THE SIGHT, THE VOICE AND THE DEED: AN INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA

FROM SOPHOCLES TO GOETHE

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> For at this moment I am sensible that [...] like the vulgar, I am only a partisan. Now the partisan, when he is engaged in a dispute, cares nothing about the rights of the questions, but is anxious only to convince his hearers of his own assertions. And the difference between him and me at the present moment is merely this – that whereas he seeks to convince his hearers that what he says is true, I am rather seeking to convince myself.
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> (Plato: *Phaedo*)[1]

Introduction

A book like this one – an introduction or a survey – is supposed to start with the definition of the central topic, which is, this time, *drama*. This requirement follows a specific and wide-spread "scientific" practice, according to which one may not go into the particulars of anything unless one has accurately and comprehensively circumscribed it, i.e., before one may claim to be able to tell what one is *really* talking about. This approach might be called the "Socratic-Fallacy" since – at least in the interpretation of Plato (427-347 BC), – Socrates, his teacher, kept insisting that one should not start the serious discussion of especially such weighty topics as *truth*, or *"the good"*, or *friendship* before making it absolutely clear where and how these notions differed from other ones. The dialogue called *Lysis*, for example, ends with the implication that since nobody, including Socrates himself, could provide a satisfactory definition of *friendship*, the participants of the dialogue might not be friends at all:

> Then what is to be done? Or rather is there anything to be done? I can only, like the wise men who argue in courts, sum up the arguments: If neither the beloved, not the lover, nor the like, nor the unlike, nor the good, nor the congenial, nor any other of whom we spoke [...] are friends, I know not what remains to be said. [...] O Menexenus and Lysis, how ridiculous that you two boys, and I, an old boy, who would fain be one of you, should imagine ourselves to be friends [...] and as yet we have not been able to discover what is a friend![2]

The Socratic claim that one cannot use a term before one is able to give its proper definition may be called a "fallacy" – or even a "trap" – because we of course use a good many terms correctly and with ease – at least under ordinary, everyday circumstances – without being able to give their exact specification. In order to ask, for instance, "What time is it?", one does not need the exact definition of time. We may even recall, as a certain "retort" to Plato, Saint Augustine's famous meditation on the notion of *time* in Book 11, Chapter 14 of the *Confessions*:

> What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who does ask me, I do not know. Yet I state confidently that I know this: if nothing were passing away, there would be no past time, and if nothing were coming, there would be no future time, and if nothing existed, there would be no present time. How, then, can these two

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[1] *The Dialogues of Plato.* Translated by Benjamin Jowett. Chicago, London, Toronto: William Benton, 1952, p. 238

[2] *ibid*, p. 25

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kinds of time, the past and the future, be, when the past no longer is and the future as yet does not be?[3]

Plato's dialogues, so often featuring the Socratic insistence on definitions, might of course also be read as the parodies of the Socratic-Fallacy itself: since most of our terms – and precisely the ones we are most concerned with – resist an all-embracing or overarching definition, we could hardly make a step any further if the first criterion of doing so were an accurate description and delineation that would satisfy everyone. A few passages from *Philosophical Investigations* (first published in 1953) by the Austrio-British philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 - 1951) may give us another perspective on definitions:

> If I tell someone 'Stand roughly here' – may not this explanation work perfectly? And cannot every other fail, too? But isn't it an inexact explanation? – Yes; why shouldn't we call it 'inexact'? Only let us understand what 'inexact' means. For it does not mean 'unusable'. [...] – Now if I tell someone: 'You should come to dinner more punctually; you know it begins at one o'clock exactly' – is there really no question of exactness here? because it is possible to say: 'Think of the determination of time in the laboratory or the observatory; there you see what 'exactness' means'?[4]

Wittgenstein's implied suggestion is twofold. On the one hand, instead of looking for an over-arching definition of something, for a definition that would "hold true" in *all* possible cases, we might like to take each case in its particularity, and decide for ourselves whether, for example, *that* certain thing is – to get back now to our primary concern here – a *drama* or not. But Wittgenstein also warns us that our instance-to-instance decisions and our "common consent" or "general agreement" may easily conflict:

> No single ideal of exactness has been laid down; we do not know what we should be supposed to imagine under this head – unless you yourself lay down what is to be so called. But you will find it difficult to hit upon such a convention; at least any that satisfies you.[5]

On the other hand, and as a corollary of the previous idea, Wittgenstein also makes us reconsider the truism that "to call something *this* or *that*" (e.g. a piece of writing "drama") is also a matter of the *context* we are *in* at the moment of our decision; our particular position and the specific ground we wish to occupy with our very locutions (speech) will determine our perspective: we would like to call something 'drama' today, under *these* circumstances, while tomorrow we may call it something else.

So I will look around and imagine – while writing these lines – that I am in the context of the lecture-hall talking and gesticulating, facing approximately a hundred students. In other words, I am taking advantage of a the inherent *theatricality* of the lecturing situation and declare that while I am asking the question "what is drama?", you are and I am *always already* ('head over heels') *in* it. My lecture notes (this moment being transformed into something wishing to approximate a 'university textbook') serve as a kind of script for my speaking and behaviour, and you, listening and taking notes (but right now: reading), play the role of the (today also in the theatre passive) audience. When realising that we are often always already within the "thing" we are up to define and analyse – this "within-ness" both blocking and clearing our way to the *concept* (e.g. *drama*), as we try to move along – we are a bit like Hamlet, who, upon returning to the royal court in Denmark, has to face a father replacing his Father, a king replacing the King, and a Mother happily being married to this father-and-king. So the Prince-and-Son is overcome with the horror that everything significant – with the "literal" weight of life and death – has been settled well *before* his

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[3] *The Confessions of St. Augustine.* Translated, with and Introduction and Notes, by John K. Ryan. Garden City, New York: Image books, Double day and Company, Inc., 1960, pp. 287-288.

[4] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Second edition. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958, paragraph 88, pp. 41-42.

[5] *ibid.*

entering the scene and, even further, that this "everything" stinks in *crime*. In a similar fashion – in a "scientific, *conceptual*" investigation just as much as in ordinary life – we get the feeling that we come to act on the "stage" called Earth belated, that by the time we arrive here, our acting-space has been assigned to, or even taken by, someone else, and that much has always already been decided: it had been decided even as early as before our *conception*. And, like Hamlet, we are naturally interested in how and why we were conceived, what had happened before we "came (in)to being", including the odour of *crime* we suspect to accompany such a – in more than one sense – violent act. The etymological kinship of *concept* and *conceive*, however, (both words going back to Latin *concipere*, 'to take in') might also give us the clue with respect to our present position of understanding: we might have to look for the understanding of *concepts* not only around *conception* ('origin') in general, but around the conception of our *own*, our very origin and coming into being; it might precisely be "I", the very individual investigating a *concept* who, in his origin, serves, in his or her *whole self*, as the "explanation" and the "source of definition" for the very concept under investigation, including its criminal aspects as well. Is it possible that it is a primal and primordial crime concerning our *conception* which blocks our way to the understanding of our *concepts*? These questions point towards another great case-study in the origins of the human being: Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*.

Chapter 1

Greek Tragedy. Sophocles

1.1. Sophocles and the Greek Theatre

Sophocles, one of the greatest Attic playwrights, did not leave us his definition of either drama or tragedy, yet, in *Oedipus Rex* – a play hailed even by Aristotle (384-322 BC) as one of the best tragedies[6] of the time – he seems to represent what the content of a "yes" to the above question involves.

1.1.1. Sophocles' life and work

Sophocles the Athenian (?494 – 406, BC) lived through almost the whole of the famous 5th, "classic" century in which his beloved Athens rose to greatness and met its fall: he lived for roughly ninety years (the exact date of his birth is unknown). As a young man, he took part in the celebration of the victory at Salamis (480 BC) against the Persians, and when he died, Athens' surrender to Sparta – after the long and exhausting Peloponnesian war – was only two years away (404 BC).

In the *Frogs* of Aristophanes (450-385 BC), produced a year after Sophocles's death, Dionysus of Hades says of him: "He is good-tempered here [in the underworld], as he was there [on Earth]" (cf. 3.2.) . He seems to have been handsome, gentle, kind and immensely popular, both as a playwright and as a public figure. As a conscientious and rich member of the *polis* (his father, Sophillus already owned many slaves and something we would today call a "factory"), he took active part in city-life, holding high offices both in times of peace and war. He was treasurer of the naval league of Athens (443-42 BC), he was a general with Pericles (who was a life-long friend, and once remarked that Sophocles was a better poet than a general) in the war against Samos (441-439 BC), and some other times. He had a son, Iophon, who also became a tragic poet and Ariston, a son by another woman. Sophocles first competed at the Dionysia in 468 and he was immediately awarded first prize. He was never placed as third in the tragic contests and he was astonishingly prolific – ancient accounts put the number of his plays at 123 (of which 7 survive); and, early in his career, he also performed in his own plays, which was a well accepted practice then.[7]

1.1.2. Theatre and performance in Ancient Greece

The Dionysia (the first recorded one is from 535 BC) was the annual, principal contest of a cycle of dramatic performances, held in the spring, gathering about 17 000 spectators – practically the whole population of Athens – in an open-air theatre, swelled by a large number of visiting strangers. It was a religious ritual, supervised entirely by the Athenian

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[6] Cf., for example: "For at first poets accepted any plots, but to-day the best tragedies are written about a few families – Alcmaeon for instance and Oedipus and Orestes and Meleanger and Thyestes and Telephus and all the others whom it befell to suffer or inflict terrible disasters." and: "A discovery is most effective when it coincides with reversals, such as that involved by the discovery in the *Oedipus*." Aristotle, *The Poetics*. Translated by W. Hamilton Fyfe. Aristotle in Twenty-Three Volumes, XXXIII, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press and London: William Heineman Ltd, 1982 (first edition 1927), 1453a and 1452a, p. 47 and p. 41.

[7] Cf. John Gassner and Edward Quinn (eds.), *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama* (henceforth REWD), London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1975, pp. 789-790

Government, held on a number of successive days but competition was not felt to be incongruous with the religious dignity of the occasion: before a tragedy could be performed at all, it had to pass the scrutiny of a selection-board (which judged the play chiefly on dramatic merit and very seldom on political grounds) and acceptance itself was already a high honour; The playwrights submitted their pieces to the *archon*, who was in charge of the festival at which the play was hoped to be performed. It was the archon who "granted a chorus" to the poets selected, which meant that he provided a *choregus*, a wealthy gentleman, who paid – among other things – the expenses of the chorus. The office of the *choregus* was regarded as a highly honourable and special service to the official state religion. A competition of comedies was admitted to the Great Dionysians in 486 B. C., and to the Lenaeans in 440 B. C. In performance, the play competed with the work of two other authors, and the prize was awarded by the votes of a panel of adjudicators, influenced, of course, by the reactions of the audience. The work of each author consisted of a group of four plays, three tragedies, either independent of each other (this practice was introduced precisely by Sophocles[8]) or forming a trilogy (the 'old' practice of Aeschylus), and a 'satyr-play' of a lighter vein (so, three competitors presented four plays in the course of the festival – thus there were usually 12 plays altogether). The reward, even in material value, was substantial. The actors, including the members of the Chorus, were exclusively male and trained by the poet himself, who was also the 'director', the 'stage-manager' of his plays. The actors were paid by the city but the other expenses (elaborate costumes, masks depicting, with broad and exaggerated emphasis, the dominant characteristics of the actor's role, high buskin boots and a lavish feast for all the players) were covered by the above-mentioned *choregus*.

Like other tragic authors, Sophocles composed the music, as well as the words of the choral odes: his music-teacher was Lampros and his model for dramatic style was the 'old master', Aeschylus. Sophocles introduced a few very significant innovations, too: the all-important Chorus originally consisted of twelve people, singing-reciting the story (providing a narrative, almost exclusively from the traditional mythology or the heroic past) and there was one actor, a kind of prologue and 'fore-singer' first, later more and more in dialogue with the Chorus (the 'dramatic' element). A second actor, as an antagonist to the first, was introduced by Aeschylus (turning tragedy into a kind of *agón*, a contest itself) and a third by Sophocles, who raised the number of the Chorus to fifteen. It was also Sophocles who, according to Aristotle's *Poetics*[9], introduced painted stage-scenery as well. The space for performance was the *orchestra* (a dancing-place) in which the Chorus moved and chanted, there was a platform for the actors (often raised above the orchestra) and a building (frequently with the facade of a palace or temple) as backdrop and as a retiring-place to change costumes, with three doors, the central one reserved for the principal actors. At either side of the orchestra and near the stage there was an entrance-way (*parodos*). Because the theatre in Athens faced south, with the town and the harbour at the audience's right and the open country to its left, it became a convention that characters entering from the right were 'coming from town or sea', and those entering from the left 'came from a long distance or by land' (e.g. messengers, shepherds, etc.). Later on this convention was applied to the side-doors of the building on the stage, too. There were various kinds of stage-machinery, the most important being the *mechané* ('machine', moving "flying gods") and the *eccyclema* (a platform on wheels, to reveal interior scenes).[10]

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[8] Although *Oedipus Rex, Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus* are often referred to as the 'Theban-trilogy', they were written in different periods of Sophocles's life and not in this order: *Antigone,* 442-441 BC; *Oedipus Rex,* 429-420 BC; and *Oedipus at Colonus* was performed only after Sophocles's death, in 401 BC

[9] Interestingly, *The Poetics* takes neither Aeschylus, nor Euripides as its model but predominantly Sophocles.

[10] Cf. REWD, pp. 372-379.

1.1.3. Aeschylus, the "father" and Sophocles, the "son"

In Aeschylian tragedy the solitary hero has to face his destiny or is playing out the inner drama of his own soul; properly speaking he is not the Human Being in his or her strength and weakness but a fearful and even extreme case of one sinful error that inevitably leads the sinner to catastrophe: the Aeschylian hero is doomed form the start, the plot is, therefore relatively static. For Sophocles, the tragedy of life is not that man is wicked or foolish but that he is *imperfect* – punishment for shortcomings is not automatic and is often beyond the moral or ethical plain. The 'tragedy of situation', in which the hero is lost either way, did not appeal to Sophocles. Oedipus is a wise father of the citizens, courteous and reasonable – the pity is that with *all* this excellence he must *still* fall. Sophocles's greatest achievement is that the various aspects of the hero's characteristics are so combined with the events that they lead to a disastrous issue (cf. the temperament of both Oedipus and his father, Laius – without that it would hardly make any sense for them to meet at the cross-roads). The disastrous issue, in retrospect (and, because the story is well-known, in advance) should appear to have been inevitable yet before the particular circumstances started to work on the hero (cf. the plague in Thebes) he is in that 'normal' state which we conventionally call 'happy'. He must be passing from this normal situation to a disaster which is either unforeseen or much greater than could be possibly expected, through *the working together* of character and circumstance. The play is the discovery procedure, the proof-seeking 'detective-story' itself, witnessed, step by step, by the audience, in which the various characteristics of the hero and the elements of the plot 'recognise' each other: they 'enter into a dialogue', interact and get intertwined. ('Whodunit?' – it is I.).

1.2. *Oedipus Rex* – an interpretation

Oedipus Rex[11] (429-420 BC) is the 'drama of dramas' because, besides being an excellently structured and thrilling tragedy, it also makes its hero re-enact – within his very drama – what the 'dramatic' *itself* might mean. Here Sophocles – as Shakespeare in *King Lear* or in *The Tempest*, for example – shows a keen interest in his very 'medium' and subject-matter. While putting the sad story of the King of Thebes on display, he wishes to investigate drama with the help of *the very drama* he is showing. Oedipus's final gesture of plucking his eyes out, for instance, might be interpreted as the coding *of the audience's essential relation to the stage* into the tragedy itself: although our primary bond with the stage is through watching

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[11] Some translators of the drama prefer to keep the original "Tyrannos" instead of "Rex" or "King". It is important to note, however, that although tyrannos meant 'absolute ruler' in the 5th century BC, he was by no means necessarily a bad one. He may have been good, he may have been bad; the point is that a *tyrannos* is somebody who has sized power, while a *king* succeeds by birth, by inheritance. A tyrannos – as Oedipus for a long time thinks himself to be – ascends to the throne through force, influence and intelligence, and everybody knows that Oedipus became king by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, to which the answer was "Man". "This *tyrannis* ('absolute power'), Oedipus himself says, "is a prize won with masses and money". Thus, even the title is one of the most powerful mockeries of the tragedy: Oedipus is tyrannos, because he owes his power to his intelligence, yet, even if for a long time he does not know about it, he is the king, too, as the legitimate son of Laius, and thus the rightful heir to the throne. This duality underscores that it seems there are in fact two Oedipuses in the play, a tyrannos and a king, a son and a husband, a father and a brother, a highly successful ruler and a blind beggar, a man who says "You must obey" and a man who says "I must obey". The social roles neatly clarified in "civilised" societies are hopelessly entangled when we take a look at the 'primordial chaos' of origin, always carrying the weight of some sinister crime. (Cf. Bernard Knox, "Sophocles' Oedipus", In: Cleanth Brooks (ed.), *Tragic Themes in Western Literature*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955, pp. 8-9)

and seeing (the Greek word *theatron*, ['theatre'] originally meaning 'a place of seeing')[12], the horror of having to look ourselves in the face, and of seeing ourselves *as we are* while witnessing to the tragedy is so unbearable that the moment we are revealed, our natural and first reaction will – paradoxically – be to cover our eyes, or to *look the other way*; we will go to all possible lengths to avoid the moment of total exposure. Oedipus will 'oblige' us by re-enacting this natural reaction 'in our stead', thereby inviting us to, *nevertheless*, face ourselves and, perhaps, to allow ourselves to be transformed in the very act of our seeing somebody *not* seeing. With this gesture, Sophocles also suggests that fiction is not *opposed* to reality but rather it is the 'royal rode' to it: it is participating in a kind of *fiction*, in a certain sort of 'unreality', which makes us capable of facing reality; our passage to the 'real world' is precisely through such appearances as the theatre. This is how, instead of concepts and *theory* (going back to Greek *theoria*, originally meaning 'spectacle'),[13] we first get *theatre* (*theatron*, 'a place of seeing'). And if we accept Károly Kerényi's suggestion that Greek *theoria* and *theorein* ('to look at', 'to gaze upon') are etymologically related to Greek *theos* ('God'),[14] then the theatre in Sophocles's interpretation becomes a 'place of seeing where one can – or cannot – look God in the face'. In Greek times the ritual of drama is part of a whole set of rituals: the amphitheatre is seen as the 'navel of the earth' and one can always find the *omphalos* there, a phallic-shaped stone, a memento (an *not* yet a *symbol*) of fertility (regeneration, spring, the promise of a new beginning, etc.). Drama is performed to purify the audience, to purge their souls almost in the clinical-medical sense (cf. the purging of the body). Today we see the theatre less as the 'map of the world' or as 'the body of God'. But, properly understood, drama might still be able to transform "*as if*" into "*I am*" through *seeing*: *fiction* into *being*, *fancy* into *existence* by making us *watch something*, by offering us an *in-sight*. At the same time, we share the same (present) *time* but not the same *physical space* with the actors; we *are* and *are not* a part of the performance; we participate in the ritual but we are also 'covered up', in the nowadays often literal darkness of the auditorium; we may look at the things happening *before* us from a certain distance. In other words, drama is a genre where we might be a part of an action without being morally responsible *directly*: if we see a man trying to kill a woman in a restaurant, we are morally obliged to react somehow, call the waiter, the police, etc. If we, however watch this scene as part of Shakespeare's *Othello*, then we may witness to a 'domestic quarrel' from the 'comfort' of the chair we paid for, and only the blockhead will jump on the stage to 'rescue the white lady from the black scoundrel'.

If we, however, insist on the inherent dramaticality of the lecture, we arrive, at the same time, at one of the fundamental paradoxes of drama-theory. If drama is typically to be *done,* to *happen*, to be *performed*, then what is the relationship between the written script (giving a relative permanence to drama) and the drama on the stage? The text (in a book, in a certain edition) rather seems to be a *pre-requisite* of drama and it is not, it *cannot* be, identical with it. But if drama is rather the performance, then it *does not exist* in the proper sense of the word: it is gone *in* and *with* the moment: its typical being is in its *being done.* And *that* particular performance can never be reproduced: it was bound to *that* night, to *that* audience, to *that* mental and physical disposition of the actors; it vanishes in the very act of being produced.

The above paradox may give as two hints as to the nature of drama. The 'time' or 'tense' of drama seems to be the 'present continuous' rather than the 'simple past' (the latter so 'natural' as the 'tense' of narratives: novels, epic poetry, etc.). We might even say that the task of drama is precisely to *transform* the narrative, the *simple past* (or the *past perfect*), i.e. 'finished history' into the *present continuous* or, at least the *present perfect*. It should be

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[12] Cf. Bruce Wiltshire, *Role Playing and Identity. The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 11.
[13] Cf. op. cit. , p. 33
[14] Cf. *ibid.*

noticed that the audience of *Oedipus Rex* knew the story by heart (as Shakespeare's audience knew the story of *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet* quite well, too); they did not go to the theatre to hear about 'something new'. Rather, they wanted the myth to happen again, in their *immediate present*, they wished to participate in its 'continuous present-ness', they wanted to be *present* while it was re-*present*ed in their *present* (continuous) 'tense'. As Oedipus transforms a past piece of information ('an old man was killed at the cross-roads') into his present, turning *knowledge* into *present understanding* (so horrible that he will pluck his eyes out), so might our past become a *part* of our present in the theatre through our *part*icipating in the mythical-ritualistic re-enactment of what happened a long time before. Aristotle calls the *moment* of discovery *anagnorisis*, which, in *Oedipus Rex*, happens to coincide with the 'reversal of fortune' called *peripeteia* (cf. 2.3.3.). And it is the same change of the action into its opposite which transforms the *active* (voice) into the *passive*: the investigator turns into the object of investigation, the detective into the criminal, the teacher into the object of the lesson, the doer into the sufferer of the action, the agent into the patient.

The above considerations about time and tenses give us a clue with respect to another fundamental feature of drama. Drama 'does not exist' also in the sense that its 'real' being is in *the moment*: if its 'genuine' existence is given in the unreproducible, the contingent and the indeterminate, then we understand why it is in constant rivalry with narrative genres: the truly 'dramatic' is not the story (the plot) but the *moment*, when everything is suspended and one may still decide to do *this or that*; (s)he may choose to go in various directions, as e.g. Macbeth may choose to kill or not to kill Duncan in the famous 'Is this a dagger I can see before me'-monologue.

Oedipus is also given various stories and the question is in which of them he is willing to recognise himself, with which he is ready to identify his being. There are various possibilities, for example that this is a plot (!) cleverly woven by Creon and Teiresias, or that according to an eye-witness, there were *several* robbers (highwaymen). Jocasta, Oedipus's mother and wife, will even say:

> Oh but I assure you that was what he [the shepherd, the eye-witness] said;
> He cannot go back on it now – the whole town heard it.
> Not only I. And even if he changes his story
> In some small point, he cannot in any event
> Pretend that Laius died as was foretold.
> For Loxias said a child of mine should kill him.
> It was not to be; poor child, it was he that died.
> A fig for divination![15]

The emphasis is on "pretend" and on the exclamation "A fig for divination": it is through pretence, through make-believe, through a dramatic *story* – which can just as well be the figment of one's fancy as the naked truth – that Oedipus learns the *truth* and the truth is not in the testimony of the shepherd; it is of utmost significance that when the shepherd, who is *identical* with the eye-witness of Laius' death, tells the story of the infant Oedipus (how he entrusted him to a Corinthian shepherd, who brought the baby to the Corinthian King), Oedipus will no longer question him about the past events and the number of robbers at the cross-roads: the truth of the story is in its *acceptance* by Oedipus. Finally, Oedipus does accept the story that he is the murderer of his father and the son-and-husband of Jocasta, while in principle he could still claim that the shepherd was bribed, is senile etc. The truth is not in the story, or in the testimony, or in the singular or plural of the noun *robber* (turning tragedy into 'grammar' as well), or in the

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[15] Sophocles: *King Oedipus*. Trans. by E. F. Walting, IN: Sophocles, *The Theban Plays,* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Inc., (1947), 1969, pp 25–68. References – unless otherwise noted – are to this translation.

'correspondence of the words with facts'; the truth is *in* Oedipus and, most importantly, it was *there* all along: he should remember now, he must remember the prophecy he received at Pytho ("But [I] came back disappointed with the answer / To the question I asked, having heard instead a tale / Of horror and misery: how I must marry my mother, / And become the parent of a misbegotten brood"), he should recall at least the fact that he killed an old man and his train and that he should also avoid marriage with any woman who is older than him. Then why did he not remember all this when he, the revealer of the riddle of the Sphinx, became King in the city and, with that, 'inherited' the widow? Was it the *hubris* (pride, vanity) which blinded him? Was it the euphoria he felt when he was successful? Or shall we say that he simply *chose* his destiny even *then*, and now it has only come *to light*? Similarly, Jocasta's "a fig for divination" is another important aspect of the story: this is precisely the attitude the gods will *not* tolerate; one cannot neglect them, they will 'prove' that they are right – *right* in the sense that they know the 'past' events from the *time* when it was 'only' 'the future'. The gods do nor compel but they do predict. Sophocles seems to believe that it is *possible* that the universe is not a chaotic place and that there is order in it according to the *logos* ('law', 'basic principle', 'language', etc.); it is possible that a universal rhythm rules in the physical world and in human affairs alike, an order which should not be mocked at. The index of this order is the perfect dramatic *form* in which Sophocles usually writes. Sophocles does not *declare* that there is such a rational order but he does *not* exclude its possibility – what is at stake precisely is *if* there is such a rational order or not; *this* provides the dramatic tension. If Sophocles had decided the question before he sat down to write the play, it would not have any appeal to the present-day reader.

We, of course, *know* that, according to the script, Oedipus will choose to identify himself, ultimately, as Laius's son and Jocasta's husband-*and*-son but, precisely because of the 'momentary' character of drama, we enjoy the performance since *in our presence* it is *still* possible that he will decide otherwise. Thus my claim is that drama is not only in rivalry with the narrative genres but it is also strangely in rivalry with *itself*: drama is the 'insurrection' of the *moment* against the *plot* (considered to be the 'soul' of drama (tragedy) by Aristotle); it is *within* drama that the moment 'rebels' against the story (the plot). On the one hand, the moment wants to totalise itself, it wishes to fill the whole vacuum on the stage bound to the present; on the other hand, the moment could not mean anything if it were not a part of a sequence, of a time-line of consecutive steps organising themselves into cause-and-effect relationships, forming a continuum (cf. the 'continuous' from 'present continuous'). In my interpretation, then, drama is *both* Zeno's famous arrow, always 'standing' in mid-air, in the moment; and, simultaneously, the *movement* of the arrow as well, trying to constitute a *whole* 'story'.

Oedipus' story is set, both in the sense that we know it from its beginning to its end, and in the sense that *within* the play there is both the prophecy Oedipus heard himself as a young man, and the story and prophecy of Teiresias, representing, in the play, precisely *our* fore-knowledge (*prognoia*, 'foresight') of the events which we learnt from the myth or through our previous acquaintance with the play. (We may say that the prophecies in the play are the index of our foresight). But it depends on Oedipus' free will *which* of the alternatives he will accept (in the tension of the *moment*): *one* of the various possibilities, with the help of Time, will reveal who he *really* is. ("CHORUS: Time sees all; and now he has found you, when you least expected it"). He will choose the least appealing variant because he wants to *know*[16], and it is

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[16] The name *Oedipus* may not only go back to *oidi* ('swollen') + *poys* ('foot'), presenting Oedipus as the man with swollen feet, but to *oida* ('I know') as well: Oedipus is the one who wishes to know. 'I know' runs through the play with the same ironic persistence as 'foot', e.g. Creon says "The Sphinx forced us to look at what was at our feet"; Tiresias recalls "the dread-footed curse of your father and mother"; CHORUS: "Let the murderer of Laius set his foot in motion in fight", "The murderer is a man alone with forlorn foot", "The laws of Zeus are high-footed", "The man of pride plunges down into doom where he cannot use his foot" (cf. Bernard Knox, op. cit., pp. 12-13).

in this human trait that Greek tragedy will, to a great extent, recognise the tragic itself: truth, when 'fully' revealed, i.e. is acknowledged and accepted, lays claim to some of the most vulnerable aspects of the human being; truth might be known but it, at the same time and with the self-same gesture, destroys the human being. Without truth the tragic hero *cannot live*; with the truth he is *unable* to live. But two things must remain: reverence and dignity – to have been great of soul is everything.

Chapter 2

Some basic concepts of drama-analysis: from Aristotle to Freud

2. 1. Aristotle: life and work

2.1.1. Aristotle's life

Aristotle (384, Stageira, - 322, Khalkis) was a *metoikos* ('one who lives together') in Athens, never a citizen (perhaps this is why he almost totally neglects the mythic-religious aspects of tragedy, though he touches upon it, very briefly, when he talks about the origins of comedy and tragedy). He spent 20 years at Plato's Academy (367-347 BC) but he was never trusted completely because of his ties with Athens' arch-enemy at that time, Macedonia (Amyntas, his father was the physician of the grandfather of Alexander the Great). In 347 Plato died and because of the political tension between Macedonia and Athens, Aristotle first went to Atarneus and then to Lesbos, where he started to work together with his best friend, and later 'editor' and successor, Theophrastus. In 343, he became the tutor of Alexander the Great. Because of the hegemony of Macedonia in the region, between 334 and 323 (these were his most productive years) he lectured in the Lykeion (originally a gymnasium, belonging to Athens), which differs from Plato's Academy also in the sense that Aristotle could not buy land in Athens so the Lykeion in Aristotle's lifetime was never acknowledged as a proper 'school'. When Alexander died in 323, he moved to Khalkis and he soon died at the age of 62.[17]

2.1.2. Aristotle's way of teaching philosophy and the place of *The Poetics* in his system

Aristotle is a highly systematic thinker; he is the first encyclopaedic philosopher who would like to cover – in his lectures given at the Lykeion – the whole range of human knowledge. From logic (which teaches the art of reasoning and debating – the 'tool' to all philosophy) to metaphysics (which is on God or on *being as being* – the highest form of knowledge) he covers ethics, politics (the right way of behaviour in the *polis* ('town'), the study of nature (*physis*)[18], meteorology, the problem of the soul, rhetoric, etc. Poetics has a place in the encyclopaedia as well.

The Poetics is the first systematic body of text on artistic creation, on epic poetry, on drama and, first and foremost, on tragedy. Of course, Aristotle is not the first one to deal with problems we today call "aesthetic": even the Pre-Socratics (especially Xenophanes and, briefly and depreciatingly mentioning Homer, Heraclitus, too) did consider certain aesthetic questions, and the interpreters of Homer (e.g. Metrodorus), the Sophists (e.g. Protagoras, Gorgias), the historians (e.g. Herodotus) and, first and foremost, Plato himself kept asking what the *truth* of the work of art is. Should art teach a certain ethical stance? And, especially: what is *mimesis*? Plato says in the *Republic* that even the act of building the republic is an artistic activity. It is all the more surprising that Aristotle, despite his general practice, does not give an overview of previous opinions and that here he does not even mention Plato.

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[17] Cf. Marjorie Greene, *A Portrait of Aristotle.* London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1963, pp. 15-19.

[18] Thus *physics* for Aristotle still means 'natural science in general'.

2.1.3. Aristotle and Plato

It is inevitable that we take a look at Aristotle's most significant philosophical ideas. This is important not only because otherwise it is well-nigh impossible to understand his aesthetic teaching but also because some basic differences between the Aristotelian and the Platonic systems will be of vital significance in the discussion of the Renaissance, too.

The most convenient starting point, indeed, is to contrast Aristotle with his teacher, Plato. Plato suggests a split between the sensible world (the world of phenomena) and the intelligible world; the intelligible world for him is the domain of the famous *ideas*; the original word is *eidos*, which is often translated into English as *form* to avoid confusion with 'ideas in our heads'. Platonic ideas (forms) are famously *not* in the human mind – they are in a world with which we may have been in acquaintance before our birth, yet now, on Earth, no one has direct access to forms; it is perhaps only the philosopher who may grasp something of them, in search of knowledge (*epistémé*) instead of mere opinion (*doxa*), but only if he is driven by the conviction that Knowledge is Truth, Truth is Beauty and Beauty is Virtue. But it is in principle that philosophy cannot result in some kind of a 'direct acquaintance' with forms; philosophy is rather the knowledge *of* the split itself, it is the awareness of the very tension between the two worlds, it is the humble acknowledgement of the opposition.

Thus, Plato is very much aware of what we might call *the ontological gap* between the two domains: the phenomenal world (the world we see if we look around us) is in constant flux but the domain of the *eidos* has abiding permanence and the constancy of significance: for Plato the *real* world is precisely the *eidetic, ideal* domain, the realm of *forms*, and not the prosaic, vulgar and incessant flow (flux) going on around us.

By contrast, for Aristotle, the world is built up according to a hierarchy of interconnected and causal elements, where each and every event has its appropriate and well-definable end. However, the maintenance of proportion is not guaranteed by external factors (the world of *eidos*) but is guaranteed from within the thing (the phenomenon) itself: for Aristotle the *eidos* is *in* the thing, it is – as we shall see – the *genus* of the thing. Thus, for Aristotle, it is the concept of *development* which becomes the general principle of explanation. All diversity is contained as a definite *phase* or *step* in the process of development. Diversity will be contained and reconciled in the unifying dynamic process. The world is a self-enclosed sphere, it has no beginning and no end (it is indestructible and uncreated), and within it there are only differences of degrees. The force of development flows from the divine unmoved mover of the universe; below him there are the star-gods, whose matter is ethereal, i.e., their body is divine, and then several further layers of beings can be found, down to the senseless stones. There are no gaps in the universe, there is finite and continuous space, measurable in distinct and determinable stages.

For Aristotle, the ultimate goal of thinking is wisdom (*phronesis*): the knowledge of all things. Knowledge starts with experience, which reaches us through the senses in the form of immediate perception. Art is the contemplation of universals, whereas science is the investigation of first causes, i.e. the *substance*, the *essence*, the ultimate substratum, shape or from (*eidos*) of all things; the first cause is the *ultimate* "Why". There are three more causes in Aristotle's system: (2) matter, which is the immanent *material* from which a thing comes into being and persists (e.g. the *bronze* of a statue); (3) the source of change: the cause which brings about/transforms/alters a thing in an *immediate* manner (as the *father* is the 'cause' of the child when begetting it) (4) the *goal* or end, which is that for the sake of which something comes into being (as we may say that health is the '*cause*' of walking about in nature – *in order to* be healthy, we take a walk in the woods).

