveals that they do not value *their own lives*. "Suicide" here is in a broad sense. There are often intimations of or allusions to suicide throughout the tragedies (Hamlet's soliloquies at 1.2 and 3.1, Lady's Macbeth's and Timon's deaths, Kent at the end of *King Lear*), but when characters kill themselves on stage, they are always protagonists or central characters: Brutus, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Cleopatra. Tragic heroes value their wills more than their own lives. By suicidal tendency,

therefore, I refer to a certain detachment from one's own life in the sense that death, from a certain moment on, becomes something sought for instead of something to be avoided. It is not in the sense that the characters lust for death, but the pain of death, or the value of their own lives, seems to be diminished to them in contrast to the pain of not satisfying their own wills.

What Frye calls the total *mythos* of comedy, the "essential comic resolution, therefore, is an individual release which is also a social reconciliation. The normal individual is freed from the bonds of a humorous society, and a normal society is freed from the bonds imposed on it by humorous individuals" ("The Argument of Comedy" 6). He also states that "*The Merchant of Venice* also deals with the superseding of the law by grace, of justice by mercy, of trusting to a bond by forgiveness. It is hardly a Christian allegory" (*The Myth of Deliverance* 26). According to Hamilton, "other critics may tell us that the Portia-Shylock confrontation in *The Merchant of Venice* makes the play a historical document because it exposes the anti-Semitism of Shakespeare's age, but only Frye tells us that the legalism and forgiveness in this play and in *Measure for Measure* are 'aspects of human life' . . . that show the authority of the play itself apart from any external reference" (*The Myth of Deliverance* xviii). The meaning of salvation is *aesthetic*, i.e., it is independent of a religious sense or historical reference. Portia, in "The quality of mercy" speech, mentions salvation, although her reasoning is rhetorical since she is trying to convince Shylock:

> The quality of mercy is not strained,
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
> It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
> The throned monarch better than his crown.
> His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
> The attribute to awe and majesty,
> Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
> But mercy is above this sceptred sway.
> It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
> It is an attribute to God himself,
> And earthly power doth then show likest God's

> When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
> Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
> That in the course of justice, none of us i95
> Should see salvation. (*MV* 4.1.180-96)

What king would risk losing his power for the sake of one life? Regardless of the rhetorical nature of her speech, her arguments revolve around one truth: in the course of justice, none of us will see salvation. Payment would not do justice to Shylock since he would not accept any sum. Not even Portia, with her skillful rhetoric, would be able to convince him that justice could be achieved another way because real justice – not only for Shylock – is always deed for deed, bond for bond, measure for measure. Shylock, as I already suggested, is on the border that separates a comic villain from a tragic hero. According to Frye,

> In a tragedy, an action that seems to be proceeding in a straight line may be, through a reversal in the action, suddenly perceived as a parabola, an action turning downward, the metaphor preserved in the word 'catastrophe.' In a comedy there is normally a reversal upward, a change from bad fortune to good, or what we might call an anastrophe. As a rule, the downward turn in tragedy appears to us as something inevitable. (*The Myth of Deliverance* 4-5)

Additionally, tragedy "ends in a 'catastrophe,' and Ben Jonson[93] uses this term for the end of a comedy also, but in a comedy the end might better be called an anastrophe, a turning up rather than a turning down" (*A Natural Perspective* 72-73). As discussed previously, Frye himself remarked that there is no such thing as inevitable comedy. *What ought to be* must come of nothing. For comedy to exist, we must, as Lear suggests and Cordelia refuses, speak again. Tragedy is inevitable because the downward movement of catastrophe is inevitable. *What is* is the natural downward flow of things, which comedy "anastrophically" struggles to avoid, and comedy does that by concealing the *what is*, the cosmological emptiness at the core of the structure of reality. In other words, Shakespearean comedy conveys a sense of salvation by concealing, through any sort of tool, the rottenness of human nature. The tools we see being used in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure* are ellipsis and irony respectively; and what tragedy does is to destroy that tool, whatever it may be.

[93] A playwright and poet contemporary to Shakespeare.