Aristotle's most well-known criticism of Plato's theory of Forms is often called 'the One-over-many-argument' (which, incidentally, has some traces already in Plato's *Parmenides* as a kind of challenge of the philosopher to himself). According to Aristotle, Plato, in his theory, runs into the trap of infinite regress. This is a deficiency all philosophical theories wish to

avoid because it makes rational thinking pointless. Let us take the example of Man: there are, obviously, particular men (in the phenomenal world, here and now) and there is the Form of Man in the world of *eidos*. The question is the relationship between the Form and the particular instances: if we may correctly apply the name 'man' to both the particular instances and to the Form, we need a standpoint from which this is possible, yet this position is very much like a 'super-position', from which *both* the Form and the particular instances can be seen, i.e. it is a position which is even 'higher' than the realm of Forms. Thus, in the shape of this 'super-position', we have a new 'One' over 'the many', the latter now not only comprising the particular instances of man but the Form of Man as well. Yet now, in order to describe all the three types of entities (namely, the particular instances, the Form and the newly arisen 'super-position') correctly as 'man', we again need a 'super-super-position', which will now be the fourth entity to which the word 'man' can be applied, and so on: we face infinite regress, or move in a vicious circle in the sense that *man* still seems to be defined by itself.[19]

In Aristotle's universe, everything is made up of four natural substances: fire, earth, water, and air. Every instance belongs to various species; species, in turn belong to genera. The genus comprises what is the same in things belonging to different species: the genus is the form, the *eidos* itself. The highest genera are the categories (universals): substance (e.g. man, horse *in itself*), quality (e.g. white), quantity (e.g. two inches long) relation (e.g. double of something), place (e.g. in the garden), time (e.g. yesterday), position (e.g. lying (on the ground), possessive (e.g. in shoes), action (e.g. to cut), and passion (e.g. to be cut).[20]

2.1.4. The problem with Aristotle's works: system or jumble?

It was Theophrastus, Aristotle's friend and successor, who arranged the Master's works (including *The Poetics*), so he might have been responsible for some strange features in many of Aristotle's works, including some surprising inconsistencies.

For example, in obviously one of the most important of his works, in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle is not consistent in defining the subject-matter of metaphysics systematically, which – judging by the pedantry which usually characterises Aristotle – is more than puzzling. In Book Gamma he says:

> There is a science [metaphysics or first philosophy] which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this by virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others treats universally of being as being (1003a, lines 18-24).

In Book Delta (under the name "Philosophical Lexicon"), "Being" is not connected with the study of metaphysics at all, and in Book Eta he says:

> But if there is something which is eternal and immovable and separable, clearly the knowledge of it belongs to a theoretical science – not, however to physics (for physics deals

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[19] Please note that Plato's case is not hopeless; he may argue, as he in fact does in *Parmenides,* that a Form (the 'One') like Man is 'above' the particular instances ('the many men') as the sun is above all of us: it shines 'globally' and evenly on everybody without a particular instance 'taking' something 'out' from the sun (the One is not like a blanket which is covering everybody's head, each head taking up some space on the surface of the blanket). Thus, it is improper to say that the meaning of 'man' is the same when it designates a particular instance and when it is applied to the Form; a shift of meaning seems to characterise the switch from instances to Forms. An alternative solution might be that even if we claim that the instance somehow 'participates' in the Form, this participation is through *imitation* and, again, not through taking a 'part' of the Form out. The particular instance is a kind of 'shadow' to the Form; the instance 'follows' the Form, it would 'like' to be the Form, it has been shaped *with respect to* the Form yet it is not making the Form up quantitatively.

[20] Cf. Marjorie Greene, op. cit., pp. 34-57.

> with certain movable things) nor to mathematics, but to a science prior to both. For physics deals with things which exist separately but are not immovable, and some parts of mathematics deal with things which are immovable but presumably do not exist separately, but embodied in matter, while the first science deals with things which both exist separately and are immovable. Now all causes must be eternal, but especially these; for they are the causes that operate on so much of the divine as appears to us [i.e. produce the movements of the heavenly bodies]. There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics and what we may call theology, since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in things of this sort (1026a, lines 10-21).

In 1923, Professor Werner Jaeger, in his book called *Aristoteles*, tried to interpret these inconsistencies (giving rise to a critical upheaval in Aristotelian studies only comparable to the one emerging after A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* in 1904). Jaeger claims that in the course of years Aristotle changed his mind when lecturing on metaphysics and that the various books of his work, put together by Theophrastus, do not show the real order of composition: Theophrastus created a jumble (most likely in other works, too). In Jaeger's reconstruction, Aristotle set out to lecture on First Philosophy (metaphysics) as a brilliant young Platonist and then he still shared the interest of his fellow-Platonists in the Divine. Thus, first philosophy then could not be anything else but the study of God. Later, when Aristotle's medical background came to have its due influence on his work, and he developed a keen interest in the structure and functioning of all living things, he started to hold that first philosophy has no subject-genus, as it deals not with any single species of being, unambiguously carved out of a wider genus, as we carve the species MAN out of the genus *ANIMAL*, but with the much more difficult (and only indirectly accessible) subject, "being *as* being", the Being of *all* things. Thus, metaphysics does not even deal with God, since He is still *one* being among the others, even though the most perfect and the best. In 1927 Hans von Armin argued that Jaeger's chronology for the composition of the *Metaphysics* is circular; Guthrie in 1933 claimed that what Jaeger takes to be the early theology is in fact the mature view, developed not out of Platonic interests but out of a down-to-earth materialism – there is no end to the debate. But the controversies illustrate our still-prevailing uncertainties concerning some of the most important concepts put forth by Aristotle.

2.2. Aristotle's silent debate with Plato on *mimesis* and poetry

As Murray Krieger points out in his remarkable book, *Ekhphrasis*, Plato works with two definitions of "imitation" in *The Republic*: a broader and a narrower one[21]. The broader definition is well-known and comes from Book Ten, where Plato blames the representational arts for being, as Stephen Halliwell puts it "crudely parasitic on reality", the artist's aim, according to Plato, being

> to produce the effect of a mirror held up to the world of the senses.[22] Mimetic works are fake or pseudo-reality; they deceive, or are intended to deceive; their credentials are false, since they purport to be, what in fact they are not.[23]

However, in Book Three of *The Republic*, Socrates-Plato restricts "imitation" to dramatic "imitation", in the sense of 'impersonation', in the meaning of 'direct miming or speech'[24].

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[21] Cf. Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis. The Illusion of the Natural Sign.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, pp. 34-41.

[22] Cf. Plato, *The Republic.* Trans. and ed. by Raymond Larson. Arlington Hights, Ill.: AHM Publishing Corporation, 1979, 596d-e.

[23] Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics.* London: Duckworth, 1986, p. 1986. See also Plato, *The Republic,* op. cit., 601c and 605c-d.

[24] Cf. Krieger, op. cit., pp. 35-37 and Plato, *The Republic,* op. cit., p. 62.

We have an instance of "impersonation" when – while reciting a Homeric poem or acting out a tragedy or simply narrating like a "moderate gentleman"[25] – a person is not telling *about* another person's deeds, and he is not quoting the other's speech but starts *acting out* what the other has been or was doing, and begins speaking in the other person's name – he acts as if he *were* the other person, he becomes 'one' with the other.

Now, as it is well-known, in Book Ten Socrates-Plato concludes that

> we acted reasonably in banishing her [Poetry] from our city, being such as she is – reason dictated our course. And let's also remind her – lest she accuse us of being harsh and uncouth – that an ancient feud persists between philosophy and poetry. Expressions that call Philosophy 'great in the idle chatter of fools' a 'yapping bitch who snaps at her master' and philosophers 'pointy-headed riffraff', who 'after subtle agonizing conclude that 'they're broke' and countless others like them all attest to that ancient quarrel. Nevertheless be it said that should imitative poetry directed to pleasure be able to give reasons for her existence in a well-regulated city, we'd gladly take her back from her exile, acknowledging that we too are enchanted by her.[26]

Yet it is precisely when Plato deals with the not "well-regulated" or "enchanting" features of dramatic representation and when he narrows it down to "impersonation", pointing out its serious dangers, that he acknowledges the tremendous power and challenge of drama for the human being. Hence the paradox also in the later puritanical attempts at closing the theatres. "The Southern yokel who rushes to the stage to save Desdemona from the black man"[27] also takes the transformation in the theatre for 'reality', yet he is much better: he wishes to participate. In Plato's analysis, impersonation takes a person totally in, it impinges upon the person, it changes and transforms his identity. This, of course, is the source of the danger of the theatre. Yet the poetic (or even 'dramatic') terms in which Plato depicts this danger are dangerous in themselves:

> "Or haven't you noticed how imitation, if practiced from childhood, settles into natural
> habits in speech, body and mind?"
> "I certainly have."
> "Then," I said, "we mustn't let our children, if we want them to grow into good men,
> imitate a woman – nagging her husband, boasting and challenging the gods, wallowing in
> seeming happiness or noisy grief – much less one who's sick, in love or in labour."
> "Absolutely not," he said.
> ....
> "Nor evil, cowardly men doing the opposite of what we just said: ridiculing and abusing
> each other, drunk or sober, with disgusting words, and debasing themselves and others with
> the kind of speech and acts used by that sort of person. Nor should they get into the habit of
> imitating maniacs."
> ....
> "But a worthless fellow will use more imitation in proportion to his own worthlessness:
> he'll consider nothing beneath him and stoop to imitating anything seriously even in public
> – thunder, howling winds, hail, squeaky wheels and pulleys, blaring trumpets, flutes,
> bugles, and every other instrument, as well as barking dogs, mooing cows, and chirping
> birds. His style will be all imitation of sounds and gestures with little or no narration."[28]

While reading the above lines certain scenes from Shakespeare might flash to mind: Kate from *The Taming of the Shrew* ("nagging her husband", etc.), Falstaff from *Henry IV*, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew from *Twelfth Night* ("ridiculing and abusing each other, drunk or sober, with disgusting words", etc.), Hamlet ("imitating maniacs"), or King Lear ("challenging the gods", imitating "thunder, howling winds, hail", etc. in storm and tempest). This is not the

[25] Plato, *The Republic,* op. cit. , 393d-394d

[26] Plato, *The Republic,* op. cit., 607b-d.

[27] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 98.

[28] Plato, *The Republic,* op. cit., 325d-396a; 397a-b

time either to point out Shakespeare's silent quarrel with Plato and with Sir Philip Sidney's *A Defence of Poetry*[29] (cf. 6. 5.), or to refer to those passages in Plato where he responds to imitation more favourably.[30] Here I wish to emphasise how clearly Plato saw and how vividly he could depict the power and challenge of drama in the theatre. And if we further consider how his dialogistic practice – in *The Republic* and in almost everything he wrote – undercuts the very principles he is putting forward[31], we might claim that he practically banished himself from his own Republic.

On the other hand, there is Aristotle, who works out a detailed, balanced and coherent – though by no means easily digestible[32] – theory of drama, yet he is never himself dramatic in the above, Platonic sense, and especially not in *The Poetics*. It is widely agreed that Aristotle's basic disagreement with Plato – in full knowledge of his teacher's works[33] – is over the concept of mimesis (imitation): Aristotle – as Stephen Halliwell argues – also works with two concepts of imitation: "a general notion of mimesis as a fictional representation of the material of human life, and also a more technical sense of mimesis as the enactive or dramatic mode of poetry".[34] The mimetic representation of action as *muthos* (plot-structure) becomes a key-term in *The Poetics*. Mimesis ceases to be a vehicle of falsehood precisely through the *muthos*, the plot of drama;

> And since tragedy is an imitation of an action, and is enacted by certain people through action, who must necessarily have certain qualities of thought and character [:..] and since it is the plot which is the imitation of action (for by 'plot' I mean here the arrangement of the events), and the 'characters' are those indications by virtue of which we say that the persons performing the action have certain moral qualities, and 'thought' the passages in which by means of speech they try to prove some argument or else state a general view – it follows necessarily that the constituent elements of the tragic art as a whole are six in number, in so far as tragedy is a special kind of art (they are plot and characters, speech-composition and thought, visual appearance and song-composition).[35]

As Else comments:

> For the plot is the structure of the play, around which the material 'parts' are laid, just as the soul is the structure of a man [...]. It is well known that in Aristotle's biology the soul – i.e., the form – is 'prior' to the body and [...] he thinks of the plot as prior to the poem in exactly the same way. [...] For Aristotle the plot precedes the poem, but it is essentially 'made' by the poet, even if he is using traditional material.[36]

The plot-structure is the result of a dynamic activity, an en-plotment – art or *poiésis* is a mak*ing*, and even a discovery[37] (cf. 2.3.3 and 2.5.2). It is through the selecting of the events with respect to their weight and importance, it is through the connecting of them with one another while condensing them into a unity, that

> the writing of poetry is a more philosophical activity, and one to be taken more seriously, than the writing of history; for poetry tells us rather the universals, history the particulars.

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[29] Cf. Sir Philip Sidney, "A Defence of Poetry" In: *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney,* Edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1979, pp 59-122.

[30] For example, Plato, *Laws*, Book 2 and Book 7.

[31] Cf. Plato, *The Republic,* op. cit., 1979, p. 64.

[32] Cf. Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument.* Cambridge, Mass.,: Harvard University Press, 1967, p. vii.

[33] Cf. Halliwell, op. cit., p. 2 and pp. 331-336; see also Else, op. cit., pp. 97-101.

[34] Halliwell, op. cit., pp. 21-22

[35] Aristotle, *The Poetics* In: Else, op. cit., 49b36-50a11

[36] Else, op. cit., pp. 242-243

[37] Cf. Else, op. cit., p. 320.

'Universal' means what kinds of thing a certain kind of person will say or do in accordance with probability or necessity, which is what poetic composition aims at.[38]

It follows that Aristotle will praise Homer precisely for a trait Plato condemns him for: Aristotle points out Homer's exceptional talent for plot-making and his rare ability of hiding behind his characters, himself "doing as little talking [i.e. connecting-narration] as possible"[39] and allowing his characters to speak for themselves. By contrast Plato – as it has been hinted at – goes to great lengths to complain that Homer gives full licence to impersonation and presents too little detached narration.[40]

Aristotle does rescue the concept of mimesis from his master's hands for a more 'philosophical' appreciation, claiming that the plot – and, thus, imitation – is able to capture some dimensions of the "universal". However, what Aristotle achieves, considered at least from the Platonic point of view, is, on the one hand, too little: Aristotle's universals are not Plato's ideas. As Else explains:

> Plato's indictment had come to this: poetry cannot represent truth because it cannot penetrate to the Ideas but stops short at the veil of Appearance (particulars). So stated, the case of poetry is hopeless; for no one can argue seriously that she has either the method or the will to reach the abstract plane of the Ideas. Aristotle's defence (which is implicit, not explicit) does not attempt that gambit. In his scheme, metaphysics, the science of Being, and its congeners physics and mathematics (also to some extent astronomy), are a special group of 'theoretical' sciences; and the theoretical sciences have theoretical objects only. Human life and action belong to the 'practical' sphere and have nothing to do with metaphysics.[...] That, in fact, is why Aristotle so carefully uses the double formula "according to probability or necessity" throughout the *Poetics*; for necessity can never be absolute in the sublunar world. [...] What it [the poetic] can offer us is a view of the *typology of human nature*, freed from the accidents that encumber our vision in real life. [...] [In Aristotle's theory] the poet is released from Plato's requirement that he must go to school to philosophy to learn the truth (the Ideas). But he is also condemned to the 'practical' realm and must not claim that he understands the ultimate things. There is in fact not a word in the *Poetics* about the ultimate "secrets of life", about why mankind should suffer or be happy, about Fate, or man's relation to God, or any such metaphysical matters. These omissions are not accidental.[...] [Aristotle] has solved Plato's insistent question about the metaphysical justification by begging the question: that is, by assuming tacitly that poetry has no metaphysical dimension.[41]

Considered now from the point of view of drama, what Aristotle achieves demands a high price as well: imitation primarily goes to the poet, to the act or operation of making poetry and the more Aristotle insists that poetry, in this sense, is an activity, the more he loses sight of the other activity, the activity of imitation on the actor's and the audience's part. Although Aristotle's *opsis* 'visual appearance'[42], or 'spectacle'[43] (cf. 2.3.2.) may semantically also comprise "the whole visible apparatus of the theatre"[44] and there indeed are scattered references to drama-in-performance in *The Poetics*[45], he talks very little about drama as it is embodied in the theatre, in the actual presentation of 'impersonators'. Drama has become, in a sense, 'tamed': activity and dynamism is, to the largest extent, on the poet's side, whose 'making' will result in a structured and unified 'artefact', a kind of 'object' or 'thing'. *Muthos*, and, therefore, mimesis, are no longer dependent – as far as their 'essence' is concerned – on the senses of the actors, and even very little on the senses of the audience: "the process is one

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[38] Aristotle, *The Poetics* In: Else, op. cit., 51b7-11
[39] Aristotle, *The Poetics* In: Else, op. cit., 60a8
[40] Cf. Plato, *The Republic.,* op. cit., 387b-395a.
[41] Else, op. cit., pp. 305-306
[42] Cf. Aristotle, *The Poetics* In: Else, op. cit., 50a11
[43] Cf. Halliwell, op. cit., p. 337.
[44] Halliwell, op. cit., p. 337
[45] Cf. Aristotle, *The Poetics* In: Else, op. cit., 47a22, 48b23, 49a9-13.

increasing objectification [...] of the mimetic impulse."[46] The whole of *The Poetics* strives at fitting the problem of imitation and drama into the great, encyclopaedic philosophical system as further specimens in the grand and overall 'butterfly-collection': instead of *theatron* (theatre proper) we mostly get *theoria* (theory).

To sum up the whole of my argument concerning Aristotle in Else's apt formulation: "philosophy in itself is not dramatic in Aristotle's eyes – but rather its opposite; though the drama is the drama of a philosopher."[47]

2.3. The structure of Aristotle's *The Poetics*

2.3.1. *The Poetics* (*Peri poiletikes – On the Art of Poetic Creation*, ca. 335 BC): Chapters[48] 1-5: preliminaries

For Aristotle, the essence (*usia*) of poetry is *mimesis* (imitation) and poetry as a species belongs to the *genos* of 'imitative art'. Art ('*techné*') here means 'being well-versed in a field', 'capability', 'expertise', 'know-how'; it is technical (and not scientific) knowledge, it is not *épistemé*. With respect, now, to the *genos* of poetry, there are the following species: epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, and dythirambic poetry[49]. Poetry can be divided according to the *means* used in composition (language, tune, rhythm, harp-playing, etc.), or according to the different *objects* it represents (good or inferior people doing or experiencing something), or according to the *manner* in which the objects are represented: in epic poetry (the chief example is Homer), there is narrative and, in the performance, the singer may assume (personify, cf. 2.2 above) certain characters; drama represents characters carrying out actions themselves. Then Aristotle gives a very brief history of poetry: its origin has to do with man's *instinct* for representation (imitation) in childhood, his joy in accurate likeness (learning) and in technique. Here tragedy is defined for the first time in order to distinguish it from comedy: imitating fine doings of fine men is tragedy, while imitating inferior (base and ugly people) gives rise to comedy, since for Aristotle a part of ugliness is the 'laughable' (cf. 2.5).

2.3.2 The definition and the parts of tragedy

In 1449b Aristotle contrasts tragedy with epic poetry; they differ in length: "tragedy tends to fall within a single revolution of the sun or slightly exceed that"[50], while an epic piece is unlimited. It is also for this reason that epics is inferior to tragedy. And here we find the famous, lengthiest definition of tragedy – practically every word here has given rise to endless debates:

> tragedy is, then, a representation (imitation, *mimesis*) of an action (*praxis*) that is heroic (*spudaios*) and complete (*teleios*) and of certain magnitude – by means of language enriched with all kinds of ornament ['spiced language, spiced with rhythm and tune'], each used separately in the different parts of the play: it represents man in action (*praxis*) and

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[46] Else, op. cit., p. 101

[47] Else, op. cit., p. 44

[48] Chapter numbers were not given by Aristotle but by the humanists in the Renaissance

[49] In 49a10 of *The Poetics*, Aristotle talks about dythirambic poetry as the ancestor of tragedy, a song sung and danced by the chorus at the Dyonysia.

[50] This is one of the formulations which has given rise to endless debates: what does Aristotle mean by the 'single revolution of the sun'? Twelve hours? Twenty-four hours? And what does it mean that tragedy may 'slightly' exceed that? That it may take place within, say, thirty-six hours? (cf. 2.4.2).

does not use narrative, and through pity (*eleos*) and fear (*phobos*) it effects relief (*catharsis*) to these and similar emotions.

Aristotle goes on to distinguish between the six parts of tragedy:

1. spectacular effect (*opsis*): the manner of representation; Aristotle surprisingly says here that "it has nothing to do with poetry" (1450b), "Indeed the effect of tragedy does not depend on its performance by actors" (1450b).

The means of representation are:

2. song-making (*melopoiia*): this is the most important element to 'enrich' (spice) tragedy

3. diction (*lexis*): the expression of meaning in words.

Then comes the most important element, the plot, the "soul of tragedy" for Aristotle (1450b, and cf. 2.2 above):

4. the imitation (*mimesis*) of action (*praxis*) is the *plot* (*muthos*): "the arrangement (*susthasis*–a medical term, also used to describe the human constitution, organism) of the incidents" (*pragma*, of 'what happens').

Since men are represented *in action*, each of these men have

5. a certain *character* (*ethos:* the quality of agents, their custom, habit). Character reveals choice (*prohairesis*)[51]; *ethos* is the pre-requisite of sound judgement, motivated by unemotional and mature thinking (*dianoia*), while *prohairesis* is the human will, the deliberate adoption of a course of conduct or line of action. It is not the deed but the choice that determines the goodness or the badness of a character.

6. Men also have a mode of speech or thought (*dianoia*), here mode or way of speech taken from a rhetorical, persuasive point of view. *Dianoia* is "when in the dialogue the character puts forward an argument or deliver an opinion", "saying what is possible and appropriate", Aristotle says. The meaning of *dianoia* is here closer to 'argumentation' than to 'thought' (the original meaning of *dianoia*), since in drama thinking gets revealed through the speeches of the characters.

2.3.3. The plot

As we saw in 2.2., for Aristotle *mimesis* is plot-making by the poet, the poet is thus the maker of plots. The action imitated must be whole and complete, the arrangement of the incidents should be orderly, and the plot should have magnitude, since beauty consists in two things: magnitude and ordered arrangement. The definition of plot runs as follows:

> the plot being the representation (imitation) of a piece of action must represent (imitate) a single piece of action and the whole of it; and the component incidents must be so arranged that if one of them is transposed or removed, the unity of the whole is dislocated and destroyed [medical terms!]. For if the presence or the absence of a thing makes no visible difference, then it is not an integral part of the whole.

What is, however, the relationship between the plot and 'reality'? The poet's task is not to tell what actually happened but what *could* and *would* happen either *probably* or *inevitably* (*necessarily*). The historian says what happened, the poet what might happen. History gives particular facts, poetry general truths, so poetry is closer to philosophy. General truth is "the sort of thing that a certain type of man will do or say either probably or necessarily."

Aristotle then talks about the *structure* of the plot: the worst is the *episodic* plot, where the incidents are loosely connected or not connected at all. The plot is *complex* (*muthos paplegmenos*) when the change of fortune coincides with reversal (*peripeteia*) and with

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[51] Both *ethos* and *prohairesis* are technical terms from Aristotle's ethical theory (especially in the *Nichomachian Ethics*).

discovery (*anagnorisis*), or both. Finally, there is the simple plot (*muthos haplo*), where there is neither *peripeteia,* nor *anagnorisis.*

Reversal is the changing of the situation into its opposite probably or inevitably; here Aristotle's example is Sophocles' *Oedipus. Discovery* is the change from ignorance to knowledge (and, as Aristotle remarks, in *Oedipus Rex* discovery coincides with reversal; this is one of the most effective dramatic devices). These two will evoke *pity* and *fear*, to be treated in more detail later.

The third element which might occur as a structural ingredient of the plot is very briefly treated by Aristotle; this is calamity (*pathos*), a destructive or painful occurrence, e.g. death on the stage, acute suffering, wounding, etc. Pathos is defined as what happens to someone, what befalls on somebody, what one suffers (cf. 2.4.3.)

2.3.4 Tragedy quantitatively divided

It is curious that at this point Aristotle disrupts his discussion of the plot of tragedy (perhaps Theophrastus really had a hand in the arrangement of the argument here) and starts to talk about the various parts of tragedy itself, which are (1) the prologue; (2) the episode (something like 'act' today, or a longer dialogue); (3) the *exode* (sung by the chorus going out), (4) the choral song, the latter divided into (4a) *parode* (sung by the chorus coming in) and (4b) *stasimon* (sung by the chorus while standing up in the *orchestra*).

2.3.5. The plot according to structure continued; pity and fear

It is only here that Aristotle returns to the problem of *pity* (*eleos*) and *fear* (*phobos*) and asks what arouses them. There are several alternatives, yet only the fourth one is plausible. It is obvious that the spectators do not feel either pity or fear if a worthy man passes from good fortune to bad fortune. And definitely not, either, when wicked people pass from bad to good fortune. The case when a thoroughly bad man passes from good to bad fortune is interesting but the effect it has is still not pity and fear.

Pity and fear are incurred only when a man is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, yet it is not through badness or villainy of his own that he falls into the misfortune, but rather through some flaw (*hamartia*) in him. *Hamartia*, also a hotly debated term, is definitely *not* sin or guilt for Aristotle; it is rather an intellectual or a moral error or imperfection. Perhaps we might interpret this as follows: the wrong decision is an inevitable outcome of the character and the wrong decision results in disaster, yet the hero is still not totally responsible because it is rather the plot which has 'found' and has 'poked out' a particular flaw in the character; the plot, the action, the story is the 'circumstance' under which something which otherwise might have remained hidden suddenly comes to the surface as a flaw in the character and destroys him. Imperfection in character and plot 'work' together.

Then Aristotle talks, in detail, about character, about various methods of composition, and about thought and diction (*lexis*); it is within the discussion of *lexis* that we find the first definition of *metaphor* (Chapter 21, 1457b).

In later chapters (chapters 23-26) Aristotle will once more examine, in detail, the differences between epic poetry and tragedy and will try to prove that tragic imitation is better than the epic one. This section also contains a philosophical discussion of the probable, the unbelievable (unlikely) and the inevitable.

2.4. Aristotle's *The Poetics* in Lessing's interpretation

2.4.1. Hamburgische Dramaturgie

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's (1729-1781) *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1767-68), a series of shorter and longer 'periodical' essays, is still one of the most original interpretations of Aristotle's *The Poetics*. The *Hamburg Dramaturgy* was started when Lessing was invited by the merchants of Hamburg to act as a regular critic for their newly founded 'national' theatre. The theatre failed but Lessing – as he relates in the last instalment – went on writing even later, devoting his energy to clarifying theoretical issues, mostly in connection with Aristotle's *The Poetics*. The most important ideas in the whole work are: (1) the German stage should not follow the French model (mainly meaning Corneille then and not Racine, though Lessing did not like the latter, either); (2) the best example to be followed is Shakespeare (though he speaks surprisingly little directly about Shakespeare here and admits that Shakespeare can (or should) rather be studied than imitated and one can hardly 'borrow from him'); (3) in a highly original way, he re-reads *The Poetics* and – going even into details of translation and connecting Aristotle's ideas on tragedy and comedy with the rest of his oeuvre – claims that the followers of the French model refer to the authority of Aristotle in vain, since "the Stagirite" was simply not saying what they want him to say. The tone is lively, sometimes satirical, even frivolous; all in all, he wrote 104 essays and he mentions roughly 50 performances.

2.4.2. Lessing on the unity of place and time

Concerning the unity of place and time, Lessing has serious reservations. He says that to squeeze the events into thirty-six hours (as the 17th century French playwright, Pierre Corneille allows, cf. 9.2. and 9.3)) is not a gain, since the performance is shorter anyway. Even if this were what Aristotle recommended (though he did not), the limitation of thirty-six hours would be complying only with the letter, and not with the spirit of the law. What is squeezed into one day a person *could* do in one day but no normal person *will* do it: the *physical* unity is not enough, one needs – and this is what Aristotle meant – the *human, the moral unity* as well, the unity of time felt by everyone. Originally, the most important unity was the unity of action (of the *plot*) anyway. The other two (of place and time) developed, in the course of theories about tragedy, from this one and they have to do with the fact that the *performance* in Greece was to take place in one day and at one place. But there was a Chorus, connecting the events, if it was necessary. In the French theatre, the Chorus disappeared and the requirement of the *simple place* was *replaced* by the indefinite place; the unity of time became a unity of a time-span uninterrupted by sleep and it was considered to be 'one day' even if a legion of events happened within it. What's use adhering to the unities when it makes characters flat and one-sided?

2.4.3. Lessing on pity, fear and catharsis

One of the central topics for Lessing is the reinterpretation of the Aristotelian teaching on *pity* and *fear*. The best way to excite these passions is if the actions the characters perform are those of close relatives (members of the same family). With respect to the intention of the actions, there are, according to Lessing, 4 possibilities (here he refers to Aristotle again but in fact Aristotle only distinguishes between 3 types): 1. the action (e.g. killing someone) is carried out intentionally, the killer knows the victim but finally he does not perform the act

(this is not in Aristotle); 2. the circumstances are the same as in 1. but the action is carried out; 3. the action is performed unawares of the identity of the victim and that identity is revealed only later (Aristotle's example is *Oedipus*); 4. the action (which would not have been intentional) is not performed, because the participants recognise each other in time. Lots of critics, e.g. Tournemine or Dacier think, Lessing says, that the fourth type is the best for tragedy, because, after talking about the fourth type of intentional structure, Aristotle refers to a tragedy which he praises. But the problem is that Aristotle elsewhere maintains that tragedy usually has a sad ending. How can the two statements be reconciled? Is there a contradiction here in Aristotle? Lessing's answer is that for Aristotle the most important thing was the plot, which is *synthesis pragmaton,* the joining of events together. Now the events that might be joined together in tragedy fall, according to Aristotle, into three distinct types (cf. 2.3.3): *peripeteia* (reversal); *anagnorisis* (discovery) and *pathos*, the third comprising, in Lessing's interpretation, such events as death, wounds or torture, i.e. *suffering*. According to Lessing, Aristotle thought that events falling into the class of *pathos* were *absolutely necessary* for the tragic effect (that effect precisely being pity and fear); events belonging to the other two result in a richer and a more complex plot (in a *mythos paplegmenos* and not in a *mythos haplo*, i.e., in a simple plot, cf. 2.3.3) but the three need not, in the first place, happen to the same person in the tragedy and, secondly, each can serve without the other, with the restriction that *pathos* must be included. So Aristotle – Lessing argues – is talking about different *parts* of tragedy here and *it is only with respect to pathos* that he says that it is the most effective when close family members are ready to bring it about (e.g. torture each other) but then they recognise each other in time and suffering does not take place.

Pity and fear are not aroused by keeping certain turns in the plot in secret and then, suddenly, coming forward with shocks. Euripides, for instance, does not hide anything; on the contrary: a god, as early as in his prologues, will tell everything from the antecedents to the outcome of the disaster. One could even say that knowing about the disaster is more effective than a sudden revelation: fear and pity were not expected by Euripides (whom Aristotle calls the most tragic tragedian) from the events that were to happen but from the *way* they were bound to happen.

Pity and fear become even more important for Lessing when he compares Shakespeare's *Richard III* with Weiß's play under the same title. About Shakespeare Lessing remarks that he is quite unique, every line he wrote bears his unmistakable stamp so one cannot 'borrow' from him, or 'rob' him: Shakespeare should rather be studied. For someone with talent, Shakespeare is the same as the *camera obscura* is for the painter: one can see, how nature, at various instances, is cast on one single surface. Shakespearean tragedy compares to the French one as a huge fresco does to a miniature on a ring: if one wished to 'borrow' from Shakespeare, each idea would immediately become a scene, and then an act: the sleeve of a giant's coat is enough for the dwarf as a whole coat.

Fear is often mistranslated as 'terror' and it is not guaranteed by the misfortune someone has fallen into but it springs form our similarity to the character who suffers, and we turn fear back to ourselves; our fear has to do with feeling that the misfortunes might reach us, too and that we may become the objects of pity as well. Fear is 'reciprocal' pity; fear is the pity we feel towards ourselves (a truly psychological interpretation on Lessing's part). But why are *these* two feelings identified by Aristotle as the effects of tragedy? Why not pity and wonder (awe), for example? And why is it fear (and not something else) that goes hand in hand with pity? To answer that, one should consider the whole of Aristotle's oeuvre, and here especially the fifth and eighth chapters of Book II in the *Rhetoric*. The desperate man (who has nothing to lose) and the conceited one (who is not afraid of anything) cannot feel fear, or pity towards the other. We do not feel pity when we see undeserved suffering. We have to feel that *that* suffering in front of us might reach us, too and thus the characters should not be

better or worse than us. Fear is to be studied in pity and pity in fear: fear ripens pity and – this is Lessing's central idea – *pity implies, or even includes fear*. Corneille wrongly thought that one or the other is enough to create the tragic effect, so his stage is full either of tear-jerking heroes and heroines on the one hand (who turn us on to pity – but what is *fearful* in Rodrigue or Chimene in Corneille's famous *The Cid*?) or horrible monsters (who make us fear but then where is pity?). In Lessing's view, Aristotle thought that if we feel pity, we must feel fear for ourselves, yet this pity should be distinguished from the 'flicker of pity', the pity we feel *without fear*; pity without fear (compassion towards our fellow-creatures in general) was called by Aristotle – in the *Rhetoric* – philanthropy. If a villain falls from favourable circumstances into unfavourable ones, we may pity him in the sense of philanthropy ('human feeling') but not in the genuinely tragic sense; this is why Aristotle says that the fall of a villain is not a suitable theme for tragedy. But if pity implies fear, then why did Aristotle talk about fear at all? Here Aristotle looked at tragedy from the perspective of the audience, and not from the point of view of its author. More precisely, he thought of the feelings tragedy is supposed to *purify* in us (*catharsis*). From the point of view of the audience, fear for ourselves is stronger than pity: when the performance is over, we stop pitying the character we identified ourselves with, and what remains is the fear we feel towards ourselves. Since it is not pity which is the element of the fear we feel towards ourselves but rather fear of ourselves is an element of our pity, fear (as an element of pity) first purifies pity and then it purifies itself. Thus, it is to be taken seriously that Aristotle singles out pity and fear which gets purified in us through tragedy. Tragedy is imitation of action just like comedy or narration (epic poetry) is, but it is *only* tragedy which is capable of purifying pity and fear, and this is done not by narration, but precisely by *arousing pity and fear in us*: getting rid of pity and fear is brought about precisely by *feeling* pity and fear. As chapter nine in the second book of the *Rhetoric* says, pity and fear are peculiar to the dramatic form: narration cannot bring about pity and fear. Why not? Because, according to Aristotle – Lessing claims – past troubles or some turmoil long gone (which narratives relate to us) are not strong enough to arouse pity and fear; we need the immediacy, the *present* of drama to feel these. This also means that tragedy is not supposed to purify us from all the (bad) passions we might feel. Tragedy should excite pity and fear in order to purge these and similar passion (*ton toiuton pathematon*), so though the characters may feel curiosity, pride, love, anger and other passions in the play and these may even cause their downfall, we are not purged from these: we are only purged from pity and fear. The expression "similar passions" does not mean 'any passion whatsoever' but rather that Aristotle took pity and fear in a broad sense: pity may also include philanthropy, for example, and fear may mean all *kinds* of depression or sorrow.