In the first epigraph used for this dissertation, Macbeth, after being tempted to murder Duncan, says that the "curtain'd sleep" has been abused. This veiled sleep is a precise image that translates the notion of concealment that I am associating with comedy. As I argued in the last chapter, had Macbeth not given in to his wife's commands, the curtained sleep would not have been disturbed. Macbeth would have paid the price of humiliation, but this humiliation would have kept concealed by the intimate life of the couple – as the acceptance of or need for pain is concealed in many Shakespearean comedies somehow. Macbeth steps out of the comic realm by refusing such humiliation, and so continuous bloodshed and social disturbance follow. The epigraph from *Paradise Lost* synthesizes what seems to be is the core of the tragic nature of Shakespearean characters. The tragic sense in Shakespeare is the (doomed to fail) attempt to impose a new cycle of pain since the old one is not accepted by the protagonists of tragedy. Satan finds ease in destroying, although not exactly *self*-destroying. If Satan, as Bloom have suggested, is Iago's heir, therefore, this relieving through destruction is not, at first, directed toward oneself. Othello, after being affected by Iago's poison, engages in the same destructive pattern to ease his own pain, but, in Othello's case, his pain is replaced by yet another one, which surmounts that of death. As a result, Othello self-destroys. Finally, the epigraph from Athony Burgess' *Nothing Like the Sun* brings comedy and tragedy together. There are two references to Greek culture in it: the association of sacrificial rituals of goats to tragedy[94] and the association of the god Priapus[95] to comedy. There is a sexual pun with "*dying*", which means literally death and, figuratively, sexual activity. In literal terms, the sexual activity implied between a village Priapus and the goat would result in the sacrifice of the latter. If we read deeper into Burgess' line, however, we may infer that there is a connection between the comic and the tragic that happens through sex and death, both elements that govern human nature. The inference is complete when we realize that the reality of human life is common to both the comic and the tragic nature.

As argued previously, the characters of both comedy and tragedy are subject to similar circumstances in the plots of their plays. In this sense, we can think of fortune or fate (at least in Shakespearean drama) as elements common not only to tragedies. According to McAlindon, "whatever significance is attached to Fortune, Fate, and the supernatural in the tragedies, the crucial fact is that they always operate in complete consistency with, and can easily be construed

[94] Cf. Walter Burkert's "Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual".
[95] Priapus is a minor deity, god of fertility, protector of livestock, fruit plants, gardens, and the male genitals. He is marked by a constant and oversized erection.

as projections of, the workings of Nature in the actions of men and women" (*Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'* 120). Are we supposed to understand "the workings of nature" as something out of the reach of human control, or is the influence of human rationality strong enough to exert an influence on the instinctual animalistic aspect of human nature?

As I tried to show throughout my discussions, the reality in which characters are immersed in each play is more or less the same, i.e., it has a similar set of circumstances and situations. What varies and determines the course of action is, as I claimed, the nature of the characters involved in the main conflicts. With all this in mind, I ask: can that reality – and so the nature of the characters from which it is sprung – be called fate? If so, the most important aspect of a notion of fate I want to emphasize is not so much predetermination but the lack of control over all the elements that comprise it, as it was discussed according to Othello's thought and Bradley's definition in chapter 1.

The meaning of comic salvation, according to Frye, is that "the essential comic resolution, therefore, is an individual release which is also a social reconciliation. The normal individual is freed from the bonds of a humorous society, and a normal society is freed from the bonds imposed on it by humorous individuals" ("The Argument of Comedy" 6). Frye's chief argument about comedy is that "the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and re turns to the normal world" ("Argument of Comedy" 9-10). Regarding tragedy, Frye argues that it "gives to the individual life a parabola shape, rising from birth to maturity and sinking again, and this parabola movement of rise and fall is also the typical shape of tragedy" (*Fools of Time* 11). Although Frye is referring to the typical structure of tragedy regarding plot over time, the parabolic movement also suits the variation of influence of character over time:

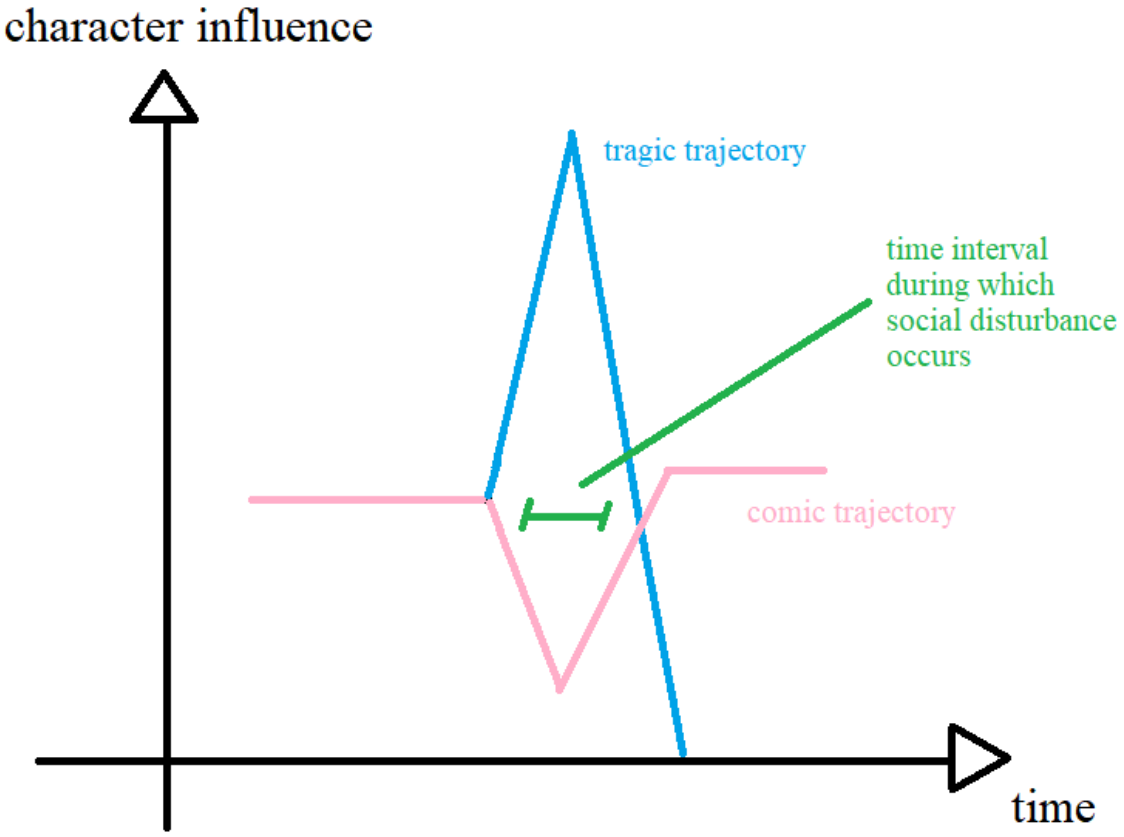


Fig. 4 Graph depicting the influence of character over time in certain plays

Although, as I discussed in chapter 2, *The Merchant of Venice* is a comedy in which Shylock is a comic villain, this play can be used as an example of the social disturbance engendered by the clash between a character with tragic tendencies, which is Shylock, and a comic heroine, which is Portia. As I have pointed out, the line separating a comic villain from a tragic hero can be blurred sometimes, and Shylock is the best example of this in Shakespeare's work. During the trial scene, when Shylock is about to injure Antonio, the acumen of his influence over the other characters takes place. However, at the turning point, his influence drops, and Portia's rises. Portia's increase of influence, which coincides with Shylock's fall, also coincides with the time interval during which social order is most intensely disturbed. The rise of a comic hero, therefore, coincides with salvation and the end of the time during which there is a threat of destruction. A tragedy, on the other hand, is populated by comic characters, but there is only one or a handful of characters that may be deemed tragic since they are responsible for the disturbance of social order, which is

reestablished once they are gone. The constant pink line in my diagram illustrates my statement from chapter 1: the tragic operates within a comic background.