For Lessing, then, it is in the very arousal of pity and fear that the power of purification is anchored: pity and fear, once aroused, get purged in the very process of their arousal; pity and fear turn up and purge us *in* themselves and *by* themselves. Lessing admits that, accidentally, tragedy may purge us from passions other than pity and fear but this is not the main aim of tragedy. And no genre can purge us from all feelings. So it is not so – as Corneille thinks – that there are lots of (bad) passions in us and then comes pity and fear as tools, and purge us from all the rest. Pity and fear are not instruments, and they are not the emotions the characters feel in the play: pity and fear are felt by *us*, the audience. Pity and fear are not the tools with which the characters bring about their misfortune, either; pity and fear are passions we feel when we are moved by what the characters feel. What the characters feel may include pity and fear and, in principle, they could bring about their (the characters') downfall, too but such a play is still to be written (Lessing says he cannot think of any examples). So tragic pity can purge our pity; tragic fear our fear; tragic pity our fear; tragic fear our pity. But this applies to those who feel very little pity, just as much as to those who feel too much, as it also applies to those who are afraid of everything and to those who are

hardly afraid of anything. The ultimate goal of catharsis is that fear and pity should be replaced by certain virtues, by – in general terms – *moral goodness*. But 'the general' (*katholu*) is not the 'personified ideal' but it is closer to the 'everyday, the average'; it is that which applies to everyone. So tragedy is not concerned with the particular but with the general in *this* sense.

2.5. Aristotle on Comedy

In the *Poetics* Aristotle talks about comedy very briefly, yet he classifies it from various points of view. In the most general sense, comedy is one of the varieties of *mimesis:* "epic and tragic poetry, comedy and dithyrambic, and most music for the flute and lyre [these are the 'genres' he distinguishes in the *Poetics*] are all, generally considered, varieties of *mimesis*" (1447a), *mimesis*, in turn, being the 'imitation of action', or in a more general sense, 'the representation of life'.

Aristotle distinguishes between the above 'genres' in three respects (following three 'points of view', or criteria): (1) the use of different *means* of representation (e.g. language, tunes, rhythm, metre); in this respect, there is no difference between tragedy and comedy; (2) according to the *objects* they represent: all these genres represent people doing [experiencing] things, yet some genres represent better people than one finds in the world, some genres worse (inferior) people, and some genres set out to represent just the same people one finds in the world. "This is also the *differentia*" – Aristotle says – "that marks off tragedy from comedy, since the latter aims to represent people as worse, the former as better, than the men of the present day" (1448a). (3) The third way to differentiate between genres is according to the *manner* (mode) of representation, e.g. one genre will rely on narration and sometimes on the narrator becoming someone else (as in, e.g., in Homer), some will speak in one's own person without a change, or one may also represent with all the people engaged in carrying out the whole action themselves (as in drama). In this respect there is, again, no difference between tragedy and comedy. So the *means* of *mimesis* (imitation, representation) is important to differentiate drama from, e.g. lute-playing (e. g. drama does use language, while lute-playing does not); the *object* represented by the various artistic forms is significant in order to separate e.g. tragedy from comedy, while the *manner* of representation is necessary to draw a distinction between, say, epic poetry and drama.

When talking about the origins of the *words* 'drama', 'comedy', and 'tragedy' (which might also contribute to the their understanding), Aristotle seems to rely on hear-say:

> Some people say that this word *dran*, 'to do' is why plays are called dramas, because such poets represent people as doing things; and this is the ground on which the Dorians claim the invention of both tragedy and comedy. Comedy is claimed by the Megaraians, both by those of mainland Greece, who say it arose when their democracy was established, and by those of [Megara Hyblea] Sicily, the home of Epicharmus [Epicahrmus of Cos, Sicilian writer of burlesques and "mimes", depicting scenes of daily life in the 6th and 5th centuries B. C.], who lived well before Chionides and Magnes [Attic writers of comedy of the early 5th century B. C.]. Tragedy is claimed by some of the Peloponnesians. In each case they found their claim on etymology: they say that while they call outlying villages *komai,* the Athenians call them *demoi,* and they take 'comedy' to be derived not from *komazein,* 'to revel, to take part in a cheerful parade', but form the fact that the comic actors wandered among villages because driven in contempt from the city; and they say that they use the word *dran* of doing, while the Athenians say *prattein*" (1448ab).

Later, however, Aristotle also seems to claim that whether one writes comedy or tragedy depends on the poet's character:

> Poetry, arising from their improvisations, split up according to the authors' divergent characters: the more dignified represented noble actions and those of noble men, the less serious those of low-class [inferior] people, the one group produced at first invectives [satire], the others songs praising gods and men. (1448b)

Yet even another feature is brought in to distinguish comedy from tragedy, partly following here historical considerations: the metre of the poem. It seems that the iambic metre was originally preserved for comic verse, since, as Aristotle claims, the word *iamb(ics)* comes from the word *iambizein* ('to lampoon'), so the iamb was the metre of the authors' lampoons [satires ridiculing a person or a literary work], while the hexameter was used for heroic verse. Aristotle also claims that it was Homer who marked out the main lines of comedy in his satire (lampoon) called *Margites* (as Homer adumbrated, according to Aristotle, the form of tragedy in his *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, too).[52]

When taking of the origins of poetry and tragedy (how they actually developed, what their 'causes' might be), Aristotle devotes a section to the origins of comedy, too:

> Comedy is, as I said, a *mimesis* of people worse than are found in the world – 'worse' in the particular sense of 'uglier', as the ridiculous is a species of ugliness; for what we find funny is a blunder (mistake) that does no serious damage or an ugliness that does not imply pain, the funny face (mask), for instance, being one that is ugly and distorted, but not with pain. While the changes and the authors of the changes in tragedy are known, the development of comedy is obscure because it was not at first taken seriously; the chorus, for instance, were for a long time volunteers, and not provided officially by the archon. The form was already partly fixed before the first recorded comic poets, and so we do not know who introduced masks, prologues, numerous actors, and so on; the making of plots, however, certainly came from Sicily, Crates being the first Athenian to drop the lampoon form and construct generalized stories or plots. (1449b).

Thus, it seems that comedy became a 'canonical' genre much later than tragedy and it had to do more with improvisation than tragedy. One reason for accepting the comic mode (and, later, comedy as a genre) only reluctantly might have been that comedy seems to subvert the established order more directly and shamelessly than tragedy, thus it might not always be welcome by the authorities. At the same time (and this has always been the 'luck' of comedy) it need not be taken seriously (one may always say that it is only 'a joke'), and thus – though comedy may get officially subsidised later than tragedy – it is able to gain ground precisely through its being 'lighter' than tragedy. Yet it is also noteworthy that Aristotle in the above passage seems to 'define' comedy by way of using a feature which plays a very important (and hotly debated) role in his theory of tragedy: the flaw in the character. In comedy the flaw (the 'mistake', the short-sightedness, or blunder, or wrong judgement) which, in tragedy, should be the main reason for the downfall and the pain and suffering of the hero (who is a not an outstandingly virtuous man from the moral point of view, yet he is not a wicked, or villainous person, either) becomes a mistake (an 'ugliness') which, precisely, does not involve pain or suffering, so it is without any serious (irrevocable?) consequences. Comedy seems to be the 'low-reading', the 'bottom-translation' of tragedy: it may represent, among other features, the same mistakes the hero would (could) make in a tragedy, yet without causing a catastrophe.

The above passage is the longest text entirely devoted to comedy in the *Poetics*; it is noteworthy that and though a few lines later (still in 1449b) Aristotle says:

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[52] *Margites*, a burlesque poem is no longer attributed to Homer.

I shall deal later with the art of *mimesis* in hexameters and with comedy; here I want to talk about tragedy, picking up the definition of its essential nature that results from what I have said,

he never fulfils the promise he made with respect to comedy. As we saw in 2.3., practically the whole of the *Poetics* is devoted to the question of tragedy (and, to some extent, to epic poetry), and further in Aristotle's text one can only find some scattered remarks concerned with comedy, one very important made when Aristotle claims that poetry is closer to philosophy than to history:

That poetry does aim at generality has long been obvious in the case of comedy, where poets make up the plot from a series of probable happenings and then give the persons any names they like, instead of writing about particular people as the lampooners did. In tragedy, however, they stick to the actual names; this is because it is what is possible that arouses conviction; and while we do not without more ado believe that what never happened is possible, what did happen is clearly possible, since it would not have happened if it were not (1451b).

Thus, it seems that the breaking away from the mythological tradition first happened in comedy. Yet Aristotle also admits that in some tragedies, too, names and events are made up (for example in Agathon's *Antheus*[53]), tragedies of this kind giving just as much pleasure as tragedies adhering to "historical names" (cf. 1451b). "So", Aristotle says,

one need not try to stick at any cost to the traditional stories, which are the subject of tragedies; indeed the attempt would be absurd, since even what is well known is well known only to a few, but gives general pleasure for all that (1451b).

Later, however, however, Aristotle admits that

at first the poets recounted any story that came to hand, but nowadays the best tragedies are about a few families only, for example Alcmaeon[54], Oedipus[55], Orestes[56], Meleager[57], Thyestes[58], Telephus[59], and others whose lot is to suffer or to commit fearful acts (1453a).

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[53] This is a play that we no longer have, yet Agathon is well-known from Plato's famous dialogue, *Symposium*, here the host is no one else but Agathon and Aristophanes, the famous comedy-writer is also present, making a very interesting speech, too. The dialogue focuses on the nature of love (*Eros*), yet at its very end (223d) it is reported that Socrates was "compelling the other two [Agathon and Aristophanes, still awake] to acknowledge that the genius of comedy was the same with that of tragedy, and that the true artist in tragedy was an artist in comedy also" (trans. by Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato,* Chicago, London, Toronto: William Benton, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952, p. 173) . This is the first instance that someone argues for the sameness of tragedy and comedy in their "essential nature", which will have a long tradition: comedy, the "inferior" genre, will be considered to be the (simple?) inverse of tragedy (cf., for instance Schelling).

[54] or Alcmaon, son of Thestor, slain by Sarpedon for having wounded Glaucus, a beloved companion of Sarpedon. (*Illiad*)

[55] Cf. 1.2..

[56] Son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, brother of Electra, Iphigenia and Chrysothemis. With the aid of Electra, he murdered his mother and her mother's lover, Aegisthus, to avenge the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, see especially Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Sophocles' *Electra*.

[57] An Argonaut, son of Oeneus and Althea, the main hero of the famous Caledonian Boar Hunt, in which it was Meleager who killed, with his own hands the boar which was sent by Artemis to ravage Caledonia because

In this section (still in 1453a) there is another remark on comedy (in comparison with tragedy, as usual) when Aristotle is discussing the criteria of the "good plot" and claims that there are tragedies which have a "double arrangement" (a double issue), like the *Odyssey* (sic!), where the piece does not end entirely in misfortune but ends with opposite fortunes for the good and bad people (i.e. it is only the bad ones who fall into misfortune at the end of the play). However, Aristotle says, this "double dealing" (punishing bad people and rewarding good ones) gained ground only because of the weakness (the sentimentality) of the audience, whom poets wanted to please. "But this is not the pleasure proper to tragedy" – Aristotle says –,

> but rather belongs to comedy; for in comedy those who are most bitter enemies throughout the plot, as it might be Orestes and Aegisthus, are reconciled at the end and go off and nobody gets killed by anybody (1453a).

We have good reasons to suppose that the *Poetics* had a second book which, indeed, dealt with comedy but got lost[60].

So much we might learn from the *Poetics* – the first systematic treatise on literary theory – concerning comedy; now I turn to an important issue which is most readily associated with, though not exclusively to be found in, comedy: *laughter*.

2.6. Henri Bergson on comedy and laughter

Bergson (1859-1941) was borne in Paris, but he was of English and Polish Jewish decent and was educated in Paris. He took a degree in philosophy and taught in various grammar schools for a while, then, from 1900, he lectured in the Collège de France. The publication of his book on laughter coincides not only with his lecturing appointment but also with the appearance of the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) by Freud. In 1914, his works were put on the index Librorum Prohibitorum (index of prohibited books) by the Pope, and in the same year he became a member of the French Academy. In 1928, he received the Nobel-Prize. Bergson was a magnetic teacher, who drew a wide circle of especially ladies, who tried to follow him, if not with their mind, then at least with their heart. At any rate, his lectures were social events. He is primarily associated with having contributed to two major philosophical questions: one is the problem of *time*, the other is the *theory of comedy*. Here we shall be concerned with the latter question.

Oeneus neglected the worship of Artemis. That Meleager gave the boar's head to his love, Atalanta, caused a family-quarrel, and consequently Meleager killed Althea's brothers, Plexippus and Toxeus.

[58] Member of a doomed and tragic family. Thyestes is Tantalus' grandson, Atreus' brother. He debauched Aerope, Atreus' wife and Atreus invited him to a banquet where Thyestes was served the flesh of his own sons. Then Thyestes – unwittingly – committed incest with his own daughter, Pelopea, who bore him Aegisthus (see above). After Atreus' death, Thyestes became the king of Mycenae, but he was soon dethroned by Menelaus and Agamemnon, Atreus' two sons (for Agamemnon, see above and cf. especially Seneca's *Thyestes*!)

[59] Son of Heracles and Auge, exposed on Mount Parthenius, where he was nurtured by a goat (or doe) and by shepherds. He married one of Priam(us)'s daughters (Priam was the last King of Troy), yet he fought on the side of the Greeks in the Trojan War because he was grateful for their healing a severe wound of his. An oracle had declared that without the aid of a son of Hercales, Troy cannot be taken by the Greeks.

[60] See Umberto Eco's best-selling novel, *The Name of the Rose*, based on the fantasy that the last copy of the part on comedy was still available in the Middle Ages, roughly at the time of William of Occam, yet an evil librarian poisons everyone who reads it, and finally it gets destroyed in a great fire.

Bergson's work on laughter grew out of his lectures; he is not always systematic (he does not always account for contradictions), and he is sometimes repetitive. This is an interpretative account of his work in the sense that it does not only list his basic ideas but tries to think along the lines he has sketched, providing some explanations he did not give and some examples he did not use.

Bergson does not want to confine his investigations on laughter to the (dramatic) genre called "comedy": he is interested in all forms of the comic that incline one to laughter, since for him laughter is primarily something very *human*. We may laugh at an animal or at a hat, yet then we discover some human features in it. Another feature accompanying laughter is *indifference*. If we watch the world from the standpoint of the detached observer, life inevitably turns into comedy. (Go into a ballroom and close your ears: the dancers will be ridiculous). The comic, therefore is primarily *rational* (as opposed to the tragic, which is first and foremost passionate, emotional). Yet one's reason should, at the same time, remain in contact with the reasons working in the others (i.e. with other minds), too: laughing is a *communal* activity, laughter wants to continue in its own echo. Laughter has a social meaning, it *is* itself an expression of our being social and of our belonging to a social circle, to the extent that we are, at least for the moments of laughter, "in league" with those laughing with us.

We fall in the street; if this is ridiculous, the effect has to do with our fall being not an action but an event, and it still happened not to an object but to a human being: it was unintentional. The muscles were too stiff to say "stop", the impetus was too great, the reaction to e.g. a stone under our feet was too slow: our body behaved not like an organism directed by a centre (will-power) but like a *mechanism*, like a machine. This is Bergson's basic idea, which will keep recurring: *the comic consists in the lack of flexibility with respect to the eventual circumstances; the comic effect is generated by life turning into something stiff, dead, lifeless, mechanical; the comic is the triumph of dead matter over a living organism (while of course, the body is still alive), and laughter is the punishment of this stiffness.* This is why absent-mindedness is comic: it is unable to react adequately to the circumstances (Don Quixote). And the more natural the cause for the comic effect is, the greater the comic effect will be. Here by "natural" Bergson means that it has taken almost full possession of the person: instead of will-power applied in accordance with the circumstances, we find an obsession or even some bad inclinations.

Yet here Bergson gets into trouble: obsessions, moral weakness or even some natural deformity (being a hunchback, for example) are not comic, or at least not "nicely" comic; we despise people laughing at madmen, moral weaklings or hunchbacks (or should we say that here we should be talking about scornful laughter or malicious joy; or about our gloating over one's depravity?). Bergson has to admit that "sometimes" these are tragic but then these features are not comic in themselves but they are comic – and Bergson is inclined to admit that, too – because they do not effect the body or the character in a way that it would cause *pain* to him or her (cf. also Aristotle); we feel that these features are not irreversible, they do not determine the person. In other words: according to Bergson, deformity (corporal or moral) is comic *to the extent it can or might be imitated by a totally healthy, ordinary person.* And a back which is bent is comic, according to Bergson, because it is stiff, it cannot simply be turned into an upright position. The comic, therefore is not ugliness but *stiffness*, and a puppet is comic because it displays this stiffness.

It is true that in comedy, man often turns into a puppet and it will display machine-like features and it is also seems to be true that the more systematic an error becomes (the more it can be explained by a single cause), the more effective it will become. It seems that Aristotle is also right: we laugh at the same features we feel passion for in tragedy yet these features appear as effecting only the *surface* of the character; in comedy we should also feel that

though today everything has fallen out of our hands and we have fallen off every chair, tomorrow we might have a better day, and that we did not cause irredeemable harm to anyone (including ourselves). The very attitude which allows that we may count on a better tomorrow presupposes something Bergson also admits: in comedy we look at things (including ourselves) from a *distances*, we are able to see ourselves (while laughing at our inflexibility, stiffness, machine-like qualities) under circumstances where we *are* able to react in a flexible way. The tragic hero is also inflexible in a certain way (obsessed with learning the truth, like Oedipus, perhaps even determined by the gods to do so, or a puppet in the hands of the gods), yet the difference between tragedy and comedy here seems to be that though the tragic hero could be "flexible" and could do something else (he cannot be *fully* determined, he should be allowed some freedom), the other solution the tragic hero could choose would be immoral or at least banal and uninteresting (perhaps even comic). (Oedipus could, even in the last moment, argue that the witnesses are senile, or biased, or evil but he "gives in", and takes the burden of the crime on himself; Hamlet could eat and drink [as Claudius does] and forget about his mother and father but then who would care about him?). Bergson is also right when he emphasises that it is the lifeless features which are comic yet the most lifeless event we know of, i.e. *death* is not comic; it is only comic when it is the *pretence* of death, and thus it is *in our power*, or we, in our detachment from the mechanical, lifeless mechanisms, very well *know* how to *end* this death. If comedy is a machine, we should be the masters over it; if we feel we no longer hold all the strings, if our control over the events is no longer tight, we are inclined to say that the events are more and more drifting towards the absurd (which is, in my definition, continuously *risking* the comic by offering precisely the above control to some unknown irrational force). Comedy – I dare say – is a form of *gaining triumph over death* by treating precisely *death* as a *lifeless* mechanism through the comic machinery (treating something lifeless when it is lifelessness itself is already comic). In comedy it is important to know (trust) that life can go back to *normal*, or at lest to know *how* it can/could go back to normal, to the ordinary (this is why it creates a community so easily). Tragedy is also some triumph over death in *catharsis*, yet it – ususally – requires death itself, or at least some kind of a sacrifice.

According to one of Bergson's excellent insights, in tragedy we make our errors even more complex, whereas in comedy our errors simplify us. This is why comedy is able to create types (this is why the title of a comedy is more likely to be a common name designating a type of person, e.g. *The Miser, The Misanthrope*, etc., while tragedy will often use a proper name as its title: *Oedipus (Rex), Hamlet* etc.). In tragedy, the features make up a complex person and it is the *interplay* of the features in the character which is in the centre of attention, while in comedy it is precisely the character who is "swallowed" up in a main (and usually deliberately exaggerated) feature; the character (as a "whole") is either unimportant, or that *one* feature *is* the character (cf. satirical comedy).

To this we might add: comedy, just like tragedy, is anchored in our being *deprived* of something; we are deprived of some strength, skill, ability or will-power we would need to answer the demands of our circumstances. But, first and foremost, in tragedy this depravity is measured by "the gods", by the universe, by a force with respect to which we are too small or insignificant (one of our depravities being precisely that we are *not gods*), against which we have almost no chances, whereas in comedy the frame of reference is rather the everyday, the "normal", or even a well-defined social norm or value-system (cf. Restoration comedy). In comedy, we get away with being laughed at; in tragedy this is impossible; tragedy demands something which is in our flesh, nerves, blood – something integrally *us*.

From the general thesis (the comic is something mechanical, machine-like) Bergson derives further theses; these are further instances of the comic:.

–   comedies follow a certain rule, or pattern yet they constantly call the viewers'
    attention to this very fact, thereby overtly, or even demonstratively displaying their
    artificiality (their mechanical, machine-like nature as opposed to the whimsical
    patterns of Nature). They move the characters and create the events indifferently,
    and this creates the impression that there is, indeed, a comic *machinery*.
–   All events are comic when we think that there is talk about the sprit, the soul and
    suddenly our attention is called to the body (think of the orator who, at the height
    of his eloquent speech, suddenly sneezes; and think of the fact that there is little
    corporal in tragedies; eating and drinking are fit for comedy). The body gains
    superiority over the soul, the form defeats the content.
–   It is always comic when a human being gives the impression of an object, in the
    sense that then we can disregard his or her pain; we know that when the clown
    falls, he is like a sack of flour and not a human body which might get hurt
–   Every event is comic when it gives the impression of life and, at the same time, it
    displays a mechanical arrangement. The events in comedy and, thus, the actions of
    some characters follow certain patterns.

As regards the comic in the events, actions and situations, Bergson finds the following
types:

– The Jack-in-the-box-type of action : it keeps returning, though it is repressed for a
while, yet the more it is repressed, the more vigorously it will return. This is traditionally
called *repetition*. The more complex the repeated event is and the more naturally it occurs (the
more it follows from the previous arrangements) the more comic it will be.

– The Puppet-type of action: this follows from the fact that the comic is comic until it
does not *know about itself; when it is, in a sense, unconscious* (e.g. the comedian should
remain serious, he must not laugh with the audience). In many cases, the character thinks he
is acting freely in a situation, yet he is a mere pawn or dummy in someone's hands (the
audience's, or another character's in the play)

– The Avalanche-type of action: one bursts into a room, pushes someone aside, yet that
person falls out of the window and falls on a carriage driven by horses, the horses are
frightened, run into a shop where everything is shattered into pieces, etc. Something
insignificant or accidental causes more and more trouble; this is a kind of *exaggeration*. This
effect is even strengthened when the cause and the effect change places, i.e. when we move in
a circle, so the character causing the various events returns to the first, triggering event, and so
on. This is why *chasing* someone (and never catching him or her or it) is comic. This gives
one the impression that life is absent-minded as well.

This gives us the opportunity to list not only various types of comic actions but events
as well (though, precisely because of comedy's machine-like qualities, the two can hardly be
separated).

–   *recurring events, repetition*: an event is repeated on another level; say servants re-
    enact on their "level" what was previously going on between their masters. We
    should see the same *structure* of the events returning and it creates a comic effect
    with respect to the variety we are accustomed to in life. (If I meet a friend in the
    street, this is not comic but if I meet him accidentally on the same day three times,
    we start to laugh). This structure brings a *mathematical order* into the course of the
    events while maintaining the impression (or illusion) of life.
–   *Reversal*: the same, or almost the same events take place but the characters change
    places in terms of their (social or moral) positions. A child starts to lecture on
    educational principles to her teacher, the accused criminal teaches the judge a
    lesson on ethics, etc. This is the "world turned upside down": the villain falls into

his own trap, the thief realises that something has been stolen from him, the hangman is hanged.

– *Some series of events in overlap*: a situation or event is always comic when it belongs to two independent series of events at the same time and thus it can be interpreted in two different ways. A typical example is *mistaken identity*; we have two systematic meanings, one given by the characters in the play, the other given by the audience. Ambiguity, or double-entendre, is not comic in itself; it becomes comic when the (partial) overlap of two separate and even distant series is made obvious. Here the author of the play can be most effective if he constantly moves on the edges of clarification or revelation, when he threatens the audience with the collapse of the overlap. (E.g. one talks about his wife, the other thinks he is talking about his cow; the frames of reference start to interact; certain terms which fit a cow must be applicable to a woman too, in order to trigger the misunderstanding, yet the more the semantic system around the cow starts to dominate (e.g. that it is milked every day, or that it lives in a shed), the more the overlap is threatened by a collapse (the clarification of the subject-matter), and the more comic the overlap will be. Or: one thinks he is in an inn, while he is in fact in his fiancé's house and he is talking not to the inn-keeper but to his future father-in-law[61]).

When Bergson talks about the language used in comedy, he does not deal with comedy expressed through the medium of language but with comedy *created* by language. Here one must distinguish between something or somebody being comic and someone being witty. Something or somebody is comic when we laugh at the person who is saying something, and someone is witty when we laugh at a third person or at ourselves. Wit is the dramatised mode of a certain way of thinking. So one conclusion might already be drawn: a thing can be comic but not witty. The witty person does not mould his thoughts into symbols but he can see and hear them immediately in a dialogue, as if his very thoughts were characters themselves. He puts his ideas on stage even when he is not a playwright. Thus wit, in a general sense, is seeing the world *sub specie theatri* (from the view-point of the theatre). Yet in a narrower sense, wit is a talent which sketches comedy-scenes with such ease, rapidity and elegance that they are over before we could say "stop". Wit is fleeting, evanescent comedy, when one contradicts ordinary opinion, turns a well-known phrase or saying upside down (into its opposite, into its inverse), makes fun of common-sense wisdom, or turns somebody's words right against him. This gives us opportunity to distinguish between witty and genuinely comic language.

Comic language, according to Bergson, follows the logic of comic situations.

– a saying will be comic if we insert an absurd idea into a well-known formula ("This sword is the most beautiful day of my life"; "Only God has the right to kill His brother")

– a saying will be comic if we pretend that we use a phrase in its original meaning, whereas in fact we use it in an abstract sense; or the other way round: our attention is directed at the materiality of a metaphor (the metaphor is taken in the original senses of the word) ("Arts are man and wife" instead of: "Arts are sisters"; "He is running after his wit – *He will never catch up*" "You know, the stock exchange is a dangerous game. One day one wins, on the other one looses. – *Then I will play only every other day.*")

And as with situations, we might use the technique of *reversal* ("Why do you throw the ashes of your pipe on my balcony? – Why did you put your balcony under my pipe?")

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[61] These examples are mine.

overlap (similarly sounding words are exchanged; we create puns: they show the momentary absent-mindedness of language) and *transfer* (when we express an idea not in its natural, ordinary tone or register but in one which is higher or lower than it would fit our subject-matter, [downgrading or exaggeration]; e.g. we talk about something – slightly – immoral as something respectable: "Considering your high rank, you steal *too much*.").

Irony: when we are saying what *ought there to be* and we pretend that it exists.

Humour: when we give a detailed description of something which really exists as if we believed that it has all those characteristics. Thus humour is the inverse of irony and both fall under the category called *satire*, yet irony is usually rhetorical, humour tends to put the disguise of science on. A humorist is a moralist disguised as a scientist.

The comedy of words strictly follows the comedy of situations, and finally becomes the comedy of character.

The scene is set for the comedy of character when one stiffens with respect to social life. All initiation rites were invented to dissolve this stiffness and to make the person accommodate to social life and to the world in general. When one is reluctant to be flexible, the first and perhaps least painful punishment is laughter, yet laughter always contains an element of humiliation. This explains the double nature of comedy: it is neither purely artistic, nor is it totally a part of life itself. No one would make us laugh in real life unless we could see him from a distance, as if we were watching him in a theatre, while even in the theatre we cannot laugh *quite* whole-heartedly, because we remember the humiliation.

So basically three conditions have to be satisfied if a character is to appear as comic:

1. (s)he should appear as being, in one or more respects, incompatible, or even in conflict, with society
2. the audience should be indifferent to his/her emotions, they should not pity him/her, they should be detached from his/her passions
3. the comic person should lay him- or herself open automatically, i.e. in an unintended gesture, in an unconscious word, so *without being aware of it.* (S)he should be – systematically – absent-minded: his/her *mind* should be *absent* wen (s)he acts. Thus all of us are comic with respect to what is already ready (with respect to what we *consider* to be ready) in our personality, i.e. what is able to function automatically in us because we constantly repeat ourselves in these ready gestures, and, in turn, we also repeat others, and others repeat us. Thus, we all start to belong to certain types; hence the "general", often simplifying, phrases in terms of which we describe people: he is "always late", "lazy", "a busy-body", "a spoil sport", a "pedant", a "miser", a "spend-thrift" etc. Of course it is not true that one is e.g. literally *always* late, yet we wish to typify, which has to do with our putting people into boxes, arranging persons as if they were objects, in order to be able to deal with them in a more "efficient" way. Comedy has a lot to do with the general tendency in our (white, European) thinking to *reduce* people to objects and thus to make them inanimate, even to "kill" them to some extent; to have others in our power, to punish our reduction (our being mortal) by applying another reduction.

In order to prove that comedy is the only genre which is aimed at the *general*, Bergson first defines the aim of art, which is to reveal Nature for us and to do away with the symbols which are useful only from a practical point of view, and with the generalities which are sanctified by society. This is done in order to make us face reality, yet with a certain amount of idealism. According to Bergson, it is only through the power of idealism that we are able to re-establish our relationship with reality.

There are certain emotional states – our most fundamental and elemental ones – which typically grow out from our social relations, from our encountering people. Our eruptive inner tensions, stifled by the laws, rules and norms of society: these are, according to Bergson, the pre-requisites of drama. Drama upsets our comfortable relations with society, yet it helps us

find our place there again. It is directed at the personal, the individual: we acknowledge an emotion to be generally true fro the human being (this is a general judgement), yet the emotion itself does not become general: it is particular and unique with respect to ourselves, i.e. in *us*.

Comedy is concerned with types; we could say that it aims *even* more at the general than art aiming at the general in the above sense. A tragic hero is unique; he is only "general" in the sense of art being general; if one wishes to imitate him directly, we find ourselves in the realm of comedy [cf. e.g. the Dr. Faustus–Wagner relationship in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*]. In comedy, the moment the central hero is born, the playwright will try to move minor characters around him who share many of his typical character-traits; one could say that often one of the main character's features will be further expressed, amplified and exaggerated in each of the minor characters. Therefore, the tragic poet looks into him- or herself, the comic poet looks around him- or herself, observes other people in the world, in society, since comedy is mostly concerned with the surface, with features we all share, with our *similarities*. It is the *average* of humankind which gets expressed in comedy. Comedy works with the *inductive* method, tragedy with the *deductive*.

Bergson claims that the most fundamental characteristic from among the typical features which may give rise to comic effects is *vanity*; all other typical features are varieties of it. This applies to the characters, yet they also fit into certain frames which are partly constructed by society, and comedy only brings them to the extreme. One frame like that is *vocation*, hence the popularity of the *vocational comedy,* when a typical, and in the age well-known job or trade (inn-keeper, miller, shoemaker, blacksmith, medical doctor, philosopher etc.) provides the frame for comedy. This frame also gives rise to vocational obsession, which goes along with a certain register (language) the characters use.

Bergson also tries to reckon with other theories of comedy; one is Théophile Gauthier's , who claims that the comic effect always has an element of the impossible, or the absurd in it. Comedy follows the logic of absurdity. Yet Bergson claims that the absurd is not a cause but already an effect and that there is a kind of absurdity which is rather tragic than comic. So it is only a very special branch of absurdity which creates a typically comic effect and this is the absurdity we find in *dreams. Comic obsession* is also a variety of obsession we find in dreams. Yet the absurdity we encounter both in dreams and in comedy is more serious than the effects we have so far enlisted. Dreams might be frightening and then we laugh not because we are detached but because we are involved; here laugher is not punishing another person (the clown, the comic character) for not being able to be flexible with respect to certain circumstances. Sometimes we laugh to ease the inner tension, to remain convinced that the danger is not imminent and we are in control of it. We wish to *mute* the unknown, the irrational (perhaps the evil) which we encounter in the absurd. The last sentence of Bergson's work on laughter talks about the *bitterness* which – sometimes – accompanies our laughter.

2.7. Paul Ricoeur on Aristotel's *The Poetics*

2.7.1. The inter-relatedness of metaphor and narrative (plot)

Paul Ricoeur (1913–), the French-American phenomenologist, concentrates on the conception of the plot in *The Poetics*, and gives an interesting extension of the idea of

Aristotelian mimesis.[62] Ricouer's theory of narrative (not a theory of *drama*!) organically grows out of his theory of metaphor, since, according to Ricoeur, both metaphor and narrative invent a work of *synthesis*: metaphor is a process which takes place on the level of the *entire sentence*[63], saves a new semantic pertinence which is born with respect, and in opposition, to the incongruity which is perceivable on the level of the literal interpretation of the sentence. We find the synthesis of heterogeneous events (goals, causes, chance) in narratives, too; the yet unsaid, the unwritten springs up in language. Multiple and scattered happenings are integrated into one *whole* in the plot and the plot changes the relative distance of these happenings in logical space as a result of the productive imagination. The *unintended* consequence issuing form human action, together with the miscellany of circumstances, ends and means, initiatives and interactions are brought together in a unity. Plot (narrative) and metaphor *re-describe* a reality inaccessible to direct description and the 'seeing-as' (the power of metaphor and the plot) becomes a revealer of 'being-as' (both for character in the plot and for the reader/spectator) on the deepest ontological level (as the plot becomes a new configuration of the (known) events, of the pre-understood order of action). The plot is the privileged means whereby we re-configure our confused, unformed and even *mute* temporal experience. Time, thus, becomes *human* time to the extent it is organised (shaped, moulded) after the manner of a narrative and, in turn, narrative is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.