In chapter 16 of the novel *Brave New World*, the character of Mustafa Mond explains how the lack of anxiety in the social formation of humanity can actually alter the way we perceive not only reality, but also fiction. In the scene used as one of the epigraphs for this conclusion, Mond says that people would not be able to understand Shakespeare because, in Aldous Huxley's novel, people live in a new world free from pain, specifically, the pain associated with love and the consequences that ensue in loving someone, like jealousy. *Othello* is about a man who undergoes extreme pain involving the doubt about the uncertainty of his wife's faithfulness. Because of the absence of the pain of anxiety, Mond says that people, in a world like this, cannot understand tragedy. As I discussed in chapter 4, *Measure for Measure* seems to be Shakespeare's way of saying that the discontents of civilization are due to a *need for pain* inherent to human nature. The greatest irony of *Brave New World* is that the protagonist commits suicide because he cannot adapt to a world without pain. Is Huxley also suggesting that human life is necessarily constrained and guided by pain? If this is so, the comic sense is largely about the acceptance of pain. As I discussed in the Introduction and showed in chapters 2 through 6, Shakespeare seemed to emphasize character over plot. The comic, I argue, is the background upon which the tragic operates, as is suggested by the epigraph taken from *Othello*, which is from a passage discussed in the first chapter. By comic background, I refer to the numeric majority of characters, which are comic. This is what Othello means by "base": lesser people who tolerate suffering and humiliation imposed on them. Othello is the counter-example since he considers himself less privileged ("prerogatived") because he cannot tolerate the humiliation of being cuckolded, as base characters do. Thus, he engages in a (self-)destructive process to mitigate this pain, even though in this development he ends up engendering more pain, not only for himself, but to others. What is important to indicate is that he diminishes his own pain by replacing it with another, of which he is the cause. This is an example, in a tragedy, of a tragic nature operating within a comic background.

In another remark about comedy, Frye muses that

> We may often think of the happy ending as perfunctory, and sometimes it may seem that, but even in the most sardonic comedies we should not assume that Shakespeare had a different kind of ending in mind that he could have provided for a more highbrow audience. The more highbrow audience might be more ironically minded, more bored with the

> conventional romantic ending, more inclined to be flattered at being asked to settle for some new variant of it. (*A Natural perspective* 118-19)

The comic sense, as I have argued, is not an illusion of happiness. It is better understood as a concealment of a possibly undesired truth, and most comic characters are aware of this truth, Nonetheless, they manage to maintain social order. The tragic sense is not a conflict between two goods, but a conflict between two evils. When Othello chooses to kill Desdemona, he is choosing the lesser evil, not the greater good. He has to choose between eternal humiliation and the death of a loved one. Tragedy tends to expose that pain is at the essence of human experience, while comedy manages to maintain this truth concealed.

Eric Robertson Dodds, when commenting about *Oedipus the King*, claims that "Oedipus is a kind of symbol of the human intelligence which cannot rest until it has solved all the riddles – even the last riddle, to which the answer is that human happiness is built on an illusion" (48). Human happiness is not an illusion at all, and the evidence for this in Shakespeare's work is Rosalind and her actions in *As You Like It*. As the reader may recall, I have referred to her as a "realist". Rosalind, alongside Falstaff, is another epitome of the comic in Shakespeare. Like Portia, Rosalind is a genuine comic heroine because she delivers the other characters from darker outcomes, but she is "purer" than Portia since she is mostly devoid of ambivalence. Rosalind is a realist because she acknowledges that the reality of human life is vile and ugly, but still manages to find happiness amidst the rottenness of human nature. Happiness, therefore, is not an illusion to Rosalind as it is to Hamlet – or as it might have been to Oedipus.

The cover of Bloom's *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* depicts a sybil from a Michelangelo's painting. As I showed in the last chapter, Shamas explained that, in mythology, sibyl was the name given to the priestess whose responsibilities were to make known the oracles of Apollo. What is Bloom's suggestion with the cover of his book then? That Shakespeare himself was a kind of oracle to the gods, or that fate is unescapable and Shakespeare is just reciting it to us? Regardless of the answer, my argument is resonant with the second possibility. Fate as the aesthetic understanding of human nature means that human will and the reality that surrounds it is an image to that which we cannot control but that controls us.

Works Cited

"Ecstasy." *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford U. P.

"pathetic." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, 2024. Web. 8 July 2024.

Aeschylus. "Agamemnon". Translated by Richmond Lattimore. *Aeschylus*. Vol. 2, U of Chicago P, 2013.

Anderson, Amanda; Felski, Rita and Moi, Toril. *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*. The U of Chicago P, 2019.

Aristotle, et al. *Poetics*. Translated by Stephen Halliwell, et al., Harvard UP, 1995.

Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Translated by George A. Kennedy, Oxford UP, 2006.

Auerbach, Erich. "The Weary Prince." *Mimesis*: *The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translated by Willard R. Trask, Princeton UP, 2003, pp. 312-33.

Augustine. "On the Free Choice of the Will". *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*. Translated by Peter King, Cambridge UP, 2010.

Barber, C. L. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*. Princeton UP, 2017.

Bawcutt, N. W. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. Oxford UP, 2008.

Berry, Ralph. "*Macbeth*: The Sexual Underplot". *William Shakespeare's Macbeth*. Edited by Harold Bloom. Infobase, 2010.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *As You Like It*. Infobase, 2008.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Macbeth*. Infobase Publishing, 2008.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *The Sonnets*. Infobase Publishing, 2008.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Infobase, 2010.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *William Shakespeare's As You Like It*. Chelsea House, 2004.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice*. Infobase. 2010.

Bloom, Harold. *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism*. Oxford UP, 1982.

Bloom, Harold. *Falstaff: Give Me Life*. Scribner, 2017.

Bloom, Harold. *Lear: The Great Image of Authority*. Scribner, 2019

Bloom, Harold. *Macbeth: A Dagger of the Mind*. Scribner, 2019.

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. Riverhead Books, 1998.

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. Oxford UP, 1997.

Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. Harcourt Brace, 1994.

Bloom, Harold. *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford UP, 2003.

Booth, Stephen. *Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Yale UP, 1969.

Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. MacMillan, 1912.

Bradley, A.C. *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. St. Martin's Press, 1965.

Braunmuller, A. R. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Cambridge UP, 1999.

Brown, J. R. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Arden Shakespeare, 2000.

Burkert, Walter. "Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 7, n. 2, 2003, pp. 87-121.

Burton, Raffel (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Yale UP, 2005.

Calderwood, J. L. *The Properties of Othello*. U of Massachusetts P, 1989.

Campbell, Lily. *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion*. Cambridge UP, 2009.

Carroll, William (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Love's Labour's Lost*. Cambridge UP, 2012.

Cavell, Stanley. *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*. Scribner, 1969.

Clarke, Michael. *Flesh and Spirit in the Songs of Homer: A Study of Words and Myths*. Clarendon Press, 1999.

Clayton, Tom. "Who 'Has No Children" in *Macbeth*?" *William Shakespeare's Macbeth*. Edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase, 2010.

Croce, Benedetto. *Aesthetic: As Science of Expression and General Linguistic*. Translated by Douglas Ainslie, Noonday Press, 1965.

Croce, Benedetto. *Guide to Aesthetics.* Translated by Patrick Romanell, Bobbs-Merrill, 1965.

Crystal, David. *The Oxford Dictionary of Original Shakespearean Pronunciation*. Oxford UP. 2016.

Dodds, E. R. "On Misunderstanding Oedipus". *Greece & Rome, Second Series*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1966, pp. 37-49.

Evan, G. B. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. Cambridge UP, 2003.

Freud, Sigmund. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 18. Translated by James Strachey. The Hogarth Press, 1962.

Freud, Sigmund. "Character and Anal Erotism". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 9. Translated by James Strachey. The Hogarth Press, 1962.

Freud, Sigmund. "Civilization and Its Discontents". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 21. Translated by James Strachey. The Hogarth Press, 1981.

Freud, Sigmund. "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 15. Translated by James Strachey. The Hogarth Press, 1961.

Freud, Sigmund. "Moses and Monotheism". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 23. Translated by James Strachey. The Hogarth Press, 1962.

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey, vol 14, The Hogarth Press, 1957.

Freud, Sigmund. "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 22. Translated by James Strachey. The Hogarth Press, 1962.

Freud, Sigmund. "Some Character-Types Met with In Psycho-Analytic Work." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey, vol 14, The Hogarth Press, 1981.

Freud, Sigmund. "The Economic Problem of Masochism." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey, vol 19, The Hogarth Press, 1986.

Freud, Sigmund. "The Interpretation of Dreams". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 5. Translated by James Strachey. The Hogarth Press, 1962.

Frye, Northrop. *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton UP, 2000.