2. 7. 2. The inter-relatedness of *muthos* (plot) and *mimesis* (imitation)

In Ricouer interpretation, Aristotle in *The Poetics* discerns in the composing of a tragic plot the triumph of concordance over discordance, yet he is silent about the *direct* relationship between poetic composition and temporal experience (he does not *thematise* it).

Ricoeur is one of the chief exponents of the view that, according to Aristotle, the imitat*ing* of action (mimesis) is the organis*ing* of the events (the plot). Both *mimesis* (imitation) and *muthos* (plot) are activities: one is the imitation of action, the other is the organisation of the events; thus the six "parts" of tragedy should be understood not as parts of the dramatic piece but as parts of the very *act* and art of composition.

Further, Ricoeur wishes to minimise the difference Aristotle draws between the plot of an epic poem (Homer's genre) and that of a drama (tragedy). Ricoeur insists that the advantage tragedy has over epics are *music* and *spectacle* but these two are "not finally essential to it"[64] (Ricoeur, p. 36). Ricouer further claims that the tragic *muthos* is a poetic *solution* to the speculative paradox of time. Aristotle's theory, however, does not only accentuate the concordance of the events into a whole but also the "play of discordance internal to concordance"[65].

Concordance in the *muthos* (plot) is characterised by (1) completeness (*holos*), (2) wholeness and (3) an appropriate magnitude. Something, for Aristotle, is *whole* if it has a beginning, a middle and an end. But – Ricoeur argues – it is only by virtue of poetic composition that something counts as beginning, middle and end; beginning, middle and end are not taken from experience, they are usually not features of some real action but the effects of the ordering of the tragedy. The emphasis is put on the absence of chance and on the conformity to the requirements of necessity or probability governing *succession*. Ricoeur thus claims that Aristotle's philosophical theory of probability and necessity, and his claim about *muthos* being a *whole* with a

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[62] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "Emplotment: A Reading of Aristotle's Poetics" IN: Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* Volume I, Chapter 2, Trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984

[63] This is not Aristotle's idea; he treats metaphor still on the level of words (*lexis*) and not on the level of sentences.

[64] Ricoeur, op. cit.*,* p. 36.

[65] Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 38.

beginning, middle and an end, imposed on the events by the poet, are two sides of the same coin: one cannot be without the other: necessity and probability will be guaranteed only if the rule of wholeness is observed, and vice versa.

Thus, the internal connection of the events in the plot is not chronological but logical. This means that the 'time' which is *in* the plot (the hours necessary for Oedipus to learn the truth in the drama and *not the actual hours* the spectators spend in the theatre). Drama loses 'direct contact' with the *type* of time in which events in ordinary life unfold; part of the poet's duty is to compress, into a logical order, the most important turns in Oedipus's life: there are references to his childhood (babyhood), his years in Corinth, his seeking the truth in Pytho for the first time, his 'adventure' at the cross-roads (when he kills 'an old man'), his solving the *enigma* (the riddle) of the Sphinx, his taking the throne, his marriage to Jocasta, and, of course, there are references to the 'present' as well, to the plague in Thebes, etc. But this is the chronology of Oedipus's *life*, which has only indirectly to do with the *actual* way in which the *plot* unfolds; only the most important events *within* babyhood will be mentioned (the tying up of his ankles, his passing over by the Theban shepherd to the Corinthian one, the drunken guest in the Corinthian king's court telling about his origins etc. but no mention will be made, for example, of what he had for breakfast when the shepherd found him, what dishes were served when the guest got drunk, and how much he drank etc.), so the plot will mean (1) selection (2) a reordering of the events[66] according to a logical order which is, precisely, the poet's invention: this is the poet's creative talent, which will take the *anagnorisis* and the *peripeteia* as principles of organisation. *Peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* constitute the *internal logic* according to which the plot is organised. Thus, even *doing*, in the play (i.e. what e.g. the fictive character Oedipus *does* in the tragedy called *Oedipus*) loses its ordinary, ethical sense and becomes fictive, *poetic* doing. And since the poetic doing is according to probability and necessity (and not according to factual 'truth', factual chronology), i.e. the linking of the events has to be necessary or probable, it will become *typical*: the plot has to be typical (possible and general) and thus, through the *plot*, we reach a poetic universal *and it is the plot that universalises the characters and not the other way round*. We say that the (specific) 'example' of Oedipus is typical or universal because his character is a part of a logically selected and ordered time-sequence, which contains actions, as well as happenings he has to go through, internally connected with one another. *To conceive of causal connections is already a kind of universalisation.* And only a causal sequence can be probable or necessary. The kind of universality the plot calls for derives from its *ordering* by the poet. To make a *muthos* is already to make the intelligible spring from the accidental, the universal from the singular, the necessary or the probable from the episodic.

Yet there is *discordance* (as the major threat to the in the concordance of the plot), too. One feature of this discordance is (1) that it is fearful and pitiable events which bring about *catharsis* (purification). *Catharsis*, as the emotional response of the audience, is constructed *in* the plot. A further sign of discordance is (2) *surprise* (e.g. marvellous events) and (3) reversal (e.g. good fortune turning into bad). The art of composition is making the discordant *appear* as concordant. And it is the conjunction of reversal (*peripeteia*) and discovery (recognition, *anagnorisis*), both 'disruptive' elements of the 'smooth' plot, which preserves universality. The plot makes the discordant incidents necessary and probable and *in* the very act of doing so, the plot *purifies* the fearful and the pitiable. Poetic composition reconciles what ethics (bound up with ordinary life) opposes.

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[66] E.g. *in the play: first* the plague and *then*, through internal narration, the shepherd's accounts about Oedipus' babyhood, etc.

2.7.3. Three senses of the term *mimesis*

On the basis of *The Poetics,* Ricoeur distinguishes between three senses of *mimesis* ('imitation' or 'representation').

The most elaborated sense is when the 'real domain' of human action (everyday activities, deeds, practices), governed, in Aristotle's system by ethics, is turned onto the imaginary level of 'as if', into action (deeds, practice) *in* drama, *on* the stage, governed by poetics. It is the construction of the plot by the poet which brings this transformation about. This is called by Ricoeur MIMESIS$_2$.

However, the *connection* between the plot (muthos) and the practical field (our everyday deeds, actions, our praxis, belonging to the 'real' domain) should not be forgotten, either: this is the *prior* ('before') side of poetic composition, which provides the foreknowledge of action, this is MIMESIS$_1$. The deeds which are imitated in MIMESIS$_2$ can more or less be found in MIMESIS$_1$. Our everyday deeds are *always already* imitations in the sense that we imitate each other and we have a more or less coherent view of our own motivations, desires, goals etc. and we are able to put all these into a logically sounding story (into our biography or CV). This is not artistic mimesis yet (it is not yet MIMESIS$_2$) but it undoubtedly involves at least selection and some attempts at typifying deeds (cf. the statement, e.g. "One does not do such a thing in decent company"): we implicitly categorise our practical field already. Moreover, in the case of Greek tragedy, MIMESIS$_1$ is almost always a mythical story (e.g. the 'story' of Oedipus in mythology, in folk-tradition, existing in many versions), an 'original', which the tragic poet subjects to a tragic effect.

MIMESIS$_2$ does not only require a 'source', a 'raw material' (MIMESIS$_1$), which usually also provides the norm of 'credibility', and, hence, *constraints* on probability and necessity in MIMESIS$_2$, but it is also directed towards *people*, who are the 'intentions', the 'targets', the 'effected and affected objects' of MIMESIS$_2$: they are the audience or the reader. They go home form the theatre or put down the book but in a very indirect and roundabout way they might start imitating what they have seen or read (i.e. MIMESIS$_2$), first and foremost in their very act of *participation* in the events of MIMESIS$_2$. The audience, the reader, who finds him- or herself once more in the 'real', ethical domain, who can be improved, or harmed, or entertained etc., may bring about MIMESIS$_3$; the structuring which the tragic poet achieves is only completed in the spectator or the reader[67]. The pleasure of recognition gives rise to the pleasure of learning and of purification. Pity and fear are inscribed in the events by the composition; they move through the filter of representative activity. Yet the pain will be transformed into pleasure and both of these emotions are born in the 'implied' spectator or reader.

2.8. Freud and comedy

Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* was published in 1906, the year Einstein published his special theory of relativity and Freud himself wrote *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, which can be taken as the continuation of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*Traumdeutung*, 1900, the same year Bergson's *On Laughter* was published; in his essay on jokes Freud refers quite lot to Bergson, especially in Chapter VII, dealing with the comic).

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[67] Though, admittedly, Aristotle very seldom speaks about the receiver (the audience), except for mentioning *catharsis* and the *pleasure* (s)he might feel participating in the coherent structure created by the poet.

On the first pages Freud acknowledges that the question of jokes is thoroughly embedded in the problem of comedy, and thus jokes are at the borderline of aesthetic and psychological categories. It is best defined, in the broad sense, as a type of *comic effect.*

Freud starts out by – selectively but critically – surveying the previous literature on jokes, and the theories he gives an account of are interesting in themselves, especially because nobody reads these works nowadays.. *Theodor Lipps* (1898) claims that a joke is the subjective from of the comic, when the comic is deliberately created. In jokes we take a sentence to be meaningful but we simultaneously *know* that it cannot be maintained; we attribute sense or truth to a sentence while we know it is logically meaningless or untrue. (The situation thus looks very much like Bergson's two codes simultaneously at work, e.g. when one is talking about one's wife, and the other thinks he is talking about his cow, yet here the element of play-acting is very much present, since both parties *know* about the misunderstanding, yet pretend that they do not. The situation is most similar to playing a game with a mature child, when both adhere, "in all seriousness", to the game but they know it is only a game, or to what actors and the audience do in the theatre watching a play: this is what Coleridge called "the willing suspension of disbelief"). *Kuno Fisher* (1889) compares jokes to caricatures: if the ugly is hidden, it has to be suddenly revealed, so – in my interpretation – he calls attention to the fact that the comic effect has a lot to do with our human separateness; our body (our "surface"), marking out our boundaries, hide our 'inner self' and the comic can also be interpreted as the inside changing places with the outside, with the hidden suddenly coming to the open unveiled. Fisher also says that a joke is always a playful *judgement* (*Urteil),* creating a comic conflict, which thus points towards our aesthetic freedom. The conflict is created because in a joke usually differing (opposing) things are brought together. *Jean Paul*, the poet describes joke "as a priest in disguise who marries every couple who come in his way", to which *Theodor Visher* adds that these are couples the relatives of whom oppose the marriage as severely as they can. Usually everybody emphasises the amazing speed with which different ideas are brought together and the element of surprise, which is rooted both in difference and in similarity. We are shocked for a moment and then, as a flash of lightning, the real meaning "dawns on us".

Thus, I would like to say, as a first approximation, the joke might be defined as a type of the comic which is based on "understood misunderstanding". Freud remarks that his approach will be totally different than the approaches hitherto followed, and points out that sometimes jokes are tools of social subversion.

Freud first deals with the *technique* of a joke and from the point of view of comedy this seems to be the most important (and accessible) part of his essay. He first analyses a joke that comes from Heine's *Die Bäder von Lucca*, where a simple and poor man claims that the rich banker, Rotschild treated him *almost* like a family member, as *famillionaire.* The word *famillionaire* is praised by Freud for its brevity: it combines the words *fam**iliar*** and **milli**onaire and capitalises on some similarly sounding elements of the words (in bold type), which make the abbreviation possible. A similar, English example Freud quotes is from Thomas de Quincy saying that old people are fond of *anecdotage* (where the combination is from *anecdote* and *dotage*, i.e. 'idle talk'). Or a vacation where a lot of drink is consumed can be called an *alcoholiday*

It is in connection with these (and lots of other, untranslatable) examples that Freud draws a parallel between the technique of jokes and his theory of dreams. Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* differentiated between the *content of the dream,* which manifests itself, and which the dreamer can remember and formulate in words or ideas; and the *dream-thought*, the 'root' of the dream, which is hidden (suppressed), as it were, 'under' or 'behind' the *content*, but never makes itself manifest and has to be brought to the open by the analyst. The process whereby the dream-thought is made into dream-content is called by Freud *dream-*

work. The work of the analyst could be described as a simultaneous 'unzipping', 'translation' and 'enlargement' of the content of the dream, which contains the dream-thought in an abbreviated from, like a capsule. The brevity of jokes (in the sense of 'thrift', 'saving up', 'being economical') is reminiscent of the capsule-like quality of the dream-content, the mixture of parts of words of dreams where some people are 'made up' of various people we know, and the process whereby ideas 'behind' the joke get condensed in e. g. a succinct phrase or even an acronym or, 'invented word' (neologism) is called the *joke-work* by Freud.

Yet Freud has to admit that not all jokes are that brief and jokes do not always work as *compression through substitution.* Yet he clams that *ambiguity* is very often the source of a joke. For example, it is possible to mix up two objects in the way that *object A* is referred to by a name which is similar to, or the same as, the name designating *object B.* (homonyms: one name for two objects, and the two objects are willy-nilly compared because of the parallel the names draw between the two objects). Freud's example is this time from Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part II*: "Discharge yourself of our company, Pistol", where a character is called Pistol and discharge simultaneously means 'go away' and 'go off, fire', as a real pistol does. Ambiguity may also come from the mixing up of the metaphorical and the literal meaning (by the way, the joke is often described by Freud and the other authors he quotes as some people describe the working of metaphor); for example Arthus Schnitzler, the playwright, whose father was a throat-specialist was told once that it is no wonder that he had become so famous a writer, since his father already "had held a mirror up to people". The quotation refers to the famous line in *Hamlet*, yet of course the mirror of Schnitlzer's father was a real one, with which he looked at the throats of people. Or somebody asks the other: "Have you taken a bath?", and the answer is the question: "Why, is one missing?". Here *take* in the metaphorical sense (to be found in so many expressions in English: *take a walk, a rest,* etc.) is suddenly taken literally, and of course the meaning is that the other has not only not taken a bath but he does not intend to do so, either. And ambiguity often comes from a play on words (e.g. we could quote here Hamlet's famous "I am too much in the sun", spoken to Claudius at the beginning of the play, meaning both that he is too much in the lime-light and that Claudius is suspiciously zealous trying to make a *son* out of him (in pronunciation, *son* and *sun* are identical; they are *homophones.*).

Yet Freud has to admit that not even the notion of ambiguity is enough to give an account of all possible jokes. For example there is the joke when one man borrows 25 ducats from the other and is found by the money-lender later in a pub eating salmon with mayonnaise. The money-lender bitterly reminds his friend that he is eating expensive stuff after all on his money and then he might not be so much in need, yet the other's reply is: "This is curious. When I don't have any money I *cannot* ([*kann ich nicht*] 'cannot afford, unable to, cannot allow myself to') eat salmon with mayonnaise; now that I have some money, I *may not* [*darf ich nicht*] ('I am not allowed (by someone else) to') eat it. So when *should* I eat salmon with mayonnaise?" The joke turns on the hinge that it is only the *logical* conclusion which the borrower does not wish to reckon with. This Freud calls the type of joke when there is a *shift from one line of thought to the other.* Here the linguistic form is only necessary to 'carry' or to 'express" the ideas; it is the ideas themselves which are in a funny relationship. This type of joke is called by Freud "notional joke" (Gedankenwitz). Another example of the notional joke is when *seeming stupidity* and *absurdity* are combined with the *shift* and serve as the basis of the joke. Someone orders a piece of cake in a cafe yet does not eat it but takes it to the counter and asks for a glass of liquor instead. He drinks the liquor and wants to leave without paying. The waiter is angry and demands the liquor to be paid for, yet the man claims that he drank the liquor instead of the cake. "Yet you haven't paid for the cake, either!" – "Yes, but I haven't eaten it, have I?" The guest in the cafe has established a

logical relationship between (not) eating the cake and drinking the liquor, which, in fact, under *normal* circumstances, does not exist between them.

It is here that Freud admits that it is hard to tell what is a joke and what is something else, say, e. g. a "paradox", or a "witty statement". His calling something a joke undoubtedly relies on intuition, or, at best, the effect of what is said (laughter). Yet not everything that is funny is a joke proper, as it is not true that what is brief is automatically ludicrous.

There are jokes where, according to Freud, to different ideas are brought onto the same level; they are somehow *unified*. For example: "January is the month to wish our friends that all should be well, and the other eleven months for making that impossible for them". Here well- and ill-wishing are on the same level, yet in this context well-wishing turns, somewhat cynically but also perhaps self-critically, into its own opposite.

There is a kind of joke where wee openly substitute one thing with its opposite, and this triggers the joke. For example one goes into Madame Tussaud's wax-work museum and is shown the Duke on Wellington and his horse. "but which is the Duke of Wellington and which is the horse?" – "Just as you like, my pretty child, you pay the money, you have the choice" (Quoted by Freud in the English original). Here the one who is showing the Duke and the horse pretends to be a businessman who wants nothing but the satisfaction of his customers. Yet depending on the quality of the wax-work, he might be the opposite, and at the same time he tries to hide the poor quality of the wax-work by implying the utter stupidity of the customer.

There is a type of joke Freud calls "bidding joke": here instead of a "yes' you find a "no" which is a more emphatic "yes" than the "yes" in itself. One of Freud's example is form Shakespeare's *Julius Ceasar*, when Marc Antony repeats again and again that "Brutus is an honourable man", meaning the opposite (Of course, this case could hardly be distinguished from what we traditionally call *irony*: saying something and meaning the opposite, e.g. "you are *very* clever!", meaning, you are terribly stupid).

Yet one may not only substitute *thing A* with *thing B*, where the two are (more or less direct) opposites, but it might be the case that while the substitution is done, A and B are related, belong together, or are connectable. An example: two ruthless businessmen at the height of their careers thought that one way to get into high society was having their portraits painted. They hired the best painter in town, then they trough a lavish party and hang their respective portraits on the wall of the drawing room. When an art-critic arrived, they dragged her under the portraits to hear him praising the portraits (and, thereby, them). The critic looked at the portraits and pointed at the empty wall with the words: "And where is the Saviour?" (Originally in English in Freud). He, in Freud's interpretation expressed something which could not be said directly: 'if the portrait of the Saviour were hanging in the middle, it would become obvious that you are the two thieves crucified with him; you are thieves, murderers.' The critic seems to point at a lack, yet he is in fact implying a parallel, or similarity: the connection between the Golgotha and the present situation and thus the substitution can be made. This might thus also be taken as *double interpretation through implication.*

Analogy also seems to have a significant share in the joke-work, yet this can sometimes be hardly separated form other complex relations. An example for analogy might be the simile Jean Paul coined precisely to characterise the nature of jokes: a joke is like a disguised priest who marries every couple.

In the next part Freud deals with the *direction* of jokes, especially with obscene ones. He contends that obscene jokes are libidinal, they aim at the observation or even at the touching of the other's genitals. This, in the joke, becomes "possible", yet the more indirect the way is, the better the joke will be. Jokes are to create pleasure or substitute for aggression: instinctual desire is able to have its way by not directly destroying social or other obstacles but by overcoming them by *getting around them*. In jokes we very often wage war on the other, or on

social norms, or other obstacles, yet in an "intellectual" (suppressed), and thus socially accepted, "cultured" way. Jokes release tension because they give the impression of victory in a socially acceptable way. Then Freud goes on 'putting jokes on stage', i.e. describing the relationship between the participants of a joke. He concludes that while the comic can give direct pleasure to the first person, jokes have to be *told*, they need an audience, since we laugh not in ourselves and do not chuckle to ourselves but we laugh as the echo of the other's laughter: we laugh indirectly, *in* and *through* the laughter of the other. His is why we usually cannot laugh at our own jokes. Then he, in a highly detailed way deals with the analogies one may find between joke-works and dream-works and also extends what he found in connection with jokes into the realm of *the comic* in general. Perhaps Freud's most significant insight is that ultimately the comic is perhaps nothing else but the disclosure of our unconscious

Chapter 3

Greek Comedy: Old and New

3. 1. "Old Comedy": Aristophanes

The origins of comedy – as we saw – are as obscure as those of tragedy, and since Aristotle was not a native Athenian, we cannot entirely rely on his account; he himself presents what he knows about the roots of comedy as hearsay or "gossip", too. It is, for example, obscure what he means, when he says that comedy derived form "phallic songs". Yet in his *Ethics* (II, 7; IV, 7-8) he distinguishes between three types of comic characters:
– the *alazon*: a boastful or pompous man
– the *eiron*: a mock-modest man, who understates or belittles
– the *bomolochos*: a buffoon, or clownish jester.
Again it is hard to know how this is related to *The Poetics.*

Today it may be safely said that *Komodia* most probably does not derive from *kome* ('village' or 'quarter of the city') but from *komos* ('a processional celebration'), and it is likely that it might be traced back to festivals where ithyphallic revellers marched and danced in a simulated contest involving choruses of animals, satyrs, giants and fat men, with a song at the entrance (*parodos*), a debate or dispute (*agon*) and an address to the audience (*parabasis*). In any event, old comedy (Aristophanes) often uses the dispute as a central element (as between Right and Wrong Logic in roughly in the middle of the *Clouds*, or the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides in the *Frogs*), and the *parabasis* is equally important where he gives tangible advice to the audience. Generally speaking, old comedy was a merciless attack on well-known individuals (like Socrates in the *Clouds,* or on the great tragedians in the *Frogs*), portraying them as absurd or offensive. So old comedy is full of personal lampooning and is used as a political and social weapon, while mixing realism and myth (realism: Euripides and Aeschylus were real persons, yet the contest between them takes place in the underworld, in the land of Hades, and Dionysus himself is the judge).

Today it is more or less agreed that it was from the second half of the 6th c. B. C. (around 536-532), at the command of Peisistratos tyrannous, that the Great (or Urban) Dionysia was introduced as a religious holiday, celebrated in the month of Elaphebolion (March-April), the beginning of spring. Tragedies were performed for three days (each day three tragedies, plus a satyr-play) but it was only from 486 B. C. that the *second* day became reserved for five comedies, and that tragedies occupied the third, fourth and the fifth day (in the morning of the first day, sacrifices were offered, in the afternoon the contest of the dithyrambos-choirs took place) and from 449 B. C. the *agon* (contest) of the tragic *actors* (and not only of tragedies) was introduced, too. So comedies (as Aristotle also observes) gained legitimacy much later than tragedy. It seems that "real catharsis" (the purification of the soul) was the duty of tragedy, while comedy was to hold a (distorted) social mirror in front of the audience: it was more direct, more critical, and though it is doubtful if catharsis was associated with comedy at all, it was to purge through laughter. It is also noteworthy that many of Aristophanes' comedies end in a compromise, as a result of a negotiation or in a great revelry, reminiscent of the ecstatic dances celebrating Dionysus .

Aristophanes (c. 445 B. C. – c. 385) is credited with more than forty plays, of which eleven survive. Very little can be known about his life; his father, Philippus was a wealthy man, and it seems that Aristophanes was conservative in his outlook and interests, identifying himself with the social layer called the "knights", the prosperous "middle class" between the

rich aristocracy, and the layer of peasants and the "urban" proletariat. His first success came in 427 B. C. when he was still a very young man with a play called *Banqueters* (DAITALÉS); with this satire on the latest fashions on educational methods he took second prize. It seems that from that time on he had become an established author and we may learn some clues about his life from the plays themselves, for example that he was very early bald (cf. *Peace*). In the *Acharnians* (425 B. C.), the earliest of his plays to survive intact, the main character says that he had offended the powerful political leader, Cleon by satirising him the year before in the play called *Babylonians* (Babylonioi). Cleon, the leading exponent of the aggressive policy against Sparta, seems to have accused Aristophanes with "slandering the state". The Chorus of *Acharnians* also mention that Sparta is anxious to acquire the island of Aegina because of the author (maybe Aristophanes had an estate there, and it is a fact that Athens expropriated Aegina at the beginning of the Peloponnesian war). From the *Knights* (424 B. C.) we also know that Aristophanes, contrary to common practice, handed his scripts over to a "producer-director" because he did not like to stage his own plays, though *Knights* itself happens to be produced by himself.

It also seems that Aristophanes was a member of the intellectual group associated with Socrates – this is not only likely from the *Clouds* (Nephelai, 423 B. C.) but from Plato's *Apology*, where Socrates explicitly mentions that his views were misrepresented by the comic playwrights and from Plato's *Symposium*, where Aristophanes produces perhaps the wittiest and most original speech on love. Yet the *Clouds* (which failed, in the sense that it only received third prize at the Dionysia), pays little attention to Socrates' original ideas. It is all the more interesting that Plato – for whom Socrates was an idol – does not seem to be angry with Aristophanes; not only does he make him almost a hero in the *Symposium* but it is also rumoured that a copy of his plays was found on his death-bed, and when Dionysius of Syracuse asked Plato to analyse the Athenian constitution, the philosopher sent him an edition of Aristophanes' works.

Thus, it seems that Socrates, a well-known figure of Athens, is rather used by Aristophanes as a typical figure of "the philosopher", the clouds representing the misty, airy images of the vapour which is his thinking. It is also true that the *Clouds* was written 24 years earlier than Socrates' execution (399 B. C.) and represent a much younger Socrates than the one sentenced to drink the hemlock. Further, the script we have now is a rewritten one and it is obscure if it was staged or not; at any rate, at the beginning Aristophanes rebukes the audience precisely for not having appreciated the play when it was first produced, then he criticises his rivals for pleasing the viewers with course jokes, and for stealing ideas from him, and he also sings his own praise in the conflict he had with Cleon. The play is better constructed than many other of Aristophanes' often episodic pieces: the plot is built on the trick of reversal (besides the usual word-play and buffoonery like beating somebody up). Strepsiades, a petit-bourgeois Athenian, who had married above his social rank, finds himself in debt because of his good.-for-nothing son, Pheidippides, who is only interested in horses and races. He decides to send his son to the "Thinking-Factory" run by Socrates, where he might learn how to talk himself out of the payment of debts, since Socrates (who is represented as a Sophist) is able to juggle with words to the extent that black will appear as white and right as wrong. Yet Socrates finds Strepsiades a dull student and turns him out of doors, but when Strepsiades finally persuades his son to go to the "Thinking-Factory", the plan backfires: Pheidippides becomes an excellent student but he is able to prove to his father that he deserves a good beating – and logic is followed by deeds. Strepsiades, in his fury, burns The Thinking-Factory to the ground.

By representing the reversal of social order (the son beating his father), Aristophanes, as usual, was moving on dangerous grounds. He touched upon one of the most crucial questions of Athens: who should educate the youth of the city? The rhetoricians, who made it

possible for their students to defend themselves at court (or to defend others for money), to give laudatory speeches or to give counsel, in fiery orations, in matters of the state? Or the poets, who also conveyed, in easily memorable beats, practical information (like how to build a raft?) Or the Sophists, who could really prove "anything" with their logic-chopping? (Later the dialecticians – like first Socrates in the market-place and later Plato [cc. 428-348 B. C.] in the grove called Academos [from 387 B. C.] – also appeared; they thought that first you have to make it clear *what* talk is going on about, and then use the correct means of deduction). The Sophists, indeed, relied on the meaning of *arete* ('virtue', or 'excellence', but also carrying the meaning: 'being good at something') and they implied that virtue is not a matter of background, social position or birthright but could be taught to anyone (who pays). This itself was a threat to the social order and conservative Aristophanes may have been ridiculing precisely this. Why Aristophanes connected the matter with the name of Socrates is another question.

Wasps (Sphékes, 422 B. C.) is a return to genuine political comedy. The two central characters, *I-hate-Cleon* (Bdelycleon) and *I-love-Cleon* (Philocleon), son and father, are constant rivals, and the real conflict starts when Bdelycleon locks his father, Philocleon up because the father wishes to attend the courts as juryman. The friendly Chorus of wasps (the Athenian jurors) come to help him but Bdelycleon persuades them that the supposed benefits of jury service (flattery, bribes, daily pay) are nothing compared to the humiliation of being tricked out of fortunes by clever attorneys and politicians. Philocleon finally decides to hold court in his own home and the first case concerns the family dog, who has stolen cheese. Though Philocleon is tricked into acquitting the dog, he takes revenge by getting drunk, singing bawdy songs, beating everybody up and running away with a flute-girl. He also leads the wild, Dionysian dance of the Chorus, and after further scandals in the street, he retires to enjoy the flute-girl. Philocleon upsets the social order, he is a villain, yet a typically comic hero, too, who is eternally vigorous, like comedy itself. Bdelycleon, who would, in principle deserve Aristophanes' sympathy, is by far more dangerous: he is cool, clear-sighted, and an excellent orator (though sometimes affected and over-sophisticated) yet with his words he is able to persuade anybody into anything. He acts as a Sophist and as – later – Euripides.

Peace (Eiréné, 421 B. C.) is a pacifist play (celebrating the Peace of Nikias), in which Trygaeus ('Vinatger'), a well-meaning farmer flies up to Zeus to learn that the future of Greece is war but with other farmers (the Chorus) he manages to dig up Peace and to bring it back to earth. The play ends in a great Dionysian festival again. *Birds* (Ornithes, 414 B. C.) is a mixture of ("Hitchcockian") utopia and social criticism again and puts even the gods in a comic light. The main character is Peithetaereus ('Friend-Persuader'), who persuades the birds to fortify their home-country, the sky to build Nophelokokkygia ('Could-cuckoo-ville')and to become rivals to the gods. The plan succeeds: not only earthly people want to join the ideal state (which they are not allowed to do) but the gods are also forced into a compromise: Sovereignty, Zeus's bride becomes Peithetaereus' wife. *Lysistrata* (Lysistraté, - 'Disbander of Armies - Madame Demobiliser', 411 B. C.) is a combination of the feminist issue and of the pacifist theme: the women of Athens join forces with women from the other states of Greece to put an end to the war between Sparta and Athens; they seize the Acropolis and turn out to be the stronger sex, and men have to negotiate the terms of peace with them, which is finally restored. (this by some critics is already rated as a "Middle Comedy").

Thesmophoriazusae (Thesmophoriazousai, 'Women celebrating Thesmophoria', c. 410) is already a comedy directly concerned with the theatre itself and has, as a central character, the person Aristophanes loved to mock best in the second half of his career: Euripides. The women of Athens charge Euripides with slandering them in his plays and he has to defend himself by quoting from his tragedies but he also has a secret ally among the women in the

person of Mnesilochus, a kinsman of his, disguised as a woman. Finally, there is a compromise and we at least hear some fragments from Euripides' lost plays, too.

3.2. Aristophanes: *The Frogs*

Frogs (Batrachoi, 405 B. C.) is almost wholly devoted to the comedy of tragedy: it was such a big success that it was given a repeat performance. The initial situation is that Athens is dead, it is still at war with Sparta (a war Athens will lose only a few months after the performance of the *Frogs* and there was even an antidemocratic coup in 411, after which many citizens were sent into exile), and there is nobody to revitalise the nation. Dionysus himself decides to go to the Underworld to bring back the worthiest playwright, Euripides, who will surely regenerate Athens. After some farcical episodes of mistaken identity (Dionysus is disguised as Heracles, who has made the expedition once before to bring back the Cerberus, and depending on the dangers Dionysus forces his servant, Xanthias to be Heracles or Dionysus), they arrive at the Elysian fields where Euripides, sitting next to Pluto in the poet's chair, is unwilling to give up his seat to Aeschylus. The debate is long, making fun of both the thundering heroism and the bombast in Aeschylus' tragedies, representing the 'golden years' of Marathon and Salamis (490-480 B. C.), and the elegant, witty yet light and shallow poetry of Euripides, who gives counsel on household matters and represents sensational incest-cases. It seems that Aristophanes implies that Sophocles is the greatest; he is reported not to take part in the contest, unless Dionysus' choice falls on Euripides. Eventually, Dionysus takes Aeschylus with him, yet the poet's chair in the Underworld goes to Sophocles.

The play starts with a farce: Xanthias asks Dionysus what kind of coarse jokes he should *not* crack, and Dionysus makes references to other comedy-writers, who make servants carry heavy loads while also making them complain about farting, a stomach-ache, etc. Then comedy is based on one of the lowest type of humour again: on the simple fact that Dionysus is constantly afraid, yet when he forces Xanthias to change clothes with him, it turns out that it always happens in the wrong moment: when Xanthias is Heracles, he is offered a dainty dinner and a flute-girl but when Dionysus is Heracles, he is told off for his previous gluttony by an inn-keeper and he is finally also beaten. Dionysus is more human than any other human and it is hard to understand how and why he – in whose honour the previous day processions were held and to whom sacrifices were offered – could play, after all in his *own* play, such an undignified part. Is it possible that comedy, in its coarse and profane (or even blasphemous) manners was aimed at the purification of the social and political sphere, the way people behave as members of the *polis* when they act in the service of the community, while tragedy wished to purify the soul (the very *being* of the human being)?

Comedy was not merely to entertain, otherwise it could not have a place at a genuinely *religious* festival. It seems to be true that conservative Aristophanes thinks the history of Athens is a constant decline in the 5th century: after the heroism shown at Salamis and Marathon, everybody is looking for *personal* gain, the legislative system was ruined when matters requiring legal decisions was put into the hands of ten times five-hundred men who not only got (from the time of Pericles) one obol a day (and from the time of Cleon three obols), and usually went just for the money (and bribes) but had no legal training and were usually old and senile, personal heroism died out during the long war with Sparta, etc., etc. Aristophanes clearly wants to pinpoint the ills of politics and society and he seems to show what people have done to the gods, too: they are cowardly, simple-minded, and thus ridiculous, just like the citizens themselves. This is the comic vein in which, for example, John Gay's *The Beggars Opera* was written, or, to some extent, Shakespeare's 1 and 2 of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, maybe *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure* as well.

The long contest between Aeschylus and Euripides is more than a debate on aesthetics and a parody of the texts of both poets; here Aristophanes is concerned with what tragedy is to achieve, and he seems to think that the text has a *direct* function in teaching morals and right behaviour. Euripides is charged with no longer being concerned with matters that would give the community one common goal; in witty and paradoxical sophistry, personal miseries, exotic desires, incest and other "exciting" delicacies are presented, and the ability to sacrifice oneself for the whole state, to show an example to all, to suffer for the whole community lives only in the memory of those who still know Aeschylus. Aeschylus:

> no harlotry business deformed my play;
> tales of incestuous vice / the sacred poet should hide from view. / Nor ever exhibit and blazon forth / on the public stage to the public ken. / For boys a teacher at school is found / but we, the poets are teachers of men

Euripides seems to agree here but he claims that it is also dishonest to speak in a language that no one can understand:

> And to speak great Lycabettuses, pray / And massive blocks of Parnassian rocks, / is *that* things honest and pure to say?

Aeschylus' answer contains a whole philosophy of language: "Alas, poor whittling, and can't you see / That for mighty thoughts and heroic aims / the words themselves must appropriate be?" Euripides only taught to "prate, harangue, and to debate".

Aeschylus is parodied, too:

Euripides:

How the twin-throned powers of Achaea	Hogy az Achájok Két trón-ura
The lords of mighty Hellenes.	S a hellén fiatalság…
O phlattothrattophlattothrat!	Trallárom-lírom, trallárom-lárom
Sendeth the Sphinx, the unchancy, the chieftainess bloodhound.	Küld baljóslatu Sphinxet, Erőszak ebét…
O phlattothrattophlattothrat!	Trallárom-lírom, trallárom-lárom,
Launcheth fierce with brand and hand the avengers	Bosszu-gerellyel S karral
The terrible eagle.	Az ádáz sas…
O phlattothrattophlattothrat!	Trallárom-lírom, trallárom-lárom
So for the swift-winged hounds of the air he provided a booty.	És martalékúl adván Fene légi kutyáknak
O phlattothrattophlattothrat!	Trallárom-lírom, trallárom-lárom

Aeschylus strikes back, parodying Euripides:

"Halycons, who by the ever-rippling	Halkyonok, kik a tenger örökfolyamú
Waves of the sea are babbling,	Habja fölött csicseregtek,
Dewing your plumes with the drops that fall	Áztatván Nedü-harmatos csöppel
From wings in the salt spray dabbling.	Szárnyaitok hegyét; És kik fenn, az eresz mögött
Spiders, ever with twir-r-r-rling fingers,	Ha-haj-hajlítjátok az újjotokon, Póksereg, a kifeszült szövevényt
Weaving the warp and the woof.	Pörge csüvöllő
Little, brittle, network, fretwork	Gondjai közt;
Under the coigns of the roof.	(trans. by János Arany)

There are other ways in which they, in front of Dionysus, try to measure their poetry: the repetition of words (Aeschylus: "Be thou mine aid to-day / For here I *come*, and hither I *return*"); the right representation of the state-of-affairs by words (Euripides: "A happy man was Oedipus at first – ") the meter (Aeschylus claims that "Lost his bottle of oil" can be inserted into each of the prologues of Euripides); and finally: the weight of words (Euripides: "Achilles threw two singles and a four" Aeschylus: "Chariot on chariot, corpse on corpse was hurled"). Yet the debate has still significance with respect to language: should words convince and delight through argument or should they shock, mobilise, impress, create?

Aristophanes' last surviving comedy, *Plutos* (Wealth), originally produced in 408 and acted, in a revised form in 388 (the revision most probably done by one of Aristophanes' sons) already belongs to "Middle Comedy".

3.3. New Comedy: Menander (Menandros, c. 342 B. C. – c. 292 B. C.)

3.3.1 Nine differences between Old and New Comedy

The age of new comedy is traditionally from the second half of the 4th century B. C. to Terence and Plautus) and some critics argue that there is even a period called "Middle Comedy" (roughly 400 B. C. –320 B. C.) but there are so few plays available that its is hard to tell the difference between Middle and New. It is easier to collect the differences between Old and New Comedy (so practically between Aristophanes and Menander):

1. New Comedy moves away from the political and the personal satire and tries to represent types (e.g. the young wastrel or spendthrift youth, the recalcitrant father, the courtesan with a golden heart, the parasite, the wily slave or clever servant, the braggart warrior, the hanger-on, etc.). Of course the word "type" must be treated cautiously: usually it is not the "man-in-the-street" who is typified, and not the ordinary, everyday lives of the common people but it is one character-trait that is put under the magnifying-glass of the playwright, and it is the implications of this trait (e.g. of being a grumpy old man) that are worked out in detail, and these, through the exaggeration, become the "typical" characteristics of old age, or of being a misanthrope. Thus, by the same token, from the case of a braggart warrior we learn little about life in the barracks in a given period, or about the military potential of a country; the figure of the good-heated harlot (though surely there were many) does not give an insight into contemporary problems of prostitution, etc.

2. The plots and themes, moving away from everyday politics, become more domestic, and thus more "general" or even "universal". For example, the question is no longer how Socrates acted – though, as we saw, his figure inevitably develops into the figure of the "typical philosopher" – but how philosophers *usually, generally* behave and even how they are *expected* to behave So the sharpness, or even the violence of satire is considerably softened: a "real" philosopher can always say that "yes, this is how philosophers *generally* behave, but not me", while Socrates had to protest if he wanted to distance himself from the figure Aristophanes moulded him into – as he actually did in Plato's *Apology* .

3. A very important formal feature of New Comedy is that the Chorus is more and more eliminated; there are no choral fantasies (cf. the chorus of wasps in Aristophanes' *Wasps,* or the chorus of frogs in *Frogs*, also prompting the *title* of the plays), and a further sign – to be also found as early as in Middle Comedy – seems to be that the chorus no longer addressed the audience *directly* on public issues; this role is taken by the actors, and instead of the choral songs there are *interludes* with dancing and singing, and these have

little to do with the plot itself; they rather play the role of the "living curtain" between the acts.

4. The resolution is seldom a big, Dionysian revelry or a public sandal (as at the end of *Wasps* or *Clouds*) but it usually derives from discovery (*anagnorisis*), i.e. "change from ignorance to knowledge": something which was clear to sight right form the beginning (usually only for the audience) suddenly comes to light at the end of the play, and thus families, lovers, friends are (re)united. This way, comedy moves from the attitude of "let that (particular) rascal (called Cleon, Socrates, Euripides) be erased from the surface of the earth through (cruel) laughter" to: "let us be thankful for having found our true identities; we have come home, we have found our way into ourselves to get to know who we are, we have learnt the truth through comic (and not tragic, i.e. irreversible) hardships." (After all, the mystery around one's origin can be treated tragically, as in *Oedipus*, melodramatically, as in Euripides' *Ion*, and fully comically, with a deliberate parody, a reflection on the very topic of obscure origins, as at the end of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Ernest*.) This is the beginning of inventing a "dual status" for the protagonist (later to be found also in such novels as Fielding's *Tom Jones* or Dickens' *Oliver Twist*): the hero, much earlier than his birth, had been provided for by his ancestors or by a rich uncle, he was to be born rich and his origin is noble, yet he simply does not know about it, and he has to go through all kinds of hardships until with his suffering and through his education he "earns" the privilege of finding his way back to all the good that was awaiting him; in this great turn of his fortunes he is "reborn" into a higher and happier state of existence, so finally it becomes clear that all through the hard times he was in fact living in "two orders". Thus suffering was not for nothing: it was to make him worthy of what he will, hopefully, use wisely, though the story ends when the whole world is finally at his feet and there is nothing about his later life (or one might assume that "they lived happily ever after"). (The background to the popularity of the "lost and found child"-motif might be that in Athens it was customary and even lawful to leave an unwanted infant somewhere out of doors, clothed, with some ornaments or trinkets by which it could later be recognised, and the biological parents could, again lawfully, reclaim it, without giving any compensation to the foster-parents[68]).

5. In New Comedy, obscenity is always toned down (there is no bawdiness). The style is closer to spoken language (the iamb, which was used in these plays, was also close to the rhythm of everyday speech, just like in Shakespeare's England), yet it is slightly "idealised": refined, conversational, easy-going and economical; elegant, often witty and musical. Plutarch remarks that Menander is polished, while Aristophanes is like a harlot who has passes her prime. New Comedy is the beginning of the "comedy of manners". (In this respect, too, Menander learnt a great deal from Euripides, whose light and elegant verse and witty, often argumentative, or even sophistic dialogues are criticised by Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *The Frogs*).

6. Though New Comedy becomes more and more domestic, it is still performed in large amphitheatres (with c. 17 000 spectators), where the nearest spectator was sixty-six feet from the actors; thus the actors, already wearing everyday Athenian clothes, still had to put masks on their heads which fixed the expression of the face for the duration of the performance and nuances could not be conveyed by a suddenly raised eyebrow but by voice and exaggerated gestures. The theatre was still open to the skies, there was no curtain or lighting, and the scenery was a standard set which normally offered a city street with two or three "houses" opening in to it; the doors were "real" but they all opened from a stage-building backing the acting area, which, in turn, was about sixty feet wide and

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[68] Cf. H. J. Rose: *Outlines of Classical Literature*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 88.

was raised above the orchestra or dancing floor (the traditional place for the chorus) probably by four or five feet.

7. New Comedy reflects no longer the historical events of the heroic past or the myths testifying to the origins of the community, but the *mood* of Greek life; thus themes include family squabbles, romantic love, marriage, the hopes and fears of the "small man", the middle-class merchant or the farmer; the plots, though they often have a root in folklore and they keep the patterns of some traditional stories, are mostly "invented" by the author.

8. Though in New Comedy mythical elements are pushed to the background, it is true that often a deity (e. g. Pan, as in *Old Cantankerous*) introduces the plot (as in Euripides' *Ion* Hermes), setting the scene, explaining the initial situation, or even assuring the audience about the outcome, yet the gods do not interfere with the events and the succinct phrases of the drama express the *private* philosophy of the society. As a consequence, the force shaping the destinies of man is not fate but *luck* or *money*. At best, human *ethical* standards are measured (Menander does not provide character studies, the motives of his heroes are not psychological but follow from which type they belong to); the human being's ability to find the – often unpleasant – will of the gods is no longer in the focus of interest, and the – usually fantastic – stories of reconciliation carry the elements of escapism from the harshness of reality. Consequently, there is a decline of tragedy at the expense of comedy (from the 4th c. B. C. only one satyr-play is performed at the entire festival). Menander – like Euripides – did not modernise the mythical stories but secularised them; he treats mythical figures like contemporaries.

9. New Comedy also marks, in a certain sense, the birth of "European drama": theatres are built and festivals take place outside of Athens and even Attica, too, and Menander himself – though an Athenian through and through – works for other theatres as well.

3.3.2. Menander's life and work

Menander's life is as obscure as Aristophanes'; we know that he was an Athenian, that he was born into an upper-class family; his father was a man called Diopeithes. The Athens of Menander is, of course, very different from Aristophanes' again: it is part of the Macedonian Empire, though Menander started to write around the time Alexander the Great dies (323 B. C.), and he could witness mostly to the political battle-games the leaders of Athens played for power. We have evidence that Menander was a friend of Demetrius of Phaleron, a Macedonian commander of the military government of Athens between 317 and 307 B. C. and when Demetrius was exiled in 307, there was at least a temporary decline for Menander, too. Menander's polished, often aphoristic and sometimes philosophical style is not an accident: he was a pupil of Theophrastus, who was not only one of Aristotle's most devoted disciples but also the one who arranged and "edited" the Aristotelian corpus (his lectures) as a kind of "literary executor". Theophrastus also wrote a book called *Character Types*. By that time philosophy had become more accepted as part of the educational curriculum than in the age of Plato. We also know that Menander squinted, that probably he was first an apprentice to Alexis, a playwright of "Middle Comedy", and that he drowned while he was swimming in the Piraeus. He was extremely prolific: he is reported to have written 108 plays and he is said to have received first prize at the Dionysia or at the Lenaia Festival 8 times, though he left the actual penning down of his plays to the last moment (at least according to Plutarch) .

It is sadly ironic that though in his time, and even long afterwards, Menader's popularity was next to Homer's – he was, for example, still a model for aspiring public speakers in Rome in the 1st century A. D., – there is only one play of his that we have more or less in full: *Old Cantankerous* (alternative titles include *Dyscolos, The Bad-Tempered Man*

and *The Misanthrope*, 316 B. C., found, by accident, in a mummy case from Egypt in 1958; the papyrus with the play was used as a cartonage of the mummy case). We, of course, have longer and shorter fragments from other plays, e.g. only the first two acts of *The Girl from Samos* (315 B. C.) are badly mutilated, otherwise it is all right, yet the texts of most of the other plays (e.g. *The Arbitration, The Rape of the Lock, The Shield,* etc.), on the whole, are seriously damaged; sometimes complete acts are missing, the dates are uncertain, and sometimes we have only a few fragments, or we do not even know the title. Two main factors help us, however, to be able to appreciate Menander's art: one is that he was very popular in Roman times as well, and a good number of his comedies were reworked by Terence and Plautus (a typical example is Menander's *The Double Deceiver* – of which we now have not more than a few lines from Act Two and Three –, which was turned into *The Two Bacchises* by Plautus) and a lot of his proverbial sayings (e.g. "Conscience makes every man a coward") found their way into diaries and commonplace books – cf. perhaps even *Hamlet*!). The second noteworthy factor is that he worked from the rich heritage of European folklore and several of his plots are drawn from well-known stories (e.g. the lost child with a talisman or birthmark, which helps him to identify himself in the end; or the bed-trick, when a man thinks he has slept with a woman of his choice but in fact it was his wife in disguise (cf. e.g. Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*); or an old father opposes the marriage of his a beautiful daughter (cf. e.g. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or the after all "comic father"-type, old Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet,* etc.), so from his choice of the tales we at least know what kind of comedy he was in favour of.

3.3.3. Menander: *Old Cantankerous*

Old Cantankerous is an early play and perhaps not Menander's best one, though it received first prize at the Lenaia Festival in 316. The story is, in fact, rather simple, it is often chaotic (perhaps because of some corrupted parts of the text) and very didactic, openly preaching the value of hard work, of innocent love, of "moderate competence" and of a community, and the bad consequences of misanthropy and selfishness. There are too many servants and their tricks and fooling about is, in many cases, little connected with the main plot.

The scene is "a village in Attica, about fourteen miles from Athens" and Pan gives a detailed and lively introduction to the story, explaining who is who and what happened before the play starts; of course it is him who has put "fetters" on Sostratos, the young hero, i. e. Pan made him fall in love. The entrance to the shrine of Pan and the Nymphs is the third door on the stage (besides the respective doors to the house of Knemon (the title-hero) and Gorgias (his step-son)), yet the play takes place in the "presence" of Apollo, too: his statue stands by Knemon's entrance.

In Act I Sostratos, a young and wealthy man of Athens, tells his best friend, Chaireas (a very popular name in New Comedy) that he has fallen in love at first sight with Knemon's, a farmer's daughter, whom he would like to marry. The sudden appearance of Pyrrhias, Sostratos' servant disturbs the scene – he is not only a victim of a comic chase and he does not only complain about having been beaten (the typical fate of servants) by Knemon but he re-enacts his conversation with the grumpy old man (to whom he went upon Sostratos' command, to plead for the girl), which gives a chance for personification and parody, to be followed by Knemon's real appearance, being worse than described. When he leaves, his daughter appears (simply called: "Girl") and she complains that their servant has dropped their bucket into the well (nicely preparing the scene when Knemon himself will fall into it), yet they need water, and of course gallant Sostratos fetches some for her from the shrine of the Nymphs (holy water as a sign of purity). This scene is overseen by Daos, Gorgias' servant.

Gorgias is Knemon's step-son and lives with his mother next door; this elderly woman used to be Knemon's wife, who bore for the bad-tempered man the Girl (so the Girl and Gorgias are half-siblings because Gorgias – as we learnt from Pan – is from a former marriage of Myrrhine, Knemon's estranged wife). Act II starts with Gorgias telling Daos how upset he is because of the visit of Sostratos, who suddenly re-appears and first Gorgias thinks he is a simple seducer (Gorgias' speech is full of pieces of general wisdom, e.g. "The successful man continues to prosper and flourish only as long as he can accept his good fortune without harming others") yet he is easily won over to Sostratos' side and advises him to take a mattock and start digging as a labourer – they hope that then Knemon might talk to Sostratos. The act finishes with a conversation between Gretas, Sostratos' mother's servant and Sikon, the cook: they were sent to Pan's shrine because Sostratos' mother saw a dream that her son was digging in the fields because he has fallen in love, and she wants to show a sacrifice lest this would come true (it *is* already true). The servants, with pots and pans and dragging a sheep for the sacrifice are making fun of each other. In Act Three Sostratos' mother is urging the servants to make haste with the sacrifice and Knemon is upset because of the bustle around the shrine and his house. Then first Getas and then Sikon wants to borrow a pot from Knemon but Sikon is beaten up by the misanthrope. Sostratos arrives complaining that his painful digging was in vain: he did not meet Knemon. Simiche, Knemon's servant-maid appears and complains that she could not lift the bucket out of the well but he has lost a mattock, too, with which he tried to pull out the bucket. Knemon decides to go into the well himself and Sostratos invites Gorgias for lunch (after the sacrifice). In Act Four we learn from Sostratos' description how Knemon was rescued from the well, into which he eventually fell. It was Gorgias who pulled him out, the misanthrope is now on a couch with wheels and the nearness of death has prompted him to amend his ways: he makes Gorgias his inheritor and consents to her daughter's marriage, preaching about the "moderate competence" everyone should strive at as an absolute value. At the end of this act, Kallapides, Sostratos' father appears as well. In Act Five Sostratos persuades his father to allow not only his marriage with Knemon's daughter (the Girl) but Gorgias' marriage with Sostratos' sister. Kallapides argues a bit but quickly gives in; Gorgias does not want to accept a dowry but finally he does. They all agree that hard work is the best thing on earth (they do not ask Sostratos' sister about the marriage – we do not even see her and the Girl does not say a word, either). Everyone goes into the shrine to celebrate – it seems that Knemon and his estranged wife have made up in the meantime –, yet Knemon prefers to stay at home alone. Getas and Sikon take the helpless old misanthrope out of his house and first they tease him a bit by asking for pots, pans and other things for the wedding, then they convince him to join the others in the shrine because it is better to be with the others than alone. This is the end, the last words are spoken by Getas, the young lovers do not reappear and such characters as Pyrrhias and Chaireas are simply "forgotten".

Chapter 4

Roman Drama. Plautus, Terence, Seneca

> I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words
> *– Un dessein si funeste,*
> *S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.*
> They are to be found in Crébillon's 'Atrée'.
> (Edgar Allan Poe, *The Purloined Letter*)

4. 1. The Beginnings of the Roman theatre: Roman comedy

In the form of *Fescennine verses*, mostly associated with weddings and harvest festivals, there were rudiments of Roman comedy at a very early date; these were full of jesting and used obscene language; further, we have the record of Etruscan dancers coming to Rome in 364 B. C., and there was a more elaborate medley of dance, song and dialogue, too, which Livy called *satura*. Yet the most important early comic dramatic forms were the *Fabula Atellana* and the *mime*.

The *Fabula Atellana* (which was named after Atella in Campania) is the leading genre in Rome until comedies based on Greek originals are introduced in 240 B. C. (see below). It is a short farce played in masks, dealing with life in the country or in a small town, and has four stock-characters: Bucco, the glutton or braggart; Pappus, the gullible old man; Maccus, the stupid clown, and Dossennus, the cunning trickster. It became a canonised literary form in the 1st c. B. C., chiefly written by Pomponius and Novius.

The *mime* in Roman (and Greek) times is a short, improvised dramatic – often indecent – farce, restricted to one scene and often used as interludes in the performance of regular plays. Its special feature is that women were also allowed to play in them and that they were performed without masks. The mime reached Rome around 211 B. C. and became an important literary form in the late Republic. The chief authors were Decimus Laberius (c. 115-43 B. C.) and Publius Syrus.

In the 3rd c. B. C. the Romans started to have regular contact with the Greeks of Southern Italy and Sicily, especially during the First Punic War (264-241 B. C.). Livius Andronicus of Tarentum, a former Greek slave translated the *Odyssey* into Latin (he set up a school and he taught his translation there), and established comedy and tragedy on the Roman stage at the *ludi Romani* ("Roman games") in 240 B. C. The comedies at that time were all called *fabula palliata,* i. e. "comedy in Greek dress" because they were invariably based on the plots and characters of Greek New Comedy and dealt with Greek characters in their native dresses and settings.

Andronicus was followed by the two greatest comedy-writers of Roman literature: Plautus and Terence (see below); twenty comedies (and a fragment) are ascribed to the former, and six to the latter. Plays in Rome were performed at the *ludi Romani* in September, the *ludi plebeii* in October, both in honour of Jupiter, the *ludi Apollinares* in July (first in 212 B. C., in honour of Apollo), and the *ludi Megalenses* in April, (from 204 B. C.), dedicated to the Great Mother (Magna Mater) as well as to Flora and Ceres. At these annual festivals not only comedies, but tragedies, music and dancing (called *ludi scaenici*, 'theatrical shows') were performed as well. The *ludi scaenici* were organised by the Roman magistrates who wished to impress their peers, clients and the citizens and to achieve some political goals

(especially with the *praetexta*). The authors were first regarded as paid employees of the magistrate and the situation only started to improve in the 1ˢᵗ century B. C.

The model for writing plays came from Greece: for comedies it was New Greek comedy, especially Menander, for tragedies both themes and plots were from earlier Greek tragedies, and the theatrical conventions were not much different, either: first there were temporary stages made of wood, and in the earliest period of Roman theatres spectators were standing or they brought their own stools. For a long time, theatrical productions in the city of Rome were opposed by the authorities as harmful to public morals; the first permanent (and magnificent) stone theatre was ordered to be built by Pompey and was erected in the Campus Martius as late as in 55 B. C., but the wealthier Greek cities of Southern Italy and Sicily had boasted with stone theatres form the 5ᵗʰ century (e.g. the theatre of Syracuse was built around 460 B. C.), and in the Latin world outside of Rome – e.g. in Pompeii in 200 B. C. – there had been some permanent stone-built theatres, too. In permanent theatres wooden stands were provided to seat the audience; the stage was long and narrow (c. 55 meters long), in most cases representing an Athenian city-street, making the numerous soliloquies, asides and eavesdropping scenes possible. The background, made of wood, too, consisted of doors providing an entrance to one, two or three houses. The stage exit to the left of the audience led to "the harbour" and to "the country", to the right to "the centre of the city" and "the forum". The Theatre of Pompey was indeed magnificent; a marble and concrete structure: there was a stage-building with richly decorated stage curtains, storing statues, scene-paintings, masks and garlands, a semi-circular orchestra (later providing seats for the members of the Senate, as there were no choruses after a while), a tiered concave auditorium, all united into a closed, holistic space. This provided the model and the standard for lots of later theatres.

The actors – as far as we can conjecture – always wore masks signifying character-types, female roles were played by men and plays were performed by companies of five to six actors, with a doubling of the minor roles. The actors played without interruption, the five-act divisions in comedy are usually later additions but Horace in the *Ars Poetica* (189-92) draws attention to the five-act-rule, the three-actor-rule and the *deus ex machina* with respect to tragedy. The lines were sometimes spoken in six-foot iambic meter without music, sometimes recited or sung to flute accompaniment, and the lyric sections in *early* Roman tragedy were much longer than in, for example, Seneca's or in Sophocles's tragedies.

Perhaps the most important stock-character of Roman comedy is the *servus*, an intriguing slave. Other prototypical figures include the *adulescens,* the young lover [cf. Orlando in *As You Like It* or Romeo]; *the scenex*, an unsympathetic or too lenient father [cf. Egeus, Hermia's father in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, unsympathetic towards the lovers] or a ridiculous, aged lover [cf. Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*], sometimes an ageing helpful friend, [cf. Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet*, though this play turns into tragedy]); various female types (young girl, wife, courtesan, maid), and types according to profession (braggart warrior, parasite, professional jokester, slave dealer, merchant, doctor, money-lender, cook).

4.2. Plautus

4. 2. 1. Plautus: Life and Work

Titus Maccius Plautus (c. 251-184, B. C.) was born in Sarsina, Umbria and went to Rome when he was very young. His became a comic actor, most probably playing the clown in the Fabula Atellana (his "middle name", Maccius might be a reference to his association with the role of Maccus, the clown). Plautus is a master of the comic effect because of his

expert knowledge of stagecraft and his mastery of the language: he often mixes plebeian elements into his diction and employs incongruous similes and comic exaggeration, but is capable of fairy consistent metaphors (c. f. the cooking- and nautical- (ship-) metaphors in *Miles Gloriosus*); he makes use of lots of puns, comic names and wordplay; his language is often musical, too, with phrases of alliteration and assonance, and he loves to parody epic themes; sometimes characters address the audience (e. g. in *Aulularia*, Euclio, the main hero, asks the spectators to point out the person who has stolen his gold) and he often has scenes of song and dance. In employing so much music and dancing, he seems to be far more indebted to the earlier dramatic forms of Italia than to New Comedy. His surviving comedies seem to date from the last twenty or twenty-five years of his life. His plays are usually separated into an early, a middle and a late period:

Early plays (before or around 200 B. C.): e. g.:

Asinaria (*The Comedy of Asses*, based on a play by Onagos of Domophilus)

Mercator (*The Merchant*, based on Philemon's *Emporos*),

Miles Gloriosus (*The Swaggering Soldier*, or: *The Braggart Warrior*, based on a Greek play called *Alazon* – as Palaestrio says in the Prologue – but the author is not mentioned)

Middle plays (from around 200-192 B. C.): e. g.:

Aulalaria (*The Pot of Gold*, probably based on a lost play by Menander, a comedy of character, i.e. a satirical comedy),

Captivi (*The Captives*, based on a lost Greek play, a more "Terencian", refined comedy)

Stichus (based on Menander's *Adelphoe*)

Mostellaria (*The Haunted House*, based on Theognetus' *Phasma*, 'The Ghost', a moneylender in the play called Misardyrides, 'Hatesilverson', might be seen as an ancient Shylock);

Rudens (*The Rope*, based on a Greek play by Diphilus; interestingly not set in the street but on the sea-shore, near Cyrene in North Africa, based on the long lost daughter- and the storm-and-tempest theme; a romantic comedy);

Late plays (191-184, B. C.): e. g.

Bacchides (*The Two Bacchises,* based on *Dis Exapaton,* by Menander, a play of rollicking deceptions),

Persa (*The Girl from Persa*, no source is known),

Amhphitrion/Ahphitruo (based on an unknown Greek play, the sole survivor of mythological parody (involving Jupiter and Mercury), the Prologue to the play says it is a *tragicomoedia*; the idea of the two sets of identical *twins* and the motif of master and servant being excluded from their home come from this play in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*), etc.

Another famous play, the date of which cannot be established, is:

Menaechmi: (*The Twin Menaechmi*, a farce with Menaechmus of Syracuse and Menaechmus of Epidamnus, twin brothers, who lost each other and one is constantly mistaken for the other; in this play – as opposed to *The Comedy of Errors* – only Menaechmus of Syracuse has a slave called Messenio).

Plautus is a farcical and sometimes even a grotesque author. His plots are usually about love-affairs, with the comic confusion resulting from trickery, or mistaken identity, or both. The typical characters are fathers, sons, daughters, wives, courtesans, intriguing slaves, braggart warriors. Plautus did want the audience to laugh, so his plays are full of repetitions (e.g. in *Miles Gloriosus* Palestrio goes through the second plan once with Periplectomenus and Pleusicles, and then with the courtesan, Acroteleutium and her maid, Milphidippa) and digressions. He loves improbable situations, unexpected development, contrasts, monologues by slaves or servants, and asides.

4.2.2. Plautus: *Miles Gloriosus*

  Miles Gloriousus (The Swaggering Soldier or: *The Braggart Warrior)* was written around 205-200 B. C.; in the monologue of Periplectomenus (an elderly bachelor of fifty-four [cf. line 654], the Soldier's good-humoured neighbour), describing Palaestrio deep in thought (Palaestrio is the master-planner, a wily slave) says in lines 214-16: "I seem to have heard there's a writer in a certain *foreign* country with his head supported on a stone block and two wardens holding him down day and night", a typical topical allusion, something we often find in Plautus, and because of the Greek setting, "*foreign*" here means 'Roman', and the writer has been identified as Nevius, a dramatist and poet, who was imprisoned for his political views, and died about 200 B. C. So this makes it more or less certain that this is one of Plautus' early plays, and the absence of metrical variety also corroborates that.

  The comedy is in the category of the "well-made play": the story we learn from the prologue is that not a very long time before, Pleusicles, a young Athenian and Philocomasium, his lover and concubine were living in Athens in great happiness yet the Soldier (usually referred to as "the Captain" in the play) kidnapped Philocomasium while Pleusicles was away on a diplomatic mission to Naupactus, and brought her to Ephesus. Palaestrio, Pleusicles' slave immediately hurried to warn his master but pirates captured him and gave him to the Captain as a present. This happy coincidence provided opportunity for Palaestrio to send a letter to Athens secretly and call his master, Pleusicles to Ephesus. Pleusicles happens to know the Captain's neighbour, a jovial elderly bachelor called Periplectomenus, and he pitches camp there, and with Periplectomenus' consent and Palaestrio's help they cut a hole in the party-wall of the two adjacent buildings and the lovers, Pleusicles and Philocomasium can meet when the Captain is not at home. Yet the girl has a jailer, a stupid but ambitious slave called Sceledrus, who one day went up to the roof to chase a monkey and happened to see that in the courtyard of Periplectomenus' house, the lovers were kissing. This is where *the play* starts. The first task is thus to convince Sceledrus that what he actually saw he in fact did *not* see, and Palaestrio's idea is to make the gullible slave believe that whom he saw kissing is Philocomasium's twin-sister, who has recently arrived from Athens with her lover. The plan works, and in the second half of the play the only task remaining is to rescue Philocomasium from the Captain. Palaestrio is ready with another plan: Periplectomenus should provide a courtesan and her maid, the courtesan should pretend to be married to the old man; the maid takes a ring of Periplectomenus' to the Captain with the story that the new wife has regretted being married to the old man, yet she cannot resist the charms of the "handsome", "Achilles-like" Captain and is dying to sleep with him. The plan works: in order to get Periplectomenus' "wife" (the courtesan called Acroteleutium), the Captain has to get rid of Philocomasium, the situation being especially ripe fro this, since her "twin sister" and "mother" (who exists in Athens but is in fact not there) can take her home. So the Captain allows Philocomasium to leave with all her jewellery and dresses, in the arms of the "sailor bringing news from the ship where Philocomasium's mother is sick" (the Sailor is of course Pleusicles) and Palaestrio also leaves with them, given as a gift to Philocomasium. Finally, Periplectomeus, under the pretext that the Captain has tried to assault his "wife", gives him a good beating and the Cook even swindles a hundred drachmas out of him. The play ends with the Captain promising to reform in a didactic little speech, ending as follows: "… justice has been done. Serve all lechers so, and lechery would grow less rife; the sinners would have more fear and mend their ways" (lines 1435-36).

  The motif of the twin-sisters can be taken as almost the opposite of *Manaechmi* and *Amphitruo*; there we have two identical *male* twins (in *Amphitruo,* one of each pair is played by the gods, Jupiter and Mercury; in *Manaechmi*, there are "real" twins), so we have two *persons* for *one* name, two selves for one self; in *Miles*, in the first half of the play

Philocomasium plays the role of "Honoria", too, so there is *one* woman for two *names*, one self for two selves. This is a farcical element, yet it is combined with motifs of the comedy of trickery, since mistaken identity is here deliberately arranged by Palaestrio, who is responsible for the whole plot (even in the second half of the play, he cooks up the plan; it is his duty to fetch certain characters, e. g. the Captain from the Forum, when the time comes; he tells Periplectomenus what kind of women are needed to play a trick on the Captain, he gives "director's instructions", etc.) Thus, the title is slightly misleading (the protagonist, in the first place, is rather Palaestrio, who is not almost always on the scene, but organises everything) and this is the only weakness of the play; though in the first 78 lines we hear the conversation of the Soldier, and his 'satellite' or 'parasite', Artotrogus, the latter praising the former in disgustingly exaggerated terms in order to be able to keep his place at the dinner-table, the Captain soon disappears and he is not to be seen till the comedy's middle (Artotrogus disappears for good). It is when the Captain leaves after line 78 that Palaestrio's Prologue comes, introducing us, in the manner of Pan in Menander's *Old Cantankerous*, to the scene (with two (twin-) houses, similarly to Menander's stage), to the main characters, to the background to the present story and to the outcome ("And we're going to play some laughable tricks on him [Sceledrus]") and even the basic trick is didactically explained to the audience, with whom a kind of contract or allegiance is set up:

> But we don't want *you* to be deceived; so don't forget,
> *One* girl is going to pretend to be *two* girls,
> One from this house and one from the that: same girl,
> But pretending to be a different one – all right?
> That's how the jailer is going to be bamboozled (150-154, emphasis original).

So we might see some fine stock-characters of Roman New Comedy: the swaggering soldier himself: vain, gullible, telling exaggerated lies but basically cowardly; Artotrogus: a satellite or parasite (*parasitos* originally meant simply 'guest', then became the 'guest who outstays his visit' and then a parasite in the modern sense of the word, whose sole role is to praise the other, yet he does so with plenty of asides telling the opposite); Palaestrio: the clever slave (the former "Dossennus"), the plot-maker, who plans everything carefully, but is able to improvise as well, a wonderful talker, always in league with the audience and the lovers against a stupid, vain, elderly man; and there is also Sceledrus, the credulous, cowardly, foolish slave, the laughing-stock (the former "Maccus").

The good-humoured bachelor, Periplectomenus, also plays a major role; he is a kind-hearted but cynical fellow, a helper for the lovers, yet he would never marry himself; he has a low opinion of women (but is on good terms with the courtesans); children for him are a nuisance, he enjoys his "freedom", loves to eat, drink and to play a trick or two, and he is a real 'Pander'. And much depends on Philocomasium, not a courtesan but a concubine, having all the trickery and guts of a maid; clever, devoted to her lover and plays her two roles beautifully and with great gusto. The gang of the helpers (considerably outnumbering the victims of trickery) is supplemented by the professional courtesan, Acroteleutium, who has a low opinion of women but even a lower of men but can act wonderfully; and Milphidippa, her artful maid, corresponding to Palaestrio in the female world. Plautus – like Menander – is also guilty of the proliferation of servants: there is also a certain Lurcio, a younger slave in a minor role, who plays the drunkard (cf. Trinculo in *The Tempest*), an unnamed Slave at the very end of the play, and a cook (Cario), always a farcical character, wishing to carve out a "certain part" from the Captain (but he does not).