Frye, Northrop. *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*. U of Toronto P, 1993.

Frye, Northrop. "The Argument of Comedy". *Northrop Frye's Writings on Shakespeare and the Renaissance*. Edited by Troni Y. Grande and Garry Sherbert. U of Toronto P, 2010.
Frye, Northrop. *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy*. U of Toronto P, 2016.
Frye, Northrop. *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society*. Indiana UP, 1976.
Garber, Marjorie. "The Education of Orlando". *William Shakespeare's As You Like It.* Edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House, 2004.
Garber, Marjorie. *Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2020.
Garber, Marjorie. *Profiling Shakespeare*. Routledge, 2008.
Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare After All*. Anchor Books, 2004.
Gibbons, Brian (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Goddard, H. C. *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press, 1951. 2 vols.
Greek-English Lexicon. Eds. Henry Geroge Liddell and Robert Scott. Clarendon Press, 1961.
Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. U of Chicago P, 1980.
Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespeare's Freedom*. U of Chicago P, 2010.
Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations*: *The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. U of California P, 1988.
Greene, William. *Moira: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought*. Harvard UP, 1944.
Halio, J. L. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Cambridge UP, 2005.
Halio, J. L. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Oxford Shakespeare, 1998.
Hamilton, A. C. Introduction. Frye, Northrop. *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*. U of Toronto P, 1993.
Hamlet. Directed by Lyndsey Turner and Robin Lough, National Theatre, 2015.
Hattaway, Michael (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Cambridge UP, 2000.
Hazlitt, William. *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. Cambridge UP, 2009.
Hibbard, G. R. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Love's Labour's Lost*. Oxford UP, 2008.
Howard-Hill, T. H. "U and Non-U: Class and Discourse Level in *Othello*". *William Shakespeare's Othello*. Edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase, 2010.
Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Rosetta Books, 2010.
Johnson, Samuel. *Johnson on Shakespeare*. Henry Frowde, 1908.
Kahn, Coppélia. "Shakespeare's Classical Tragedies." *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*. Edited by Claire McEachern. Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 204-223.
King Lear. Directed by Peter Brook, Columbia Pictures, 1971.
Knight, George. *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*. Routledge, 2005.
Knights, L. C. *Explorations*: *Essays in Criticism Mainly in the Literature of the Seventeenth Century*. George W. Stewart, 1947.
Knights, L. C. *How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth? An Essay in the Theory and Practice of Shakespeare Criticism*. The Minority Press, 2003.
Lattimore, Richmon. *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy*. The John Hopkins Press, 1958.
Lawlor, John. *The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare*. Chatto & Windus, 1960.
Lawrence, D. H. *Twilight in Italy*. Duckworth and Co., 1924.
Lever, J. W. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. Routledge, 1996.
Li, Marina. "The Visible Light Spectrum." *ThoughtCo*, 28 August 2020, https://www.thoughtco.com/the-visible-light-spectrum-2699036.
Ludwig, C. R. "Is *The Merchant of Venice* a Comedy or a Tragicomedy?" *Letras de Hoje*, v. 56, n. 1, 2021, p. 75-86.