Thus, Plautus' play has a meta-theatrical interest in two ways: there are characters whose duty is to play tricks on others *within* the play; the deceivers are wonderful actors, their main duty being to personify somebody else than they are, or to arrange and direct the scenes,

providing stage-props etc.; Philocomasium will play the role of her own sister, Acroteleutium the role of Periplectomenus' wife, Pleusicles, the true lover of Philocomasium, will get the role of a sailor, and Periplectomenus does not only provide the stage-setting (housing the lovers and allowing for a hole to be cut into the party-wall of the two houses so that Philocomasium may play her double role) but the disguise for Pleusicles as well (cf. lines 1182-89), and Palaestrio – as we saw – is the absolute pivot, the stone on whom the wheel turns. The deceived party, Sceledrus, who is not to be seen in the second half of the play, and the Captain, who takes his role, are a wonderful 'audience' in the sense that they take everything literally, they cannot even fathom that somebody wants to deceive them and they are blinded by well-definable human weaknesses, stupidity and vanity respectively. Yet the way one makes up a plan (writes and directs a plot) and the process whereby one loses his eyesight and believes that he has not seen what he has seen is several times commented on and even analysed as well; there is some aesthetic-philosophical interest in Plautus, especially in the first half of the play, yet he does not exploit the theme of *one self* playing *two selves ('self-es')*; it has a function in the comedy but no depth for philosophy.

Periplectomenus describes the thinking Palaestrio, cooking up his plan, thus:

> [to the audience] Watch him, do. Look at his attitude…scowling brow, deep in thought…knocking at his breast – to see if his wits are at home! Turning away now… left hand on left hip … doing sums with his right … slap, right hand on right thigh – a hard slap, too, he's having trouble with his thinking machine. Snapping his fingers – that means he's at a loss…keeps changing his attitude… shaking his head, 'no, that won't do'. He's got something cooking but doesn't want to serve it up half-baked – ants it done to a turn. […] Hah! now that's better … that's a fine attitude… just what a slave in a comedy ought to look like. […] Wake up. Show a leg. It's morning. (line 201 and passim)

Thinking is presented here as being in a trance, as dreaming, yet the speech – implicitly – also acknowledges that there is no way to enter the other's mind; all we may do is to record the outward behaviour of the person, but that will not give us what thinking *is*; we might as well describe the working of a *machine* and then claim that it was 'thinking'. This is especially interesting in the context of the first conversation between the Captain, and his parasite, Artotrogus:

> <u>Pyrgopolynices:</u> You are as good as a thought-reader, my dear man.
> <u>Artotrogus:</u> Well, it's my job, isn't it, sir, to know your mind?

Of course, it is not difficult to read the Captain's mind – after all it is always on women and his own heroism – yet in this marginal exchange it seems to be suggested that only an 'artful rogue', a flatterer is able to read the other's mind, as if the only thing we could know about the 'inner' life of another person is that he does not think *about* the others, and not even *about himself* but constantly *of* himself and, all what we can gather about the 'outer' – be it as detailed as Periplectomenus' analysis, or not – will not reveal more than bodily movements which are still in need of interpretation, and they are nothing more than signs which might be *taken* ('translated') *as* signs of thinking. We see what we see, and if we are possessed by a harmful passion we might see things in the wrong way, and we might be deceived easily; "facts" may be manipulated into their opposites, since it is more important what we *believe* to be true than what we *actually* see. These commonplaces of comedy *almost* get a deeper treatment in Plautus, yet he, especially towards the end, chooses to concentrate on farce and some conventional morality.

4. 3. Terence

Terence (Publius Terentius Afer, c. 185-159, B. C.) belongs to the next generation of comedy-writers, yet he is one of the most mysterious classic authors. The first problem is his obscure origin: he seems to have been born in Carthage and to have been brought to Rome as a slave, soon to be liberated and educated by his master, the senator Terentius Lucanus, yet it is a mystery which people he belonged to (was he a Berber? was he Greek? maybe an Italian from the South of Italy, the son of one of Hannibal's captives?) and it is even more mysterious how he became one of the greatest stylists of the Latin language (is it exceptional talent? or was his mother Italian?). It is a fact that he was a teaching manual for Latin composition till the 19th century and his lucid and elegantly simple Latin had come closest to the admired Greek style for the first time in the literature written in Latin. His death is also surrounded with mystery; he simply disappears around 159-160, B. C., perhaps on an errand to Greece or Asia Minor, to find more plays by Menander.

What we know for certain is that soon after his liberation he became friendly with the so-called Scipionic Circle (Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus himself, then the Greek historian Polybius, the Greek philosopher Panaetius, the Roman satirist Lucilius, and, most importantly for Terence, Lucius Ambivius Turpio, who was an actor-producer and staged all his plays); his exceptional good looks surely played a part in that. But he was far less well-received than Plautus: he was charged, in his lifetime, and even after, with all sorts of intellectual crimes: that his noble friends wrote his plays, that he was simply "translating" Greek plays, and that he was plagiarising from earlier Latin authors. In his prologues – which are already divorced from the plots and comment on his critics rather than telling the summary of the action – he boldly defends himself; he points out that nothing is ever said which has not been said before, that the real translators only turn a good Greek play into a bad Roman one, while he *contaminates* (*contaminare*) only in the sense of the great Plautus: he selects what he wants from any source he likes and he *combines* them, because inventiveness lies in precisely that. Terence is the first author who seeks something new, for whom novelty – in structure, content and style alike – is a great virtue. Thus, it might well be the case that he is much closer to Menander than Plautus and it is again a fact that out of Plautus' twenty surviving plays only three are surely after Menander, while out of the six Terencian comedies four follow the Greek master. Yet Terence, an outsider for ever, is neither *too* Greek, nor *too* Roman, and this has given him his timeless quality. He is more serious, yet not only from a moral but also from a psychological point of view; he is passionately interested in both the darker and the lighter side of human character, but often he puts the features not into various, black *or* white characters but into a single person. He understands, yet he always criticises as well, preparing the way rather for the 'problem play' than for the full-fledged, vulgar, down-to-earth comedy. He was looking for what was genuinely *human*; it is no wonder that it is line 77 from *The Self-Tormentor*, "*homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto*" ('I am human, so any human interest is my concern', spoken by Chremes) which has become proverbial.

There are several reasons for his not being as popular as Plautus, well beyond the envy of the older playwrights having less powerful patrons. One is that when he divided the prologues from the rest of the play, he could rely more on surprise than anticipation and this was very unusual then; he is less didactic; the farcical bawdy completely disappears from his plays (Terence's slaves speak just as impeccably as their masters); he is more subdued and sophisticated; he dislikes conventions like off-stage births, conversations from the stage with people indoors and the revelations of secrets on the stage; there is no noisy song and dance; he addresses a more aristocratic, attentive and educated audience (he himself belonging to the philhellenes, with the deliberate intention of following the Greek models more closely); he employs more dialogue instead of the monologue; he dispenses with divine intervention

(*deus-ex-machina*); his *servus* is not so much a trickster but a bungler, trying to keep his master from wrong-doing; and it is him who also introduces the intricately woven *double plot* (with the exception of *Hecyra*), in which often the lives of two or three young men are constantly juxtaposed, producing an interplay of character and giving the opportunity to the author to keep an ideal balance between a character-*type* and an *individual*, a *kind* of person, who, at the same time has a carefully drawn *personal* portrait.

The accepted order of his plays are:

Andria (*The Woman of Andros*, from Menander's *Andria*, 166 B. C., performed at the ludi Megalenses)

Hecyra (*The Mother-in-Law*, based on the play *Hekyra* by Apollodorus of Carystus, 185 B. C., ludi Megalenses, a failure because people were attracted by a rope-dancer in a nearby side-show);

Heutontimorumenos (*The Self-Tormentor*, from a play by Menander with the same title, 163 B. C., ludi Megalenses)

Eunuchus (from Menander's play with the same title, 161 B. C., ludi Megalenses, a big success the basis for Wycherley's *The Country Wife*)

Phormio (based on another Apollodorius play, *Epidikazomenos, 'The Law-Suit'*, Phormio is a helpful parasite, he is reborn as Scapin in Moliére's *The Cheats of Scapin*; 161 B. C. ludi Romani) and

Adelphoe (based on a Menandros-play called *Adelphoe* but not the one used by Plautus in his *Stichus*; 160 B. C. at the funeral games for Amemilius Paulus).

4.4. The "golden" and the "silver" age

After the period of the republic (with, for example, Cato the orator and author of the first full-length prose-work on agriculture, 234-149 BC as the most outstanding), the period of the civil wars and the first decades of the empire (roughly the 1st c. BC) marks the "golden age" of Roman literature (classicism), especially the reign of the first Roman emperor, <u>Augustus</u> (Caius Octavius, 63 BC - 14 AD, emperor from 31 BC) is called by this name. The most outstanding authors are Catullus (87-54 BC) most famous for epigrams; Lucretius (96-55 B. C.), author of *De rerum natura*, working out, in a poem of hexameters, Latin philosophical language and giving a very useful account of Greek thought – a treasure-house for Humanists in the Renaissance); Sallustius (86-35 B. C.), the historian of the civil wars; Cicero (106-43 B. C.), the great orator and philosopher, an idol in the Renaissance; Vergilius (Virgil, 70-19, B. C.), the author of the famous eclogues and of the *Aeneis*; Horatius (Horace, 65-8 B. C.), perhaps the greatest poet of the age with satires, odes and epistles (e.g. *Ars Poetica*); Propertius (50- ~15 B. C.), the writer of passionate elegies, Ovidius (43 B. C. –18 AD), with the *Metamorphoses* as one of his most important works – a great favourite in the Renaissance; and Titus Livius (59 BC-17 AD), writing a comprehensive history of Rome.

Seneca ironically marks the very beginning of what we call the "silver age", or the age of post-classicism, with Lucanus (39-65), Petronius (?), Phaedrus (~15 B. C.- ~50), Martialis (~42-104), Juvenalis (~55-140), Pliny, the Younger (61-114), Tacitus (55-120); Apuleus (125-180), the author of the 'novel', *The Golden Ass*, is the last great and original talent of 'classic' Roman literature.[69]

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[69] G. O. Hutchinson, G. O. : *Latin Literature from Seneca to Juvenal*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 15-20

4.5. Roman tragedy

Ironically again, tragedy was an active industry in Rome from the earliest times to the end of the republic and even a new genre, the historical drama (*fabula praetexta*) also emerged, taking its themes from Roman history but very few of them survived: we mostly know about them from references by such authors as Horace or Cicero. Fragments remained only from four of the greatest Roman tragedians: Naevius (d. ~200 BC), Ennius (239-169 B. C.), Pacuvius (220-130 BC) and by Accius (170- ~ 85 BC), the last of these being the most versatile figure of the late republic, with great rhetorical skills, an immense output and equally immense popularity. Revivals of his plays are attested to 57-44 BC (e.g. *Brutus, Clytemnestra, Tereus*). After Accius's death, tragedy seems to have become a plaything for the aristocracy: Cicero's brother, Quintius is reported to have composed four tragedies in sixteen days for diversion, Julius Ceasar wrote an *Oedipus* and Augustus attempted an *Ajax* but there was the notable tragedian Varius Rufus (with a *Thyestes* in 29 BC), and we also know that Ovid wrote a *Medeia*. In the 1st c. AD the *ludi scaenici* became dominated by the "popular theatre" (coarse and indecent mime, pantomime and spectacle). Seneca had a notable contemporary who wrote drama: Pomponius Secundus, with whom, according to Quintilian, Seneca even had an argument over tragic diction. The question whether Seneca's tragedies were written for the stage or not is still hotly debated since then tragedies were often recited by a single speaker in the recitation-hall (*auditorium*) or in private-houses or even in the theatre itself either as a virtuoso individual recital of tragic speech, or as a preliminary for theatrical performance. Earlier, many considered Seneca's tragedies to be book-dramas; today critics seem to agree that at least parts of them were designed for some kind of performance (recital by Seneca and/or performance by actors)[70].

4. 6. Seneca

4.6.1. Seneca: lifer and work

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (the Younger) (~4/1 BC – AD 65) was first and foremost a Roman statesman, second a philosopher-essayist, and, third, a writer of tragedies. He was born in Corduba (Cordova) in southern Spain, the second of three sons to educated Annaeus Seneca (the Elder), an author of a (lost) history of Rome and of a rhetorical manual. Seneca was brought to Rome as a child, went through the standard education in rhetoric (then these schools were mushrooming in Rome) and he developed a keen interest in Stoic-Pythagorean philosophy (including vegetarianism). Throughout his life, he was suffering from a tubercular condition and for a while he was sent to Egypt to his aunt. In 31 AD he returned to Rome and entered the Senate via questorship. From that time on he had first-hand experience of "political tragedy" and a bloody, treacherous, cruel and ultimately very claustrophobic state-mechanism. He held the office of *tribunus plebis* (tribune of the people) and gained fame as an advocate, teacher of rhetoric and an excellent stylist He arose the jealousy of the emperor Suetonius Gaius (better known as Caligula, *princeps* (emperor) 37-41 AD) and temporarily retired to private life but when Claudius ascended to the throne, Seneca was soon exiled to Corsica for eight years under Messalina's (Claudius's wife) charge of adultery with Caligula's

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[70] Cf. A. J. Boyle, *Seneca's Phaedra*, Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes. Liverpool and New Hampshire: Francis Cairns, 1987, pp. 7-8.

sister, Julia Livilla. He was a married man at the time (to Pompeia Paulina, who survived him, or to a first wife – this is uncertain) and lost his son around the year of his exile. In 48, Messalina was executed, Agrippina, Claudius's new wife called Seneca back to Rome and he became the tutor of Agrippina's son, Nero (Lucius Dominius). Agrippina poisoned Claudius, and Nero ascended to the throne in 54 AD. This was a period of immense influence and power for Seneca; with Afranius Burrus he was chief minister and political counsellor. Nero killed his mother in 59 AD (in which most probably Seneca was not privy but to which he wrote a justificatory *post factum*), Burrus died (most likely poisoned) and Seneca went into semi-retirement in 62 AD. He was accused of involvement in the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero and he was ordered to kill himself, which he did (both his brothers met the same death).[71]

4. 6.2. Seneca and politics; the prose works and the tragedies

Seneca never knew the republic: he witnessed to an age when political and personal freedom and safety 'in high circles' were nullities and power resided essentially in one man, often a vicious psychopath (Caligula, Nero). Servility, hypocrisy and corruption ruled (at least according to Tacitus). Hatreds, fears, lusts, cowardice, self-interest, self-abasement, abnormal cruelty, extravagance vice, violent death and perversion reached such a degree that recent critics suggest that Seneca did not even read the 'original' Greek authors (e.g. Sophocles for his *Oedipus*) – as his "quotations" from earlier sources are mostly proverbial, known by every educated member of Roman society[72] – but he simply put down in his tragedies what he saw with his own eyes, what was the very stuff of his life, composing these contemporary horrors into (and thus disguising them as) stories which were told, at that time, by mothers to their children (including the story of Oedipus!) and circulated as part of folk-mythology[73].

Seneca wrote a satire on Claudius's deification ('The Pumpkinification') and several philosophical works, among them *Naturalis Questiones* ("Natural Questions") and the *Epistulae Morales* ("Moral Epistles" to Lucililum) are the most famous, both composed in his last years, in self-imposed exile. (Other philosophical works include ten *Dialogi* (Dialogues), *De Beneficiis* (On Benefits), *De Ira* and *De Clementia* (On Clemency)). They represent Stoic ethical ideas: the advocation of virtue, endurance, self-sufficiency, true friendship, condemnation of evil, condemnation of wealth and power, praise of wisdom, reason and poverty and contempt for the fear of death. They stand in such striking contrast with the tragedies and the day-to-day reality that surrounded Seneca that some critics charge him with cynicism, some read them as an intellectual's escape into a dream-world, some as the ideal set by an instructor to a former pupil who ran amok and some tried to reconcile the tragedies and the moral teaching by claiming that the tragedies, in one way or another, are even 'popularised versions' of his Stoic doctrines. It is clear that there is a kind of schizophrenia, although when Seneca wrote, genre (tragedy, comedy, ode, epistle, etc.) was a fact of literature with relatively strict rules, dictating a tone and a structure (e.g. comedy could not be mixed with tragedy), so then the question is why he turned to tragedy at all, and not why the ethical elements of his philosophy are so difficult to be found in them. This seems to explain why Seneca never mentions his tragedies in his prose-works, though his Choruses sometimes touch upon philosophical issues.

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[71] C.f. A. J. Boyle, op. cit., pp. 2-3 and p. 5

[72] Cf. R. J. Tarrant, "Senecean Drama and its Antecedents", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 82, 1978, pp. 213-63, a highly influential article.

[73] "The Oedipus-legend was well known: mothers taught it, probably in a variety of versions, the their children, who later would have learnt it at school, it would have been included in histories and handbooks of mythology (like those of Diodorus, Apollodorus, and Hyginus) which have not survived, and in works in art." (Marcia Frank, *Seneca's* Phoenissae: *Introduction and Commentary,* Leiden, New York and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1994, p. 28.)

In his prose works Seneca says that philosophy is above everything, even history and poetry (as the age loved to show genres as if they were rivals), because philosophy deals with the sprit and the system of the universe while history often shows the interest of a group of people an in poetry value can be in purely imaginative enjoyment while philosophy is concerned with reality. But, according to Seneca, "the Truth" can never be known: he combines professional credulity with frivolous scepticism ("we think things are great because we are small"). His intellectualism is never cold, he is never dogmatic in his Stoicism and he is magnificently inclusive, embracing the whole range of a hierarchical universe. The truly virtuous man is described as a "citizen and soldier of the universe" (cf. "wrap all the universe / In awful darkness, let the winds make war", *Thyestes,* Act V).[74]

In his tragedies, we seem to leave behind the sense of an ordered universe so fundamental to the Stoic world; in tragedies the grim mythological deities destroy the virtuous, and wicked characters (e.g. Thyestes or Medeia) are joyfully triumphant, physical events are vividly unreal and vastly claustrophobic and greatness is not only admitted in virtue (which is destroyed anyway) but in vice as well. The great debate of Seneca's age over the relationship between realty and illusion is settled in the tragedies when grandeur in rhetoric (the actual expressions of the characters) rises with the imagined and unseen: e.g. a visible child is sacrificed for the unseen ghost in *Medea* and Seneca's best rhetorical skills serve the justification of this move. In *Thyestes* we, too, can witness to perverted loftiness, with an immense extension of ordinary language, totally in the service of mythological unreality. Seneca is simply fascinated with his evil characters (Atreus, Clytemnaestra, Medea, etc.) and the ghosts, the underworld, hereditary evil, the atmosphere of disorder and hopelessness stand in striking contrast with a Stoic universe. [75]

4.6.3. Seneca: *Thyestes*

The tragedy of *Thyestes* is one of compulsive, repetitive *mimesis*: Tantalus (who in Seneca's play returns as the Ghost), a son of Zeus, served his son, Pelops as food at a banquet of the gods. Tantalus's punishment became his famous 'pain': he had to see water and food but could never satiate his hunger or thirst. Zeus restored Pelops to life and Pelops obtained a kingdom and a wife by treachery, so the doom lingered on: his two sons, Atreus and Thyestes could never settle the question of heritage; they constantly fought for their father's throne. Periods of banishment alternated with periods of prosperity for each boy, and their fate continued in Agamemnon (son of Atreus), in Aegisthus (son of Thyestes, by his own daughter Pelopia) and in Orestes, who killed Clytaemnestra, murderer of her husband, Agamemnon. Seneca's mimetic activity does not find its expression over the plot (as Aristotle would recommend) but with respect to generations, which cannot but imitate one another incessantly.[76]

It seems that at the beginning of the play Fury decides everything, urging Tantalus's Ghost to fill the place with his curse, foretelling the events to come. The topic thus becomes the 'ever-repeated alternation / Of crime with crime' (Chorus in Act I), and that "law is powerless" (ibid..) Atreus consciously plans the repetition of Tantalus's deed, trying to outsmart his father but the 'beauty' in the paradoxical horror is that this presupposes an almost total identification with his brother: "some black and bloody deed must be attempted /Such as

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[74] Cf. G. O. Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 42-50., pp. 101-104, pp. 127-131, 151-156, 159-2160, pp. 160-164, pp. 222-239, pp. 273-287

[75] Cf. G. O. Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 82-85, pp. 124-127, pp. 160-164, pp 208-216.

[76] Cf. Seneca: *Thyestes, Phaedra*, *The Trojan Women, Oedipus,* with *Octavia,* trans. and introduced by E. F. Walting, Penguin Books, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1966, pp. 17-38, pp. 306-312

my brother might have wished were his"; "This is a deed / Thyestes could be proud of, as can Atreus; / Let them be partners in the doing of it" (Act I). Even at the end of the play he will accuse Thyestes of two things: that Thyestes is grieved not by the loss of his sons but by the fact that he could not do the same with Atreus and that he is not sad because he still has sons, and they are precisely Atreus's children: " 'tis your grief / That you were cheated of the crime you proposed. You weep, not that you ate this loathsome meal, / But that you had not cooked it! / ... And would have done it (with Atreus's children), but for one thing only: You thought you were their father" (Act V). Atreus compulsively mirrors both Thyestes's suggested desire and their father's deed, as young Tantalus is a reincarnation of his grandfather, enticing Thyestes into the trap. The Chorus expresses general maxims, nice moral truths ("A king is he who has no ill to fear / Whose hand is innocent, whose conscience is clear" (end of Act II), "No man should put his trust in the smile of fortune", end of Act III) but of course this is not the 'purpose' of the tragedy. The tragic here is inevitable Fate (the doom on the family), the fact that union is only possible trough treachery and through the literal and grotesque irony of eating one's own flesh ("Consider them already with you here / In your embrace", Act V), as if the acknowledgement of one's children were not be complete until they are one body with you again through cannibalism, or as if the father could rival the mother by putting his children into his own stomach, from which they will even 'speak'. Fighting one's fate will only produce repetition of the same fate, the same sin – even outdoing it will not help to break the boundaries. Atreus's tragedy is precisely this: he thinks he will get rid of the family's doom by doing something even more horrible but his joy is not complete since "There are bounds / To limit wilful sins; but sin's requital / Acknowledges no limits. I have done / Too little yet. I should have drained their blood / Warm from their wounds into your open mouth; You should have drunk it from their living bodies. (...) I should have made the father do all this! / His torture came too late; he never knew / What he was doing when he cursed teeth / Gnawed at those bones! His children never knew it!". Fate is insatiable, like Tantalus's thirst and hunger, there is still a place to go for even more cruelty in the imagination and the only obstacle is, once more, the *lack* of *knowledge.*

Chapter 5: Medieval Drama

5.1. The origin of Medieval drama: the 'Quem quaeritis'-trope

The origin of Medieval drama, rising in almost total independence from the Greek and Roman theatrical tradition, could be characterised by a paradox: its 'cradle' is the 'empty grave'. The 'empty grave' occurs in a tiny performance or 'play' called *trope*, here understood as a group of four lines interpolated, by the 9th century AD, into some portions of the Easter Mass of the Roman Catholic Church and dramatically spoken by the Angels and the 'three Marys', the latter in search of Christ's body. This miniature drama, with some additional lines, became an important part of the Easter service; then more and more of the Easter story was acted out until, at important religious holidays, practically the whole Bible was dramatised, to bring *liturgical drama* about (and we should, of course, also notice the inherent drama in the Mass itself). Liturgical drama slowly moved out of the church-building into the church-yard, then to the market-place and the streets and other convenient and busy areas of the town: drama gradually became 'secular' and 'profane' (cf. *pro+fano*: 'before the temple'). There are scholars now arguing for the relatively independent origins of the *mystery play* (see below) in the vernacular (i.e. in English): though the vernacular plays do echo the Latin liturgical drama, and the authors of most of them were most probably clerics, they represent a largely independent tradition of vernacular drama.[77]

The founding trope, still in the liturgical context, contains the following lines:

> Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, [o] Christicolae?
> Iesum Nazarenum crucifixum, o caelicolae.
> non est hic, surrexit sicut praedixerat.
> ite, nuntiate quia surrexit de sepulchro.
> Resurrexi!
> (Who are you looking for in the sepulchre, o Christians?
> The crucified Jesus of Nazareth, o celestials.
> He is not here, he has arisen as he said he would.
> Go and announce that he has arisen from the sepulchre.
> I have risen!)

We may immediately notice that the angels are not asking the three women *who* they are or *what* they are *doing*. Their question postulates, even in its very performance *as question*, the existence of the *object* of the quest it ascribes to the questioned, it presents the 'Marys' *as* questing, it gives them an *identity* and a purpose in *being in* the mode of understanding and it is thus that they come into a position of naming, of identifying, of particularising: 'the crucified Jesus of Nazareth'. In the angels' response we encounter another striking paradox: the 'good news' precisely is that there is *nothing* in the sepulchre, that the grave is *empty*. The women should become Witnesses of this *nothing*; truth (meaning) is 'there' through and by its *not* being there, it works in its *absence*. The 'third voice' is from the 'outside' (from 'heaven'?), spoken by Christ himself: "I have risen" (*Resurrexi*!). Thus, 'true meaning' is deferred: it is not *right there,* it resists the availability of *immediate reality*; it is 'above', yet it still speaks in the *first person singular,* in the *present tense* and the *perfect aspect*. Naturally, it cannot but speak in 'human', '*personal*', particular (*singular*) terms, yet it re-presents something which is *more* than human truth *within* that human truth: while being 'outside' or

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[77] E.g. The *Play of Adam* – on the Fall of Man – was performed in England in the 12th century in Anglo-Norman, with highly sophisticated stagecraft, dialogue and characterisation.

'above', it is still in the temporality of the *immediate* present and in the aspect or mode of '*perfect-ion*'.[78]

In a way, this seemingly simple dialogue can be taken as an 'allegory' of reading: how this piece of literature is reading itself may give us a clue as to the reading of Medieval literature (drama) in general. The text asks: 'What are you looking for in your reading, oh reader/literary critic?', and we usually answer: 'we have come in search of tangible, real, immediate (referential) meaning, unambiguously identifiable and workable truth; we have come in search of the *ontic: the* Truth'. Yet, alas, the text answers: 'Your search is, in this sense, in vain, this reference has been suspended, as I said it would when I designated myself as existing in another realm (outside or above). The *here* of me is empty: and void – here and now you may find nothing but *beings*. Yet your quest, nevertheless, is not in vain: meaning and truth do reaffirm (resurrect') themselves outside, in the realm of the true and authentic absolute *Being'*. The presence marked by absence is the true temporality and mode of our quest for meaning and truth, and much of this understanding is *present* for example in the *Second Shepherd's Play*. In a 14th century tract, *Treatise of Miraclis Pleyinge* – one of the few pieces of theatre-criticisms surviving from the Middle Ages – the anonymous author writes:

> sithen miraclis of crist and of hise sentis weren thus effectuel, as by oure bileve we ben in certein, no man shulde usen in bourde and pleye the miraclis and werkis that crist so ernystfully wroughte to oure helthe.
> (since the miracles of Christ and of his saints were thus effectual, as we know for certain by our faith, no man should use it in jest and play the miracles and works which Christ wrought so much in earnest for our health)[79]

5.2. Miracles and mysteries

The writer above is talking about one of the most important genres of Medieval drama, which developed right from the '*Quem quaeritis*'-trope: the *mystery* (*miracle*) *play*[80], treating the life of Christ or of saints and/or re-enacting certain stories from the Bible. *Mystery* here refers to the spiritual mystery of Christ's redemption and, according to some scholars, it also has to do with (perhaps has even been confused with) the Latin word *ministerium*, (*ministry*, here meaning 'handicraft' or 'occupation'), since these plays were commonly acted out by various crafts: the performance of mystery/miracle plays became the concern of the trade-guilds, each being responsible for particular episodes of the Bible (e.g. the masons for Noah, the weavers for the Crucifixion, the bakers for the Last Supper and the wealthiest group, the Mercers, for the spectacular Last Judgement scene, etc., cf. also the handicraftsmen in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). One of the most favourite roles was Herod, where one could really be 'angry'. The attempt at an encyclopaedic dramatisation of the Old and New Testaments resulted in the creation of so-called *cycles* a *group* of plays, constituting a '*series*', Almost complete cycles of mystery plays survive from Chester (25 episodes), from

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[78] Cf. the brilliant discussion of the 'empty grave' by Ortwin de Graef in his *Titanic Light. Paul de man's Post-Romanticism, 1960-1969.* Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, pp. 206-209.

[79] Simon Shepherd and Peter Wormack: *English Drama: A Cultural History*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996, p. 16.

[80] As it is also clear from Shepherd's and Wormack's book, critics (be they Medieval or modern) do not use the designations *miracle* and *mystery* consistently. David Daiches, in his *A Critical History of English Literature* (London: Secker and Warburg, Second ed., 1969, Volume I, pp. 208-214) favours, for example, the term *miracle*, while for *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (ed. by J. A. Cuddon, London: Penguin Books, 1979), a miracle play is 'a later development from the Mystery Play. It dramatized saints' lives and divine miracles, and legends of miraculous interventions by the Virgin' and 'The Mystery Plays [...] were based on the Bible and were particularly concerned with the stories of man's creation, Fall and redemption'. Some writers even use the term 'scriptural play' for 'mystery/miracle play' or 'Corpus Christi play'.

York (48), from Coventry or N-Town[81] (42) and from Wakefield (32) – the last one is also called Towneley cycle, after the family who once owned the manuscript.

These cycles were presented on the great Church festivals: on Shrove Tuesday (at the beginning of Lent), at the Annunciation, on Palm Sunday, at Easter, at the Ascension, at Pentecost, i.e. at Whitsuntide (the week following the seventh Sunday after Easter) and especially on Corpus Christi Day (a week after Whitsuntide). Corpus Christ, falling in May or June, was established as late as in 1264 and was dedicated to the real presence of the body of Christ, with a huge procession in which the Host (the consecrated bread and wine of the Mass) was carried through the town. Each play was mounted on a wagon with a curtained scaffold. The lower part of the wagon was the dressing room. Each wagon (also known as *pageant*) presented a different scene of the cycle, and the wagons were following each other, repeating the scenes at successive stations. So, in the course of a day, the people in a city were able to see a complete cycle. Martial Rose also suggests that the plays may have been produced on wagons grouped together about the perimeter of a "Place", i.e. a town square.[82] These plays are anonymous: it was the story which was important and not the author. Mysteries quickly developed in the 12th century, there are records of mysteries in many regions of England during the 14th–15th centuries, well into the 16th; Shakespeare, for example, was still able to see mysteries in Stratford (the last recorded performance of the Chester Cycle is in 1575).

The Wakefield Plays run to over 12 000 lines in verse; six of them are more or less the same as their correspondents in the York Cycle; it seems that Wakefield's borrowed from York directly, rather than all these plays going back to a common origin. Six plays, in turn, are recognised as having been written by an author of true genius (sometimes called the "Wakefield Master", who was active around 1475): *Cain and Abel, Noah and His Wife, the Flood; The First Shepherd's Play;, The Second Shepherd's Play; Slaughter of the Innocents* and *Buffetting (The Trial before Caiaphas).*

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[81] The Coventry-cycle gets its name from a 17th century note "Ludus Coventriae" written on the flyleaf of the Hegge Manuscript; Robert Hegge was the early 17th century owner of the plays. Yet some scholars claim that what is in the Hegge-manuscript cannot be the Coventry-cycle, since the two extant plays from Coventry are entirely different from the corresponding ones in the Hegge-manuscript. These scholars prefer the label "N-Town cycle", because in the Hegge-manuscript the introductory proclamation contemplates performance in N-Town. Yet N. might simply be a reference to the town (Norfolk?) where the plays were to be performed next and this might also indicate that the cycle was a touring one, yet not with pageant-wagons proceeding one after the other in a particular town but with scaffolds situated about the parameter of a round *plateau* or place in the town-square, or constructed in the open country. So the title "Coventry cycle" might simply be a mistake or may be used in a generic sense, meaning "plays of the *type* performed at Coventry". Yet if it is true that the N-town/Coventry-cycle was performed by a touring company, then the actors could not be guildsmen but had to be professional actors, too.

[82] Cf. *The Wakefield Mystery Plays*, a modern translation with a critical study by Martial Rose (1962), cf. also *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama* (ed. by John Gassner and Edward Quinn), pp. 907-8. .

Here is a comparative table of the four extant cycles:

N-Town (Coventry)	Chester	York	Wakefield (Townley)
1. Creation of the Angles, Fall of Lucifer	1. Fall of Lucifer	1. Creation of the Angels, Fall of Lucifer	1. Fall of Lucifer, Creation of Adam and Eve
		2. Creation to the Fifth Day	
		3. Creation of Adam and Eve	*In 1*
		4. God's Prohibition	
2. Creation of the World, Fall of Man	2. Creation, Fall of Man, Cain and Abel	5. Fall of Man	*Fall of Man - Lost from manuscript*
		6. Expulsion from Eden	*Expulsion form Eden -Lost from manuscript*
3. Cain and Abel	*Cain and Abel – in 2.*	7. Cain and Abel (incomplete)	2. Cain and Abel
		8. Building of the Ark	
4. Noah and the Flood, Death of Cain	3. Noah and His Wife, the Flood	9. Noah and His Wife, the Flood	3. Noah and His Fife, the Flood
	4. Lot, Melchisedek, Order of Circumcision, Abraham and Isaac		
5. Abraham and Isaac	*In 4.*	10. Abraham and Isaac	4. Abraham and Isaac
			5. Jacob and Esau
			6. Jacob's Wanderings
		11. Pharaoh, Moses, Exodus	(8. Pharaoh, Moses, Exodus – misplaced in manuscript, York 11)
6. Moses (Burning Bush, Ten Commandments)	5. Moses (Ten Commandments, Balak, Balaam, the ass, and Prophets)		
7. Prophets (of the Nativity)	*In 5.*		7. Prophets (of Nativity, incomplete)
			8. Pharaoh, Moses, Exodus (misplaced in manuscript, York 11, see above)
			9. Caesar Augustus
8. Conception of the Virgin			
9. Presentation of the Virgin			
10. Betrothal of the Virgin			
11. Parliament of Haven; Annunciation	6. Annunciation, Visit to Elizabeth, Suspicions of Joseph about Mary, Caesar Octavian and the Sybil, Birth of Christ	12. Annunciation, Visit to Elizabeth	10. Annunciation, Joseph's Suspicions about Mary
12. Joseph's Suspicions about Mary	*In 6.*	13. Joseph's Suspicions about Mary	*In 10.*
13. Visit to Elizabeth	*In 6.*	In 12	11. Visit to Elizabeth
14. Trial of Joseph and Mary			
15. Birth of Christ	*In 6.*	14. Birth of Christ	
16. Adoration of the Shepherds	7. Adoration of the Shepherds	15. Adoration of the Shepherds	12. First Shepherd's Play 13. Second Shepherd's Play
17. Adoration of the Magi	8. Coming of the Magi, Herod.	16. Herod and His Son, Coming of the Magi.	14. Adoration of the Magi

	9. Adoration of the Magi	17. Herod's Plot, Adoration of the Magi	
	10. Flight into Egypt, Slaughter of the Innocents, Death of Herod's Son, Death of Herod	18. Flight into Egypt	15. Flight into Egypt
18. Purification of the Virgin	11. Purification of the Virgin, Christ and the Doctors	(41. Purification of the Virgin – misplaced manuscript, see below)	17. Purification of the Virgin (order reversed with respect to N-Town and York)
19. Slaughter of the Innocents, Death of Herod	*In 10.*	19. Slaughter of the Innocent	16. Slaughter of the Innocent (order reversed with respect to N-Town and York)
20 Christ and the Doctors	*In 11.*	20. Christ and the Doctors	18. Christ and the Doctors (York 20)
21. Baptism (of Christ)		21. Baptism (of Christ)	19. Baptism (of Christ)
22. Temptation (of Christ)	12. Temptation, Woman Taken in Adultery	22. Temptation (of Christ)	
		23. Transfiguration	
23. Woman Taken in Adultery	*In 12.*	24. Woman Taken in Adultery, Raising of Lazarus (both incomplete)	
	13. Healing of the Blind Chelidonius, Attempt to Stone Christ, Raising of Lazarus		
24. Raising of Lazarus	*In 13.*	*In 24.*	(31. Raising of Lazarus – misplaced in the manuscript)
25. Council of the Jews			
26. Entry into Jerusalem	14. Entry into Jerusalem, Cleansing of the Temple Conspiracy of the Jews with Judas	25. Entry into Jerusalem	
27. Last Supper, Conspiracy of the Jews with Judas	*In 14.*	26. Conspiracy of Jews with Judas 27. Last Supper (incomplete)	20. Conspiracy
		28. Getchemane (incomplete), Betrayal	
28. Betrayal (of Christ)	15. Last Supper. Betrayal.	*In 28.*	
29. Prologue of Doctors and Contemplation, Herod			
30. Trial before Caiaphas, Peter's Denial, Death of Judas, First Trial before Pilate, Trial before Herod	16. Trial before Caiaphas (the Buffeting), Peter's Denial	29. Peter's Denial, Trial before Caiaphas	21. Buffeting (Trial before Caiaphas)
31. Dream of Pilate's Wife		30. Pilate and His Wife, Dream of Pilate's Wife, Pilate's Beadle, First Trial before Pilate	
		31. Trial before Herod	
32. Second Trial before Pilate, Condemnation, Scourging, Procession to Calvary, Crucifixion	17. Procession to cavalry, Casting of Lots, Crucifixion, Longinus, Joseph of Arimathea	32. Second Trial Before Pilate, Remorse of Judas, Purchase of the Field of Blood 33. Second Trial Continued, Condemnation	22. Scourging (Trial before Pilate) (32. Death of Judas, incomplete, misplaced in manuscript)

		(incomplete) 34. Procession to Calvary 35. Crucifixion 36. Death and Burial	23. Procession to Calvary (York 34), Crucifixion 24. Talents (Casting of Lots)
33. Descent into Hell of Anima Christi (first part of Harrowing of Hell)	18. Harrowing of Hell, Arrival of the Virtuous and Damned in Paradise. Alewife	37. Harrowing of Hell	25. Harrowing of Hell (York 37)
34. Joseph of Arimathea, Longinus, Descent from the Cross, Burial	*In 17.*	*Partly in 34.-35.*	
35. Guarding of the Sepulcher, Harrowing of Hell, Resurrection, Appearance to the Virgin, Compact of Pilate and the Soldiers	19. Guarding of the Sepulcher, Resurrection, Compact of Pilate with the Soldiers, Marys at the Sepulcher, Appearance to Magdalene, Appearance to Mary Salome, Mary Jacobi, and Peter	38. Resurrection	26. Resurrection (York 38)
36. Marys at the Sepulcher	*In 19.*		
37. Appearance to Mary Magdalene	*In 19.*	39. Appearance to Mary Magdalene	
38. Pilgrims to Emmaus, Doubting Thomas	20. Pilgrims to Emmaus, Doubting Thomas	40. Pilgrims to Emmaus	27. Pilgrims to Emmaus 28. Doubting Thomas
		41. Purification of the Virgin (misplaced in manuscript, see above)	
		42. Doubting Thomas	
39. Ascension, Choice of Matthias	21. Ascension	43. Ascension	29. Ascension
	22. Choice of Matthias, Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost), Institution of the Apostles' Creed		
	23. Prophets of the Antichrist, Signs of Judgement		
	24. Coming of Antichrist		
40. Pentecost	*In 22*	44. Descent of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost)	
		45. Death of the Virgin	
		46. Appearance of the Virgin to Thomas	
41. Assumption of the Virgin		47. Assumption of the Virgin	
42. Last Judgement	25. Last Judgement	48. last Judgement	30. Last Judgement (York 48)
			31. Raising of Lazarus (misplaced manuscript, see above)
			32. Death of Judas (incomplete, misplaced manuscript, see above)

Wakefield, the cycle with the greatest literary merit, differs from the other three in omitting the Birth of Christ, Temptation, Woman Taken in Adultery, Entry into Jerusalem, Peter's Denial, The First Trial before Pilate, The Trial before Herod, and The Pentecost, yet it is the only cycle that has two plays with Jacob. It is also unusual that it has two Shepherd's Plays (written perhaps for two different guilds?). As the above chart indicates, the "favourites" are the Creation-stories, Cain and Abel and Noah's Flood, yet it is interesting that there is no cycle containing the story of the Tower of Babel, for example. It is also noteworthy that though the famous near-sacrifice of Isaac is there in all the four, from among the other great figures of the Old Testament practically only Moses is represented (with the burning bush, the Exodus and the Ten Commandments); Joseph, David, King Solomon are – for example – totally missing. As regards the stories of the New Testament, the cycles – not surprisingly – concentrate on the nativity and the episodes surrounding the passion and resurrection of Christ. The Harrowing of Hell, though largely apocryphal, is a great favourite, and can be found in all the four, and "the working out the details" around Pilate (and sometimes Herod) is also interesting. The reason for this is that the greatest emphasis was on redemption and those stories were selected from the Old Testament which foretell it, and those from the New Testament which recount it.

In the quotation form the *Treatise of Miraclis Pleyinge* (see above), the anonymous author is perfectly aware that to perform a miracle is to interfere with the natural course of events; he knows that to walk on the water, for instance, or to raise people from the dead – not to mention resurrection – are so astonishing 'that the beholders are seized by an apprehension of the grace of God.'[83] So miracles are *always already* theatrical, both in the sense that they wish to impress the spectators by *re*-presenting, by bringing to the *open* (from the church), by transforming into a *sight*, what people can *hear* Sunday after Sunday in church, and also in the sense that they are *substitutes* for something which is sacred and thus, ultimately, forbidden: as the Host carried from street to street becomes the body of Christ, so should a miracle get transformed into the 'real thing', not so much re-enacting but turning *into* the 'original' miracle itself, and the dilemma precisely is whether this is possible and permissible. 'So when the writer says 'miracles playing' – Shepherd and Womack comment –

> he is talking not exactly about a dramatic genre ('miracle plays') but rather about a devotional practice (playing – as opposed, say, to *working* – miracles). [...] This way of looking at the question defines medieval drama as one element in a larger repertoire of religious theatricality.[84]

5.3. Moralities

The other most significant dramatic genre, the *morality play* has also an eminent role in England and it stands well apart from miracles. While the fundamental concern of miracles is to re-en*act* an *act*ion or an event, moralities, we could say, wish to dramatise a *word* (a 'concept'), an 'abstraction' like 'Flesh', 'Lust', 'Folly', 'the World', or even 'Man' or 'God', etc. Instead of asking: 'now *what* is Flesh, Lust, etc.', they make the words (and, thus, the Word) alive by showing them *in action*, and without relying on a well-known story from the Bible. So moralities are typically *allegories* in a dramatic form. Basically, they are simple, didactic exemplums, reminding people of death (cf. Medieval *memento mori* – 'reckon with death!', 'don't forget to die!') and emphasising the absolute necessity of repentance and the severity of the last judgement. Their mode of presentation is not so much a ritual or revelation but *exposition* – it brings about a kind of *narrative* theatre, constantly colliding and

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[83] Shepherd and Wormack, *ibid.*
[84] Shepherd and Wormack, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

negotiating with *history* and *fiction*. Moralities are not *history* in the sense that they have no claim to 'real, factual' events, yet they would not subscribe completely to *fiction*, either, since they perform what happens to *everyone* in the course of his life.

Thus, moralities confirm the Medieval world-view in at least two ways. First, by their *structure*: they represent the Medieval idea that life is a pilgrimage from birth towards either Heaven or Hell. Man (the human being) often appears in these plays as 'Everyman' or 'Mankind', as the allegorical-essential-typical embodiment of general human features, being. the battle-ground of good and evil forces (*psychomachia*: the battle for the soul). The good forces – as we saw – are personified in the Good Angel, in Good Deeds, in Knowledge, etc., the evil ones in the Bad Angel, in the Seven Deadly Sins, the Flesh, the World, the Devil, etc.. In the most famous morality with the title *Everyman* (cc. 1485-1500), for example, the protagonist has a choice, he must decide which side he listens to in this polar opposition; Beauty, Strength and Discretion forsake him, even Knowledge, highly esteemed in Medieval times, bids him farewell as one-before-the-last and only Good Deeds accompany him 'to make his reckoning'. For the Medieval mind this is *comedy*, usually interpreted as a *divine* one: an ending is understood to be happy when one gets to Heaven, while tragedy is tantamount to being in the state of separateness from God, in the state of *judgement*, which is, because of the Fall of Man (Adam), the initial human condition. So a play like *Everyman* displays a transformation from tragedy to comedy, from doom to salvation.

Moralities also confirm the Medieval world-view by their reliance on *allegory*, the representational *medium* of moralities. The Medieval Universe is itself essentially allegorical: Scripture (the Bible), the Book of God is in correspondence with the other Great Book, the Book of Nature, into which God has also inscribed His message – hence the licence to study Nature, to philosophise, to emphasise the significance of learning, to esteem Knowledge as the second highest-ranking human property after Faith. For Medieval thinking, the wrinkles in one's palm may correspond to the venation on the leaves of a tree and it is the correspondence itself which is important, it is the relation that is of crucial significance and not the question 'what represents (stands for) what'. Similarly, earthly hierarchy corresponds to the Heavenly one, in which man has a fixed and well-defined place.

5. 4. The problem of comedy in the Middle Ages

5. 4. 1. The problem of comedy

Although moralities are not devoid of earthly humour and profane elements, mysteries/miracles are more similar to secular drama and, through their ambiguous attitude towards *comedy* and to *the comic* in general, they are closer to dismantling the Mediaeval world-view than to reaffirming it. What is the role of the comic in Medieval thinking?

Lydgate in his *Troy Book* 'defines' comedy as:

> A commedie hath in his gynning ...
> ... a maner compleynyng,
> And afterward endeth in gladness (2;847).

> and Chaucer's Knight objects to the Monk's series of tragedies by preferring tales of

> ... joye and greet solas,
> As whan a man hath been in povre estaat,

And clymbeth up and wexeth fortunaat,
And there abideth in prosperitee.[85]

The comedy in moralities is – as we saw – from (spiritual) poverty to (spiritual) prosperity, from sin to redemption, where 'the comic' is associated with *joy* rather than with laughter. Yet all known and accepted classical definitions of comedy run directly contrary to the proclaimed intentions of the Mystery Cycles and Moralities and, thus, even to Lydgate's or Chaucer's 'definitions'. For example, Strabo in his *Geography* writes that comedy took its structure from tragedy but it also has been degraded – from the sublime height of tragedy to its present 'prose-like' style.

Plutarch in the *Moralia* notes that

> the Athenians considered the writing of comedy so undignified and vulgar a business that
> there was a law forbidding any members of the Aeropagus to write comedies.

And even Aristotle, the chief authority on poetics thinks that

> Comedy ... is a representation of inferior people, not indeed in the full sense of the word
> bad, but the laughable is a species of the base or ugly.[86]

No wonder, then, that for example the Wycliffite opponent of mysteries finds dramatic laughter a matter of potential spiritual danger, pointing out that Christ himself never laughed.[87] Thus Evil Characters (usually the Devil or Vice) become associated with the comic: their return to Hell takes the form of their being chased, beaten up, ridiculed, their power belittled (cf. the 'Vitéz László'-tradition in the Hungarian puppet-theatre, especially in fairs). Belittling, or the 'muting' of, evil is one of the most important sources of the comic: we look at somebody/something from the *outside*, from a distance and from above, the *par excellence* position for *the comic*, whereas *the tragic* is usually possible trough taking an *inside* view: one commiserates, *sympathises*, suffers together, *with* the characters (cf. Greek *sym+pathos* – '*together+ feeling*, *passion'*; i.e. one's feelings are in harmony with the feelings of another person).

However, it belongs to the nature of this dialectic that humour did not only serve the purpose of alienating the spectators from Evil; in presenting Vice or the Devil as a comic figure, the authors brought the problematic of moral choice and stance closer to the (simple and illiterate) spectators by precisely *humanising* evil. Thus, towards the 15th century, the holy stories became more and more secular; comic, *profane* and even vulgar elements were 'interpolated', and, especially in the Wakefield (Towneley) and the York Cycle, the cycles with the greatest literary merit, the anonymous authors seem to be aware of the wonderful opportunity for foolery. It is not hard to see how and why: the actor, personifying Caiaphas, for example, is standing on a wagon, splendidly dressed (probably looking like a bishop), and he demands silence from a relaxed little crowd, some members already drunk and everybody having a good time: it is holiday, no one is working, the bitter cold of winter is gone and life, in the age of plagues and hunger, is short anyway.

The actor's claims, in a vaunting speech – so typical of the Mediaeval theatre – are *total* ones: he says, using his temporary authority, that he is the *most* powerful, the *most* learned of all, etc., which is comic in more than one way. On the one hand, "it universalises the image, making the particular potentate the emblem of earthly sovereignty as such; and on the other it

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[85] Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, 'Nun's Priest Tale', Prologue, 8-11

[86] All the quotations are from R. D. S. Jack's *Patterns of Divine Comedy. A Study of Medieval English Drama.* Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989, pp. 14-26 and *ibid.*

[87] Cf. Umberto Eco's famous novel, *The Name of the Rose*, a philosopher's fantasy revolving around laughter and the Bible: 'What would have happened if the sections dealing with comedy in Aristotle's *Poetics* had survived?' – this is the central question of Eco's book, which is, among other things, very instructive on life in the Middle Ages.

makes the speaker sound hysterically boastful"[88]. Further, everybody knows that he is the cobbler from the neighbourhood, so he is 'not to be taken too seriously', while, even further, they also know that Caiaphas is everything but the ruler of rulers: he is the murderer of Christ, at best the *blind* instrument of the divine will, who will – according to the play – precisely make the soldiers *blindfold* Christ and force Him to guess which of them has just hit him. The two parallel forces of demystification result in the 'message' that it is the evil high-priest (the staged bishop) who is the real 'bloody' and *blind* fool: the cobbler as Caiaphas becomes the emblem of all Evil and of all human authority as ridiculous.

Thus, the dilemma of the classical authors is reborn: it is all right that we laugh at ludicrous and inferior Vice yet his 'humanisation' may reach such a level, he may become so entertaining that everyone will be waiting for his arrival, everybody will wish to play his role, so he might steal the whole show, tempting imitation both on the stage and among the audience (cf. the Iago-problem in Shakespeare's *Othello* and the attractive and amusing traits in the character of Richard III).

5. 4. 2. *The Chester Play of Noah's Flood*

Unfortunately, all the five surviving manuscripts are later than 1575, the last dated performance of the Chester-cycle and since the whole series has been extensively revised, in the 16th century, it is hard to reconstruct what this play was like in the Middle Ages. It is a good example of the so-called "composite authorship", when the text passes through the hands of several unknown authors, each adding something from his own tradition. The scene when Noah's shrewish wife, who would not leave her "Gossips" (i.e. her fellow-women who will surely die) and who gives her husband a box on the ear is surely a Medieval interpolation (cf. Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*, for example) to entertain the audience, as well as to bring the whole story closer to their everyday lives. The Guild responsible for the *Noah-play* was this time the Waterleaders and Drawers who carted and sold water, hence the sub-title: "The Waterleaders and Drawers of Dee" (the river Dee flows through Chester).

God is a separate "character" in the play and his lengthy instructions as to the number of the clean and unclean animals – though they can readily be found in the Bible – show a later than Medieval, perhaps even Protestant interest in Jewish law. The play follows the Old Testament story quite closely; what they wished to dramatise was that Shem, Ham and Japhet, Noah's sons are excellent carpenters, equipped with axes, nails, etc., like contemporary workers , Noah's wife is first very helpful, she brings timber, Shem's wife is carrying a chopping block ("hackestock"), Ham's wife gathers "slitch" (i. e. pitch) and Japhet's wife cooks dinner for all. This family-scene evolves into Noah's wife suddenly becoming disobedient; she claims that her friends, the "Gossips" were all kind to her and she swears quite anachronistically by "Saint John" and "by Christ". We are suddenly in Medieval Chester and we hear a husband complaining: "Shem, son, lo thy mother is wrow [angry] / By God, such another I do not know". Shem is ready to fetch his mother yet she is with the "Good Gossips" drinking wine:

> Noah's Wife: Here is a pottle [two-quart measure] of Malmsey [sweet wine] good and
> strong
> It will rejoice both heart and tongue
> Though Noah think us never so long,
> Yet we will drink atyte [at once].

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[88] Shepherd and Womack, *op. cit.,* p. 14.

Japhet's arrival and Shem's dragging her aboard re-enacts the familiar "son fetching the mother from pub"-scene, yet after the famous slap in the face, Noah, the victim only comments: "Aha, Mary ["by Mary"- an anachronistic oath], this is hot / It is good for to be still." And that is the end of this episode: none will refer back to it and there will be no repercussion for Noah's wife, either.

Another interesting feature of the play concerns mimesis; from the relatively detailed stage-instructions, it is clear that the performers insisted on creating a convincing illusion: though when they work on the ark they "only make signs as if they were working with different tools", when it comes to carrying the animals on board "all the beats and fowls hereafter rehearsed must be painted, that their words may agree with the pictures" and when the flood is over "he shall send forth the dove; and there shall be another dove in the ship, bearing an olive branch in its mouth, which someone shall let down from the mast into NOAH's hands with a rope". This tells a great deal about the play's conception of imitation: there are moments when simple signs are enough to support words, in others (no doubt, also for practical reasons) paintings will do, yet there is a point when the dove must be seen, in almost a "naturalistic" fashion. And the author sometimes shows great poetic skills; for example, when describing the rainbow he uses a metaphor which is not in the Bible: "The string is turned toward you / And towards me is bent the bow", i.e. the sign of the new covenant is represented as a bow aimed away from the earth.

5.4.3. *The Second Shepherd's Play*

In *The Second Shepherd's Play* (*Secunda Pastorum*), belonging to the Wakefield cycle, the problem of comedy is especially alive since the Angel, singing *Gloria in Excelsis*, appears only at the very end of the play: the traditional interpretation of the Nativity-story comes relatively late while Mak, the 'fourth shepherd' is one of the best humorous characters outside of Chaucer's work in this period. Yet the author (usually referred to as the 'Wakefield Master', most probably a well-educated cleric) is original precisely in *adding* to the traditional interpretation, achieving a complexity which is quite unparalleled in Medieval drama.

The play starts in the moor, symbolic of sin, of losing one's way, of separateness. Coll and Gib are complaining about the bitter cold, while the play was most probably performed on Corpus Christi Day, most probably falling in June that year – hence the cherries for the Baby Lord Jesus at the end of the play –, and celebrating Christmas! The shepherds go on grumbling about low wages, too many kids and shrewish wives. Man, initially, is in the state of being unredeemed, he sings – in ironic contrast to the Angels at the end of the play – out of tune and moans for a better life, not knowing yet that it comes differently. But they are shepherds, shepherds of lamb like Christ will be, they are wakeful people, whose duty is to keep away the wolf, the evil forces. Action starts with the arrival of Mak, who is a thief, he is the *fourth* one ('the odd man out') in the company of Coll, Gib and Daw, representing the number of the Holy Trinity. However, Mak presents himself as a 'yeoman' of the king, a messenger ('sond') from 'great lording': he comes as an Angel. He is ill-trusted, he is searched, he has to sleep between the others. He is able to say his prayers, yet while the others sleep, he casts a spell on them in the form of a moon-shaped circle ('circill'), which is the sign of the Devil (cf. the Witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*). The sleep of the shepherds is also symbolic: in the New Testament man is often represented as one who falls asleep precisely at the most important turning points of his life: Christ's disciples in the Garden of Getchemane,

or after witnessing to Christ's transfiguration when they 'were very sleepy' (Luke 9:32)[89]. Mak does manage to steal a sheep and from now on the author shows him in at least *three* roles at the same time: he is the Devil with the magic spell, he is a 'poor devil', a family-man looking after his wife and flock of children, but he is also Christ, who has 'stolen' us from Hell, from damnation by acting as our substitute. Mak takes the sheep home and goes back to the moor by the time the others wake up; he even claims that he had a dream: his wife, Gill gave birth to a son (which, in the 'reality' of the play, has already happened). Mak then goes home but he knows that the sheep will be looked for, and it is Gill's idea to hide it from the other shepherds in the cradle of the newly born son. Coll, Gib and Daw count the sheep and discover the theft but when they arrive at Mak's house, Gill is imitating the moans of a woman who has just been in labour (somewhat also imitating the figure of the Holy Mary). The sheep is discovered by accident: Daw wants to give 'the baby' in the cradle a kiss upon their departure. Yet his exact words upon his 'revelation' are of utmost importance; he says:

> What the devil is this? He has a long snout
> [...]
> Saw I never in cradle
> A horned lad ere now
> (I have never seen a horned lad in a cradle before)

Thus, the cradle is 'empty', it is *not yet Christ* in it, while it is also heavy with the *devil* but that 'horned devil' is also supposedly a *child* and, in 'reality', a lamb, also symbolising the Lamb of God, who will take the sins of mankind away. *At the same time* and in *a single* image, the author is able to represent man as the lost sheep, Christ as the future sacrifice and the devil as the ugly, smelly creature with a snout and horns. Meaning and Truth are there and not there. Yet the shepherds are not only the simple people of Yorkshire but also the shepherds of the Bible to whom 'real Truth and meaning' are revealed in the stable of Bethlehem. They bring the real Baby red cherries, which are good to eat *and* are the symbol of life; a bird, which is fun to play with *and* the symbol of the soul; and a tennis ball, which is a toy *and* the symbol of the Earth. Christ is a child and *the* King *at the same time*. Mak is 'tossed in a blanket' even before the ending of the play in Bethlehem, yet the ambiguity and paradox of the Christ-story in its fulfilment and simultaneous non-fulfilment remains with the spectators from the cradle of Mak's son and of Bethlehem to the later, 'empty grave'.

5. 5. The problem of tragedy in the Middle Ages[90]

With respect to tragedy in the Middle Ages, one usually quotes the 'definition' to be found in Chaucer's *The Monk's Tale:*

> Tragedie is to seyn a certain storie,
> As olde bookes maken us memorie
> Of hym that stood in great prosperitie,
> And is yfallen out of heigh degree
> Into myserie, and endeth wreccedly.

Yet there is more to this: in fact we should look at Chaucer as a revolutionary exception of his time because he thought of himself as an *author* of tragedies (though even his understanding of the genre differs considerably form ours), whereas e.g. Bocaccio, whose *De casubus virorum illustrium* is often quoted as an example of a collection of 'tragic tales' of the late

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[89] Cf. also: 'If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house broken into' (Luke 12:39); and 'the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber' (John 10:1).

[90] This section is based on Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Ideas and forms of tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993

Middle Ages-early Renaissance, did not consider these accounts ('falls') to be tragedies at all. Only a limited number of Medieval authors use the term 'tragedy', and most of them think it to be an obsolete genre, one practiced only by poets of classical Antiquity and, with a few exceptions, even Seneca, the single author relatively well available, is neglected as a direct model for tragedy. In other words, almost nobody writes tragedies as we understand it.

Aristotle's *Poetics* is almost totally unknown till the 13th c., when it is translated into Latin but leaves practically no mark on either theoreticians or poets. Those who mention tragedy at all, draw on Horace (*Ars Poetica*); on Ovid; on Diomedes and Donatus (two 4th century grammarians, giving a fairly elaborate definition of tragedy – it is about leaders and kings, often historical figures; is about exiles and slaughters, great fears, something one would like to avoid, and has a disastrous and turbulent ending, a sad outcome); on Cicero; on *The Rhetorica ad Herennium* (falsely attributed to Cicero but very influential – talks about tragedy as something without much value, i.e. as an example of the *fabula*, containing events which are neither true nor probable, as opposed to comedies, which is an example of the *argumentum,* recounting probable events and to histories (*historia*), which tell true events of the past); and sometimes they know the comedy-writers, Plautus and Terence and the tragedies by Seneca (although, up to the 13th century, very few people refer to Seneca explicitly, e.g. Aldhelm writing in England in the 7th c. quotes two lines from Seneca's *Agamemnon*; the Neopolitan Eugenius Vulgaris at the beginning of the 10th c. draws extensively on the plays). Depending on their source(s), they will 'neutrally' describe or condemn tragedy, and only very seldom will they praise it.

Medieval authors till the 13th century never talk about *catharsis* and they usually mention the following features of tragedy:
– it is about sad (mournful, sorrowful) deeds, often crimes
– it is concerned with public and often historical ('real') figures (kings), as opposed to comedy, which deals with private affairs of imaginary 'low' people
– it was sung in the theatre by one man while the actors were moving as in a ballet or imitating speech (the singer 'dubbing' their parts)
– it was written in high style (as opposed to comedy, written in low style)
– some use the term 'tragedy' in the ordinary sense, i.e. as denoting (private) disaster or catastrophe, e.g. Pope Nicholas in a letter of 31 October, 867 writes that he will give the history – "if it should not be called a tragedy" – of two bishops who refused to send an adulteress back to her husband, or Ekkehard of St Gall (~890-1036) in his chronicles talks about the tragedies brought about by heathen tribes attacking the 'civilised' Christian world.

One of the most often quoted sources in the Middle Ages is St Isidore, bishop of Seville (599-636), who wrote a book called *Etymologies* (*Origins*), in which he tried to cover all areas of learning. Although by that time classical literature had practically disappeared from sight and he could only draw on Plautus, Terence, Cicero, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and St Augustine (the latter claiming to have acted in tragedies but considering the theatre as something sinful in his *Confessions*, therefore for Isidore the 'theatre' is synonymous with 'brothel'), he gives a fairly accurate description of the theatre and he starts spreading the belief that tragedy is called this way because then the actors/authors sang for the prize of a goat (Greek *tragos*). Otherwise, in Isidore's book we get the usual description of tragedy as sorrowful and public.

The only thinker adding something original to the idea of tragedy is Boethius, the philosopher at the beginning of the 6th century in his *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium*. He considers the circumstances of Christ's conception as tragic: "But if flesh had been formed new and real and not taken from man, to what purposes was the tremendous tragedy [*tanta tragoedia*] of the conception [*generationis*]?" This is further elaborated by St Remigius (Remi) of Auxerre at the turn of the 10th century (who knew Isidore's work as well):

"Tragedies describe ludicrous [*ludicras*–sic!] and monstrous things. If therefore the flesh of Christ was not taken from the flesh of man, what Holy Scripture says of the birth of our Lord and Saviour, will be like a tragedy." However, Boethius also deals with tragedy in his by far more influential *Consolation of Philosophy*, betraying knowledge of Euripides' *Andromache* and calls the Greek tragic poet "my Euripides". When Lady Philosophy is reasoning with Fortune, the latter asks: "What else does the clamour of tragedies bewail but Fortune overthrowing happy kingdoms with an unexpected blow?" This 'definition' will be Chaucer's direct source to understand what tragedy is.

In 1278 William of Moerbeke translated the *Poetics* from Greek into Latin but it had very little effect on his contemporaries. Because the actual plays Aristotle was referring to were unknown, it took a long time for the Medieval authors to realise that Aristotle was talking about the same thing as *they* knew to be 'tragedy'. Even those who obviously had access to Aristotle's *Poetics* well before the Moerbeke-translation, and translated excerpts from it themselves and commented on it (such as the great commentator, Averroes, who translated Aristotle into Arabic), for lack of knowledge about the theatre, do not even realise that Aristotle talks about plays consisting of dialogues to be acted out on stage and think that tragedies were odes praising the virtues of great men who later fell to misfortune. For example, Averroes translates *opsis* (spectacle) as 'speculation', defined as the establishment of the correctness of belief or action, not by persuasive means but by the speech of representation. Tragedy becomes the opposite of rhetoric, the main difference being that in tragedy there is no gesticulation. Averroes's example (drawing on the Koran) is the story of Abraham, a virtuous man who goes through the moving event of having to sacrifice his son (which he eventually does not have to do).

Knowledge about classical theatre and of the performance of tragedies started to spread, to a limited extent, with a growing interest and serious study in the tragedies of Seneca. Nicholas Trevet, a Dominican professor at Oxford, one of the most learned man of his times, wrote commentaries on the tragedies of Seneca between 1314 and 1317. He combines what he could learn from the plays mostly with Boethius (of whom he was also a commentator) and with Isidore. He says that although both Virgil and Ovid can be called tragic poets, Seneca is a poet not only "of tragic matter but also in the tragic mode. For this reason this book [Seneca's] is deservedly called *The Book of Trgedies*; for it contains mournful poems about the falls of great men, in which the poet never speaks, but only introduced persons." Independently of Trevet, Lovato Lovati discovered Seneca's plays in the 11th century Etruscus codex at the abbey of Pomposa, which triggered, in the latter part of the 13th century, a whole campaign of studying Seneca in Padua. Lovati's disciple, Albertino Mussato even composed a tragedy, *The Ecerinid (Ecerinis)* in Seneca's manner around 1314-15. For Lovati and Mussato, tragedy is the description, in the form of lamentation, of an overthrown kingdom. Dante, however, did not know of Seneca's tragedies and his treatment of tragedy does not indicate the awareness that tragedies are plays. He says, in *De vulgari eloquentia*: "We are seen to be using tragic style when the most noble verse forms, elevated construction and excellent vocabulary are matched with profundity of substance".

Chuacer, who most probably knew only Boethius, consciously composed 'tragedies' – narrative poems, beginning in prosperity and ending in adversity, such as the *Monk's Tale* or *Troilus and Cryseyde*, where Fortune plays a leading role. A good century later, Robert Henryson wrote *The Testament of Cresseid*, heavily drawing on Chaucer. John Lydgate, also heavily influenced by Chaucer, also shows signs of knowing about Isidore and is aware that ancient tragedy was in an acted from. Lydgate translated Laurence of Premierfait's expanded version of Bocaccio's *De casisbus* into English as *The Fall of Princes*, which was expanded further by William Baldwin's *A Mirror for Magistartes*, well-known also by Shakespeare.

Chapter 6

Renaissance Drama I.
The Renaissance World-View and Theatres in England.
Kyd and Marlowe

6.1. The Renaissance world-view

There is no agreement concerning either the length of the period we label the 'Renaissance', or to its 'content'. Today some scholars (especially representatives of New Historicism) even prefer the term 'early modern' to the 'Renaissance', to take away the to them too unproblematically and optimistically sounding 'rebirth'-image, contained in the original meaning of the word.[91] The beginnings of systematic studies in the Renaissance start with Jacob Burckhardt's epoch-making and highly influential book (first published in l860): *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien.*[92] Burkhardt grants no place to philosophy in the Renaissance and claims that this period rather expresses itself through the 'languages' of art (architecture, painting, music, literature).

The most influential thinkers to challenge this view were Walter Pater (1839-1894) in England and the German-American Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945)[93]. Pater, in his *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry*, (originally published in 1873), 'defines' the Renaissance as "that movement in which, in various ways, the human mind wins for itself a new kingdom of feeling and sensation and thought not opposed to, but only beyond and independent of the spiritual system then actually realised" [...] "for that age the only possible reconciliation was an imaginative one" [...]. "the Renaissance of the fifteenth century was, in many things, great rather by what it designed than by what it achieved." Pater emphasises the vitality, the creative force in the Renaissance, which comes, as he claims, from the tension one feels between what one desires and can see with his 'mind's eye', ('mystically', when closing the eyes) on the one hand, and what one can *actually* achieve and see. Pater rediscovers the 'ontological gap', giving rise to violent and desperate feelings in the Renaissance, as opposed to Burkhardt's 'harmonious self-realisation of the individual'.[94]

The 'ontological gap', as a main feature of the period, is emphasised, through a detailed study in the (Neo-Platonic) philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa (or: Cusanus, 1401-1464) by Cassirer, too[95], this 'gap' going back to Plato's teaching about the chasm between *beings* and *Being*: man is only capable of experiencing and getting to know phenomena, which are just the shadowy images of *real* ('perfect') Being, existing in the 'shape' of the Platonic Forms in another, 'higher' realm (cf. 2.1.3). Upon the influence of Plato, the Renaissance, especially in the late 15th century, will question, though will never totally replace, the ladder of hierarchies Aristotle constructed; Aristotle, as a direct criticism of Plato's approach, wanted to make it at least theoretically possible to reach the 'Prime Mover', the 'Supreme Being' by claiming that everything *inherently* contains its own perfect 'idea' and constantly strives towards it,

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[91] Cf., for example, John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, "Demanding History", In: Cox and Kastan (eds.), *A New History of Early English Drama,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. 1-5.
[92] In Hungarian: *A reneszánsz Itáliában.* Ford. Elek Artúr, Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalata, Budapest, 1978.
[93] Ernst Casssirer, *The Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy,* New York: Harper and Row, 1963.
[94] Cf. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry*. New York: New American Library, 1959, pp. 26-39.
[95] Cassirer, op. cit., especially pp. 25-31.

creating, thereby, a great chain of beings (cf. 2.1.3). The Renaissance will still rely on the Medieval hierarchical structure, worked out – especially by Saint Thomas of Aquinas – on the basis of the Aristotelian system, but it will primarily problematise the 'fixed' place of the human being in this hierarchy.[96]

Yet the first revolt in the Renaissance against Aristotle occurred in the form of the criticism of the Latin style (and language in general) of Medieval Scholasticism, Scholasticism heavily relying – and often commenting – on the Latinised Aristotelian corpus, especially on Aristotle's works on logic. Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) (1304-1374), for example, set the elegance and beauty of Cicero's Latin against the ugly, contrived and cumbersome 'vulgar Latin' of Scholastic philosophers at the universities. Moreover, Petrarch, in one of the 'foundational texts' of the Renaissance, in his *Ascent to Mont Ventoux* (1336), quotes Seneca and Saint Augustine to emphasise the excellence and greatness of man.