Macbeth. Directed by Justin Kurzel, StudioCanal, 2015.
Macbeth. Directed by Orson Welles, Republic Pictures, 1948.
Maguire, Laurie. *Studying Shakespeare: A Guide to the Plays*. Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
Mahood, M. M (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
McAlindon, Thomas. *Shakespeare Minus 'Theory'*. Routledge, 2016.
McAlindon, Thomas. *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.
Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick or, The Whale*. Penguin Books, 2009.
Milton, John. *The Annotated Milton: Complete English Poems*. Bantam Dell, 2008.
Murphy, Andrew. *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing*. Cambridge UP, 2021.
New International Version. Biblica, 1983, www.biblestudytools.com/niv/
Nuttall, Antony D. *A New Mimesis*: *Shakespeare and The Representation of Reality*. Methuen, 1983.
Nuttall, Antony D. *Shakespeare* the *Thinker*. Yale UP, 2008.
Nuttall, Antony D. *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* Oxford UP, 2001.
Pater, Walter. *Appreciations*. Macmillan, 1980.
Salingar, Leo. *Shakespeare and the Tradition of Comedy*. Cambridge UP, 1974.
Santos, M. L.; Martins, T. S. *A Tragédia de Hamlet, Príncipe da Angústia*. *Em Tese*, v. 28, n. 3, 2022, p. 198-218.
Schiller, Friedrich. *Friedrich Schiller*: *Do Sublime ao Trágico.* Translated by Pedro Süssekind and Vladimir Vieira, Autêntica, 2011.
Schiller, Friedrich. *Aesthetic and Philosophical Essays*. George Bell and Sons, 1910.
Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Shakespeare, William. *All's Well that Ends Well*. Oxford UP, 1998.
Shakespeare, William. *Antony and Cleopatra*. Cambridge UP, 2007.
Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Cambridge UP, 2000.
Shakespeare, William. *Coriolanus*. Oxford UP, 2008.
Shakespeare, William. *Cymbeline*. Thomson Learning, 2002.
Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Directed by Antoni Cimolino and Shelagh O'Brien, Stratford Festival, 2016.
Shakespeare, William. *Henry V*. Routledge, 1995.
Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar*. Cambridge UP, 2012.
Shakespeare, William. *King Henry VIII*. Methuen, 1986.
Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Cambridge UP, 2005.
Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Directed by Gregory Doran, Royal Shakespeare Company, 2018.
Shakespeare, William. *King Richard II*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Shakespeare, William. *King Richard III*. Cambridge UP, 1999.
Shakespeare, William. *Love's Labour's Lost*. Bloomsbury, 1998.
Shakespeare, William. *Love's Labour's Lost*. Cambridge UP, 2012.
Shakespeare, William. *Love's Labour's Lost*. Oxford UP, 2008.
Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Cambridge UP, 1999.
Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Directed by Antoni Cimolino and Shelagh O'Brien, Stratford Festival, 2017.
Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Longman, 1982.
Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Yale UP, 2005.

Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. Directed by Gregory Doran, Royal Shakespeare Company, 2019.
Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. Oxford UP, 2008.
Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure*. Routledge, 1996.
Shakespeare, William. *Much Ado about Nothing*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Shakespeare, William. *Pericles*. Cambridge UP, 2012.
Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Edited by Dympna Callaghan. Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones. Thomas Nelson, 1998.
Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Edited by Stephen Booth. Yale UP, 2000.
Shakespeare, William. *The Comedy of Errors*. Cambridge UP, 2015
Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*. Edited by Colin Burrow. Oxford UP, 2002.
Shakespeare, William. *The First Part of King Henry IV*. Cambridge UP, 2013.
Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Arden Shakespeare, 2000.
Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. Oxford Shakespeare, 1998.
Shakespeare, William. *The Second Part of King Henry IV*. Cambridge UP, 2012.
Shakespeare, William. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Cambridge UP, 2009.
Shakespeare, William. *The Winter's Tale*. Cambridge UP, 2007.
Shakespeare, William. *Timon of Athens*. Thomson Learning, 2001.
Shakespeare, William. *Troilus and Cressida*. Thomas Nelson, 1997.
Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth Night*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Shamas, Laura. *"We* three*": The Mythology of Shakespeare's Weird Sisters*. Peter Lang, 2007.
Shapiro, James. *Shakespeare and the Jews*. Columbia UP, 2016.
Snyder, Susan; Curren-Aquino, Deborah T. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth Night*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
Snyder, Susans (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *All's Well that Ends Well*. Oxford UP, 1998.
Sophocles. "Oedipus at Colonus". Translated by Robert Fitzgerald. *Sophocles*. Vol 1, U of Chicago P, 2013.
Sophocles. "Oedipus the King". Translated by David Grene. *Sophocles*. Vol 1, U of Chicago P, 2013.
Staiger, Emil. *Conceitos Fundamentais da Poética*. Translated by Celeste Aída Galeão. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1997.
Swinburne, A. C. *A Study of Shakespeare*. London, 1880.
Tillyard, E. M. W. *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*. U of Toronto P, 1961.
Vendler, Helen. *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. The Belknap Press, 1997.
Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*, *1860: The 150th Anniversary Facsimile Edition*. U of Iowa Press, 2009.
Woudhuysen, H. R. (ed.). Shakespeare, William. *Love's Labour's Lost*. Bloomsbury, 1998.