> I admired every detail, now relishing earthly enjoyment, now lifting up my mind to higher spheres after the example of my body, and I thought it fit to look into the volume of Augustine's C*onfessions* [...] It is a little book of smallest size but full of infinite sweetness. I opened it with the intention of reading whatever might occur to me first: nothing, indeed, but pious and devout sentences could come to hand. I happened to hit upon the tenth book of the work. My brother stood beside me, intently expecting to hear something from Augustine on my mouth. I ask God to be my witness and my brother who was with me: Where I fixed my eyes first, it was written: "And men go to admire the high mountains, the vast floods of the sea, the huge streams of the rivers, the circumference of the ocean, and the revolutions of the stars – and desert themselves." I was stunned, I confess. I bade my brother, who wanted to hear more, not to molest me, and closed the book, angry with myself that I still admired earthly things. Long since I ought to have learned, even from pagan philosophers, that "nothing is admirable besides the mind; compared to its greatness nothing is great".[97]

Petrarca in his last sentence quotes from the "Eighth Letter" of Seneca – he is the example of the "pagan philosopher". Here is "Renaissance Man": around, above and in front of (*before*) him the infinite universe, he is holding Ancient and Medieval authors in his hands and his heart is filled with boundless faith in the power of the mind.

Yet Augustine and Seneca are referred to by Michel Montaigne, too, in his *Apology for Raymond Sebond*:

> *Inter caetera mortalitatis incommoda et hoc est, caligo mentium; nectantum necessitas errandi, sed errorum amor.* [Among the other inconveniences of mortality this is one, to have the understanding clouded, and not only a necessity of erring, but a love of error.][98] *Corruptibile corpus aggravat animam, et deprimit terrena inhabitatio sensum multa cogitantem.* [The corruptible body stupefies the soul, and the earthly habitation dulls the faculties of the imagination].[99]

Not much before this totally different selection from the authors Petrarca invoked, Montaigne puts down the following to support his claim to the "noble faculties" of the human being:

> Let us now consider a man alone, without foreign assistance, armed only with his own proper arms, and unfurnished of the divine grace and wisdom, which is all his honour, strength, and the foundation of his being; let us see what certainty he has in his fine equipment. Let him make me understand by the force of his reason, upon what foundation

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[96] One could say that the Aristotelian, logically based hierarchical ladder gets totally thrown away in one of the most important works on logic in the 20th century, in Wittgenstein's early masterpiece, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), in which Wittgenstein says that the person who understands his book 'must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it' (*Tractatus*, 6.54).

[97] Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oscar Kristeller and John Herman Randall Jr.(eds.), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948, p. 44

[98] The quotation is from Seneca's *De Ira*, (ii, 9), cf. Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays*, trans. by Charles Cotton, ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt, Chicago and London: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc, 1957, p. 215.

[99] This text is from St. Augustine's *City of God*, (xii, 15), cf. Montaigne, op. cit., p. 215.

he has built those great advantages he thinks he has over other creatures: what has made him believe, that this admirable movement of the celestial arch, the eternal light of those planets and stars that roll so proudly over his head, the fearful motions of that infinite ocean, were established, and continue so many ages, for his service and convenience? Can anything be imagined to be so ridiculous that this miserable and wretched creature, who is not so much a master of himself, but subject to the injuries of all things, should call himself master and emperor of the world, of which he has not power to know the least part, much less to command it. And this privilege which he attributes to himself, of being the only creature in this grand fabric that has the understanding to distinguish its beauty and its parts, the only one who can return thanks to the architect, and keep account of the revenues and disbursements of the world; who, I wonder, sealed for him this privilege? Let us see his letter-patent for this great and noble charge; were they granted in favour of the wise only?[100]

Here is "Renaissance man" again, the "other", who had read the same Ancient and Medieval writers differently, who, in Lear's words, "is no more but such a poor, bare forked animal" (III,4;105-106) and who looks around himself in a frightful and uncanny universe, appalled by his own smallness as much as by his infinite possibilities. "Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to your thyself have we given thee, Adam" – Pico Della Mirandola makes God say to Man in his famous "*Oration on the Dignity of Man*", one of the foundational texts of the Renaissance –,

to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgement thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. [...] We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgement, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.[101]

Thus, the Aristotelian-Medieval hierarchy is still there, yet – in King Lear's words again – man' s 'frame of nature' has been 'wrench'd' 'from the fix'd place' (I,4;266-267), man is given freedom to choose his role on the stage of the Renaissance and this is just as much an occasion for celebration as for experiencing terror and awe.

Further, we should note – in the English translation – the frequent occurrence of the modal auxiliaries of *may(est)* and *shal(l/t)* and recall that linguistic analysis usually distinguishes between two kinds of modalities, expressing two kinds of possibilities: epistemic and deontic possibility. Let us take the example of *may*: it can be used in the 'epistemic' sense, e.g. *Othello may kill Desdemona* – 'Othello is not barred by some authority from killing Desdemona', 'it is possible *for* Othello to kill Desdemona'; and in the 'deontic' sense: *Othello may kill Desdemona* – 'I am not barred by my premises from the conclusion that Othello will kill Desdemona', 'it is very much possible *that* Othello will kill Desdemona'. In Pico's text, *may* and *shall* seem to express deontic possibility: "thou *mayest* have and possess...", "Thou ... *shalt* ordain...", "thou *mayest* fashion thyself...", "thou *shalt* prefer", "thou *shalt* have the power", yet, since Pico puts these words into God's mouth, here the deontic and the epistemic senses seem to overlap: God is typically "relinquishing authority" and allows Man to dare as much as he can dare, while the "declarative", "creative" mode of God's speech[102] (strengthened by *shalt*, too) also makes Man's possible enterprise "factually -

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[100] Montaigne, op. cit., pp. 213-214.
[101] Cassirer, Kristeller and Randall, op. cit., pp. 224-225
[102] John Searle, the great authority on speech-acts, characterises declarations (the fifth category in his classification of "verbal deeds") in the following way : "Declarations are a very special category of speech acts" [...] It is the defining characteristic of this class that the successful performance of one of its members

epistemically" grounded: it is not only possible *for* Adam to do what God offers him but it is, from God's point of view, also very much possible *that* he will do as he was told.

I take this overlap of the two meanings of *may* (the epistemic one reinforced by *shalt*) to be symbolic in one of the foundational texts of the Renaissance. The overlap can, of course, be corroborated historically-linguistically as well. According to Péter Pelyvás's brilliant argumentation, it is the 'ability' meaning of *may*, now extinct, which is the source of the two meanings through extensions in two directions: "into the deontic meaning [...] on the one hand, and, through a process of metaphoric extension, into the epistemic domain"[103]. Pelyvás reconstructs the process as follows:

> In contrast to *can*, the auxiliary expressing ability in Present Day English, the origins of which go back to 'have the mental or intellectual capacity to'; 'know how to' (Old English *cunnan* [...]), the original *ability* sense of MAY had much closer links with *strength*: 'to have the physical capacity to'; 'be strong' (Old English *magan*, *maeg*, cognate with Modern English *might* [...]). The fact that this meaning is based on strength rather than skill suggests an easy route for extension into the deontic domain [...] (and perhaps goes some way towards explaining why it is obsolete). The basis of the meaning is *potentiality in the form of the subject's strength* – **a potential force**. But physical strength is usually seen as being relative: it can only be properly manifested in relation to other forces that it is able to overcome. We can postulate that such counteracting forces, of which the speaker's may be one (and this leads almost directly to the deontic meaning) are/were always understood to be present in a situation described by the *ability* meaning of MAY [...]. Extension into the deontic meaning retains the structural aspect of *the subject's relative strength*. highlights [...] the *relative weakness of a possible counterforce* (typically the speaker's), and adds the *subject's intention*, which makes the force actual. These three elements together make up the deontic meaning. [...] Epistemic MAY is attested quite early in the development of the modal system, especially in impersonal constructions [...] The epistemic meaning [...] is in general only weakly subjective in all (pre)modals in Old English, with strongly subjective meanings requiring strong speaker involvement only occurring centuries later (around the 17th century [just Shakespeare's time]).[104]

In the Renaissance the two meanings of *may* still "rejoice" over their common semantic root of 'ability', making us *able* to see this period as one in which the human being takes "authority"[105] over from God, tests his "relative strength" and "relative weakness", yet, as it turns out in Montaigne's essays or in Shakespearean drama, Man's "potential force" appears with respect to a "possible counterforce" (God? the Devil? – this is the question precisely at stake), to "split", as it were, the single meaning of *may* into two – perhaps for ever.

So what are the possibilities of the human being equipped with his free will? Are these possibilities really endless or still limited? Where is the dividing line between man and beast, man and God? If we identify the main concern of the Middle Ages as the profound study of '*Being*' and '*to be*', and of man's relation to its supreme form, God, then, by contrast, the great discovery of the Renaissance is, precisely, the problem of '*may be*': Hamlet does not

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brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality, successful performance guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the world: [...] if I successfully perform the act of nominating you as candidate, then you are a candidate; if I successfully perform the act of declaring a state of war, then war is on, if I successfully perform the act of marrying you, [an example not at all uninteresting from the point of view of *Othello*] then you are married. [...] There are two classes of exceptions to the principle that every declaration requires an extra-linguistic institution. When, e.g., God says "Let there be light" that is a declaration" (John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning. Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 16-19).

[103] Péter Pelyvás, *Generative Grammar and Cognitive Theory on the Expression of Subjectivity in English: Epistemic Grounding.* Debrecen: KLTE, 1994, p. 168.

[104] Pelyvás, op. cit., pp. 168-170, emphasis original.

[105] Cf. with the following exchange: " *Lear.* What would'st thou? *Kent.* Service. *Lear.* Who would'st thou serve? *Kent.* You. *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."

believe his father's Ghost because it '*May* be a devil' (II,2;595), Othello exclaims: 'I think my wife be honest, and think she is not / I think that thou art just, and think thou art not / I'll have some *proof*' (III, 3, 390-392) and Iago's answer is 'She *may* be honest yet' (III,3;440). What *may* there be in the world and beyond it and what *may* man become? In the Renaissance, the deontic sense of *may* ('Is it possible that there are ghosts?' 'Is it possible that Desdemona is not chaste?') gives rise to scepticism; the epistemic sense ('Is it possible for me to pass judgement over a fellow human being and to kill him?', 'Am I allowed to kill Claudius?' 'Do I dare to. . .?' – cf. Macbeth: 'I *dare* do all that *may* become a man / who *dares* do more, is *none*' (I,7;46-47)) gives rise to hope and despair.[106]

6.2. The "Tudor Age" and Tudor Comedy

6.2.1. The Tudor Age

We may talk about the "Tudor age" (and, thus, of "Tudor drama") between 1485 (when Richmond, the future Tudor Henry VII defeated Richard III at Bosworth field) and 1603, when Tudor Elizabeth I died and Stuart James VI of Scotland (James I in England) ascended to the throne. There were five Tudor rulers on the English throne, Henry VII, Henry VIII (king between 1509-1547), Edward VI (1547-1553), "Bloody" Mary (1553-1558), Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and the later four are all direct descendants of Henry VII. With Elizabeth, the Tudor-line was broken, never to return. However, in literature it is more customary to talk about "the Tudor age" as falling between 1485 and 1558 (or 1509-1558) and to call the rest (up to 1603) "the Elizabethan age", especially because it is during the reign of Elizabeth, and most significantly in the 1580s and 1590s that London – both a commercial and a political centre – could witness to an unprecedented literary growth in the field of all kinds of writing (religious, philosophical, poetic, including lyrical and epic poetry and romance, historical, satirical, etc.) appearing in manuscript and often made popular through the relatively cheap means of printing. Yet there was almost a revolution in the field of drama, too, with the opening of permanent theatres: first a scaffold stage at the Red Lion in Whitechapel, was erected by a grocer, John Brayne in 1567, and then the first "real" permanent theatre called The Theatre in 1576 in Shoreditch was built by James Burbage and the enthusiastic John Brayne, followed by the Curtain, the Rose, the Swan and the famous Globe, etc. The poetic ("literary") status of plays is problematic throughout the age, and the printing of plays and the relationship between the dramatic texts and their authors is also a very difficult matter. However, until the closing of the theatres in 1642, the stage is always popular in England, so the "Age of the Theatres" (roughly between 1576 and 1642) extends well beyond Tudor and Elizabethan times; it is a period of a good sixty years, with an output of something 2000 plays, of which only roughly 600 survived. Compared to this number, Shakespeare's 37 (or so) plays are only a few and today, especially historically minded literary critics go out of their way to show that Shakespeare is only one among the many

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[106] See also, with some typical Renaissance features, (the love of dialogue, freedom, transcendence, dignity, the confirmation of self-hood, bonding and continuity between one's own soul and intellect and those of the ancient authors, transformation-translation) a letter by the famous – and, in England, notorious – statesman, Niccolo Machiavelli: "On the threshold I slip off my day's clothes with their mud and dirt, put on my royal and curial robes, and enter, decently accounted [i.e. 'well-equipped'], the ancient courts of men of old, where I am welcomed kindly and fed on that fare which is mine alone, and for which I was born: where I am not ashamed to address them and ask them the reasons for their action, and they reply considerately, and for two hours I forget all my cares, I know no more trouble, death loses its terrors: I am utterly translated in their company". (This sense of 'translated' ['transformed, changed'] is used in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream: 'Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated. (III,1;114)).

(maybe a "primus inter pares"?), and that he was the son of his age just like John Lily, Robert Green, Richard Peele, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe (the chief early contemporaries) and Ben(jamin) Jonson, Thomas Dekker, John Marston, Thomas Heywood, John Webster, Thomas Middleton, Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, William Rowley, John Shirley, etc., the most notable playwrights chiefly during the Stuart-period (1603-1642). Yet it was precisely one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Ben Jonson, who said that "he [Shakespeare] was not of an age, but for all time" and though this might not be more than a gesture of politeness to the great rival in one of the dedicatory poems of the First Folio (1623), it proved to be prophetic. It is hard to see why we should react to Shakespeare (if we could at all) as if especially the Romantic era had not made Shakespeare "special" and perhaps it is precisely in comparison with the "others" that his greatness might convince us.

Yet we are not yet in the "age of Shakespeare"; we are in the first half and the middle of the 16th century, full of religious turmoil, unrest and uncertainty, especially because of Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy in 1534, followed by the execution of Sir Thomas More (and of Fish) in 1535, the image-breaking in churches in 1538, the dissolution of monasteries in 1539, the Protestant reign of James VI, and Mary's brief but vehement return to Catholicism. Throughout the 16th century, and well into the next, the church battled within itself over the best modes of church government, over clerical dress, over the articles of faith, and over the extent to which the constitutional break with Rome should be matched by a break with its theology as well. During the reign of Edward, a lot of Protestants came to England from Flanders and the Protestants who fled England during the reign of Mary penned and sent to England more than 80 separate printed works, devising strategies of resistance, including, for the first time, the radical idea that the monarch who transgresses God's law to become a murderer and a tyrant should be opposed by force.

That a famous humanist of Europe, Thomas More, one of Erasmus' best friends, also fell victim to this turmoil (though more as a politician than as a humanist) shows a great deal: it indicates that by the 30s, England had adopted, and adapted to, much of the humanist learning coming from Italy, France and Spain. This showed itself in terms of politics: humanist writers such as Thomas Elyot and Thomas Starkey emphasised an ideal of counsel (with roots in Cicero's *De officiis*), which urged the educated and eloquent nobility to advise the monarch. (More did so, but his advice was less than welcome). Conceptions of government throughout the period was, indeed, divided between the ideal of a sacred, imperial monarchy, and the ideal of a regal government limited by counsel. Sometimes England appeared as mixed polity, the power of the Crown counterpoised by the moral force of counsel and parliament. And advice came both in the form of historical examples and even in the form of literature (like More's *Utopia)*; histories not only emphasised the legitimacy of the Tudor-line but also the significance of the King's (or Queen's) listening to His[107] subjects; sometimes there was something like an "aesthetic campaign" against the Monarch, suggesting, with the vividness of poetic language and with persuasive rhetorical skills, what He should do; of course, even implied criticism was often disguised as the language of praise. But the most important contribution of humanism in England was to education, with a great emphasis on training in rhetoric. In 1512 John Colet, with the aid of Erasmus, worked out the plan of St. Paul's School in London; later John Milton was educated there. Edmund Spencer attended the Merchant Taylor's School, an equally important stronghold of humanism and other grammar schools (like the one in Stratford) and even primary schools were an outgrowth of this movement. The fullest account of humanist principles of teaching can be found in Roger Ascham's book, *The Schoolmaster* (1570). Ascham was Latin secretary to

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[107] In legal documents, Elizabeth is often referred to as "He".

Queen Mary, then tutor first to Lady Jane Grey and later to Elizabeth. When Elizabeth became Queen, Ascham became Greek preceptor at her court.

Ascham makes some very important points, relevant even for Tudor aesthetics in general. He thinks that language does not refer to things directly: language is always mediated by other languages, by the conversations of others around us and by the texts we read. Thus, we learn language (eloquent language, language that can persuade) through *imitation*, and education is nothing but the direction of, and the right control over, those various written and spoken texts in the course of imitation. The ultimate goal is to form the self in and through language, and he compares the universe of language to a human body, so that the various forms of eloquence make up a whole body of eloquence. He divides the body of eloquence into four members: Poetic, Historic, Philosophic and Oratorical, and then the Poetic is subdivided into comic, epic, tragic and melic (lyric) parts. Thus, the imitation (of nature, of action) is never direct: a poet imitates something by imitating other poets imitating something.

In Ascham's discussion, we find some of the most significant tenets of the Tudor attitude to language and to learning. The language which creates one's self is "subtracted" from various other linguistic forms and the measure of the success of this process is not the *thing* but the *body*, which imitates (while speaking, writing, etc,) and which is also imitated, since we imitate a whole body of eloquence. As opposed to the age after the Renaissance, when, with Descartes, the fundamental category becomes the *thing* (either a "thinking thing", *res cogitans* or an "extended thing", *res extensa*), here we may still see the body as the chief category through which the whole universe is seen: indeed, there are several representations (e.g. Richard Case's *Sphaera Civitatis,* 1588; William Cuningham *The Cosmological Glasse,* 1559), where the structure of the universe is mapped out in proportion to the human body. Yet such a study never stops at the human bodily parts: to e. g. *blood* and *liver* a corresponding spiritual feature is found, e.g. being *Sanguine*, and thus, through the human body, a link is established between Jupiter, the planet, with the main influence on the blood and liver, and a human spiritual characteristic (which we today would call "psychological feature"). So the study of the human body is also instrumental to the study of the human spirit and the human mind. In other words, Medieval analogical thinking is still there: what is Jupiter in the heavens is the blood and liver to the human body, and what is the blood to the body is being Sanguine in the world of spirits. Yet it is the visible body, stretched out against the universe on which the wheel turns; and this body is not a dead *thing* but something which is alive, which is dynamic, which is moving and which imitates even when it does not "want to" i.e. in itself and by itself. Is it surprising, then, that the actor's body is so easily and readily taken as the representative of other bodies? It imitates me, but also the whole universe, just as I do, but his body is on display, stretched out also against a universe of language (dialogue, discourse, interaction) and against other bodies.

Ascham also follows the humanist tradition by not adhering to a strict or narrow political ideology: the chief attitude to works of all kinds in the age is pluralistic, giving prominence to the potential multiplicity of perspective. This has to do with the belief that all arts can, after all, be learned: even a work of "real" art, like a painting or a poem is less seen as suddenly and wholly inspired by a muse but rather as a work *constructed*, *made* (here the meaning of the word *art* is much closer to the original 'craftsmanship' or 'trade'), and it is made from various, often even discordant perceptions of various cultural forces and practices. These cultural forces and practices are often congruent with those inherited from classical works but this is not a limit but rather a beginning; both Erasmus and John Colet emphasise that a teacher should not rest satisfied with the ten or twelve standard authors used traditionally in schools, since – as James Cleland later beautifully puts it in his *The Institution of a Young Noble Man* (1607) – "learning is circular, and the Muses stand around Apollo, having no beginning nor ending more than a geometrical circle".

6.2.2. Tudor Comedy

There are three plays marking the beginning of English Renaissance drama and all the three of them developed from what we today call school-dramas, i.e. plays written and performed in certain grammar schools or universities. The first full-fledged English tragedy, *Gorboduc, or the Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex* (1561) was written by two students, Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, at the Inns of Court, where lawyers (including influential future statesmen) were trained. The play, like many later tragedies, is a historical *exemplum* (example); by taking a theme from the history of Britain (cf. Shakespeare's *Lear* and *Cymbeline*), it shows the disastrous effects of dividing the body of the country and the body politic; Gorboduc does have councillors but he is unable to select the really wise one and rather yields to his own preferences and, though he has a first-borne son, Ferrex, he gives one half of the country to the younger one, Porrex, and soon the worst happens that can happen to Britain (i. e. England): disorder and civil war, which – after the Wars of the Roses, the Wars between the Houses of Lancaster and York – should be prevented at all costs. The final result is the extermination of the whole family, including Gorboduc and his wife (a chief source of intrigue).

The second significant piece of early Renaissance English drama is *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, a farce; the date of composition is between 1550 and 53 and the author is a certain "Mr. S.", most probably William Stevenson, later fellow of Christ College Cambridge, and deacon in London – he died in 1575. The play takes place in a small village in Northern England; Gammer Gurton has lost her prized, long needle (the phallic implications are worked out with great relish), and the first "Bedlam" (licensed beggar and madman, cf. Edgar in *King Lear*) of the English stage called Diccon happens to pass by, deciding, mainly for the fun of it, to put Gammer Gurton at odds with her neighbours over the needle and a supposedly stolen cock (!). The most memorable character is Hodge, Gammer Gurton's servant, and the central metaphor, besides the needle is his breeches, which are torn in the most embarrassing place, and where (in the rear part) the needle is eventually found. The most interesting feature of the play is its context: this foolery was performed in Christ College, Cambridge, in front of eleven to seventeen year-old boys, most of them poor and coming from the North of England. Besides the "carnivalesque" nature of the play, offering holiday-escape for the students, perhaps it also wished to show the audience the world they had left behind and the progress they had made through learning.

6.2.3. Nicholas Udall's (1505-1556) *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553/4)

Nicholas Udall is also associated chiefly with school-circles: he was born in Southampton, Hampshire in 1505, was educated at Winchester and in Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he seems to have become an exponent of Lutheran views. In May, 1533 he composed, in collaboration with John Leland, some verses for the pageant at the coronation of Anne Boleyn (later mother of Elizabeth, beheaded in 1536). Form 1533 to 1537 he was vicar of Braintree, where he may have written a play (*Placidas* or *St. Eustace)* which was perhaps performed before Thomas Cromwell (More's chief opponent) but references are vague. He knew the Roman playwrights well and his compilation from three of Terence's plays (*Andria, Eunuchus* and *Heautontimoroumenos*) called *Floures for Latine speykinge selected and gathered oute Terence* in 1534/35, with an English translation, designed as a handbook for pupils, was an important step towards making Roman comedy known on the English school-stage. Between 1534 and 41 he was headmaster of Eton, but he lost his office through misconduct, which was stealing some candlesticks and physically (perhaps even sexually) abusing some of his students. He was imprisoned for a short while, then he devoted himself to

theological work, translating parts of Erasmus' *Paraphrase of the New Testament.* He gained favour again during the Protestant reign of Edward VI, yet remained a favourite of Queen Mary as well, exhibiting – as a letter of the Queen states – "Dialogues and Enterludes" before her, holding the revels office for the Christmas entertainment. Form 1554 (or 1553) he became the headmaster of Westminster till his death in 1556.

Ralph Roister Doister is the sole work written by Udall for certain (sometimes an allegorical play called *Respublica*, composed in 1553 and performed by the children of the Chapel Royal, is also attributed to him). *Ralph* is very likely to have been written in 1553, and performed already by the Westminster boys, since Thomas Wilson[108], who was Udall's student at Eaton, uses, in the third edition of his *The Rule of Reason* from 1533/4, Roister Roister's mispunctuated love-letter (Act III, Sc. 4) as an illustration. Udall drew his plot and characters mostly from Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus,* yet towards the end of the play, some elements of Terence's *Eunuchus* can also be found.

The plot – following a five-act structure – is simple but lacks the dramaturgical mistake of the "original" by Plautus: here Ralph is on the stage quite a lot and Matthewe Merrygreek (corresponding to both Artotrogus, the parasite, and to Palaestrio, the skilful and witty servant), is a fully "anglicised" mischief-maker, having a lot from the Medieval Vice-figure as well, yet he bears his victim, Ralph, no real ill will. The plot revolves around Ralph's desire to woo Dame Christian Custance (and her "thousand pounds or more"); Custance substitutes for the standard courtesan in Plautus in the shape of a virtuous widow and her very name reveals her character just as the other names tell a lot about the types their bearers belong to: she is the paragon of virtue, totally uninterested in the "love-sick" Ralph and gets duly married – after some false accusations – to her true love, Gawyn Goodluck, who is the first "honest, middle-class merchant" on the English comic stage. Yet the names representing types, still having a lot to do with the allegorical heritage form the morality plays, are allegories attached *to people* rather than the other way round when people were attached to certain allegorical abstractions.

The play evolves in concentric circles around Dame Custance: first Ralph gives a letter to Margaret Mumblecast, Custance's old nurse, which she delivers to her mistress, yet she is scolded for it, then Dobinet Doughty, Ralph's servant brings a ring and gives it to Tom Trupenny, a servant, and Tibet Talkapace and Annot Alyface, both maids to Dame Custance, yet the circle of the ring is still too "indirect" and weak, so Merrygreek (though not yet Ralph) comes to talk with Custance, which is followed by a moment when Ralph is also there and he does talk to Custance yet Merrygreek partly interprets and partly "corrects" his words. Here we find the most memorable part of the play, when Merrygreek reads out Ralph's original love-letter (bringing the play, to some extent, back to its beginning, or to a new beginning) with a punctuation which results in every sentence meaning its opposite. E. g., instead of:

> If ye mind to be my wife, ye shall be assured for the time of my life; I will keep you right well; from good raiment and fare ye shall not be kept, but in sorrow and care ye shall in no wise live. At your on liberty do and say what ye lust [want]. Ye shall never please me but when ye are merry. I will be all sad, when ye are sorry. I will be very glad, when ye seek your heart's ease; I will be unkind at no time.

he reads:

> …If ye mind be my wife,
> Ye shall be assured for the time of my life [that]

[108] Wilson was also the author of the most important rhetorical handbook in English, *The Art of English Rhetoric* (first edition in 1553, second, expanded one in 1560, and later several reprints, the book becoming standard reading at the universities, mostly at the Inns of Court). Wilson later became secretary to the Privy Council.

> I will keep you right well from good raiment and fare;
> Ye shall not be kept but in sorrow and care.
> Ye shall in no wise live at your own liberty;
> Do and say what ye lust, ye shall never please me;
> But when ye are merry, I will be all sad,
> When ye are sorry, I will be very glad;
> When ye seek your heart's ease, I will be unkind;
> At no time, in me shall ye much gentleness find,

Dame Custance leaves in disgust; Merrygreek has to fetch the Scrivener who composed the letter; it is from that letter that Ralph copied his version. The Scrivener reads the letter out correctly and says something which is a significant warning to all actors of plays in the future: "Then was the fault in reading, and not in writing / – No, nor I dare say, in the form of editing." Act III ends with Ralph and Merrygreek getting into a brawl but instead of fighting they sadly go home. In Act IV it is high time we saw something of the "true lover", Gawyn Goodluck, yet it is – in line with the rest of the play – only his servant, Sim Suresby, whom we encounter, reporting to Dame Custance that his master is coming. The scene is disturbed by the reappearance of Ralph and Merrygreek, who address Custance as if she were Ralph's wife and Suresby runs away to report the mischief to his master. Yet Ralph is now threatening Custance both verbally and physically, yet Custance sends for Tristam Trusty, a friend of Goodluck's, to defend her, as well as alarming her household to do the same. Trusty first persuades Merrygreek to leave Ralph, and Merrygreek, indeed will become their ally; he leads Ralph and his men to the house, where they receives a good beating form the whole household, including now Merrygreek, who pretends to hit Custance but always hits Ralph, so Ralph and his men flee in disgrace. Act V is parody of mistrust (suspicion, scepticism) and trust regained: Goodluck arrives but he is not convinced that Suresby's report was false (or exaggerated) until Trusty guarantees the honesty of Custance. But Goodluck is so much overjoyed by Custance's faithfulness that he forgives Ralph and even invites him and Merrygreek – in spite of Custance's protest – to dine with them. Ralph promises to reform and so the play ends.

6. 3. Renaissance theatrical conventions

Though morality plays like *Everyman* continued to be popular even in Shakespeare's lifetime (Shakespeare may well have seen some in Stratford), the new drama we today call 'Elizabethan' and 'Jacobean' (taking the respective reigns of (Tudor) Elizabeth I [1558-1603] and (Stuart) James I [1603-1625] as landmarks) is an independent and genuinely secular development, initiated and first cultivated by young intellectuals, mainly in and around Cambridge. Following Latin examples both in comedy (Plautus and Terence, cf. 3.1.2) and in tragedy (Seneca, cf. 5.3.), some students and graduates wrote plays and gave performances (first in Latin, later in English) at their universities, joined by some semi-professional or professional players, in inns and, finally, in permanent 'playhouses' (theatres) in London, while also touring in the country, and some companies even playing in the Royal Court. The first English tragedy in blank verse, *Gorboduc or the Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex*, written by two lawyers, Thomas Sackville (1536-1608) and Thomas Norton (1532-1584), was first produced at the Inner Temple (the 'law school' or 'university') in 1561. The fusion of the learned and the popular tradition was, indeed, the achievement of the 'University Wits': John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, George Peele, Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe and Christopher Marlowe (cf. 5.6.), Thomas Kyd also belonging here, though – like Shakespeare – he had no academic background (cf. 5.5.). The permanent playhouses (the 'public theatres') were erected one after the other: "The Red Lion" in 1567; "The Theatre" in 1576; the "Curtain" *c.* in 1577; the

"Rose" *c.* in 1587; the "Swan" in 1595; etc..; and, most importantly for us, the "Globe" in 1599, burnt down in 1613, rebuilt in 1614, where Shakespeare's plays were performed. Writing plays and acting became a sometimes quite rewarding enterprise, and certain more or less permanent companies, under the patronage of an aristocrat or the member of the Royal Family, lending his or her name to the theatrical group, became associated with them. Examples include the Lord Admiral's Men[109], with Marlowe, playing in the "Rose", managed by Philip Henslowe[110]; or the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later King's Men, playing in the "Globe", managed by the Burbage family, and including William Shakespeare as well.

The public theatres could house *c.* 2000-3000 spectators (sic!), the building was unroofed, oval or octagonal in shape, with an 'apron' stage jutting into the yard, surrounded, on three sides, by the standing spectators, the so-called 'groundlings', paying a penny as entrance-fee, while for another penny the more well-to-do could occupy covered seats in three rising tiers around the yard. Thus, visibility was ensured around and even from above the stage; the contemporary audience still got a 'three-dimensional view' of the performance, as opposed to today's 'two-dimensional' one. The stage had a 'tiring house'[111] in the back, with a right and left entrance on its respective sides, used for coming and going by the actors, and its flat top was the place of the musicians, or serving as the 'balcony' in *Romeo and Juliet*, or in *Othello* (for Brabantio), or as the 'battlement castle' in *Hamlet*, etc. The *stage* did have a roof, which was extending well beyond the tiring house, to protect the musicians and the rich and expensive costumes of the actors[112], while there were hardly any stage-props – hence the detailed explanations at the beginning of scenes to tell us where we are or what the weather is like. The roof above the stage, also called 'Heaven', was storing some stage machinery, such as pulleys and ropes to lower 'gods' or 'goddesses' (e.g. Jupiter or Juno[113]) from above. Somewhere in the middle of the stage there was a trap-door called 'Hell', serving e.g. as a path for Old Hamlet's Ghost to come up from the 'underworld' or as Ophelia' grave.

So here is the contemporary theatre, e.g. Shakespeare's, between 'Heaven' and 'Hell' and called the 'Globe' — all these names and places still carrying rich symbolic-emblematic significance The special feature of these huge, wooden theatres was that (except for the Royal Court, who ordered private performances), all layers of contemporary society were represented, from the law-students through the merchants on market-days to the pickpockets and prostitutes. The audience were far from 'disciplined': they were eating, drinking, talking, laughing around the stage and if the play was poor they went next door to enjoy the 'bear-biting', where some hungry dogs were set on a hungry bear, chained to a pole. A performance then was something between today's rock-concert, a religious gathering and public performance, all in broad daylight, usually between 2 and 4-5 in the afternoon. There were also the so-called 'private theatres', for an aristocratic or upper-middle class, more refined or intellectual audience; the building was completely roofed and was much smaller in size, seating *c.* 300 people, and torches and candles were used to give light. For instance, there is the theatre called the Blackfriars, in which the King's Men played, besides the Globe, from 1608 onwards (e.g. *The Tempest* was written also with that theatre in mind).

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[109] Later called Prince Henry's Men

[110] Henslowe's *Diary*, recording the performance of the plays and keeping accounts, is one of our main sources of information on the drama of the age.

[111] The word 'tiring' is a derivation from the word 'attire', since the tiring house was used for changing clothes and sometimes even serving as an enclosed, private section of the stage, e.g. Prospero's cell, or Romeo and Juliet's tomb.

[112] A costume then cost more than the manuscript of a whole play.

[113] Cf., e.g., Act IV of Shakespeare's *The Tempest.*

6. 4. Seneca in Renaissance England

Our contemporary fascination with Seneca is primarily because he was so extremely influential in Renaissance England; his plays, which had been available in aristocratic circles even in the Middle Ages (Andreas Gallicus printed them in Ferrara in 1474), were adapted, translated and imitated by many, including Marlowe (e.g. *The Jew of Malta*) or Shakespeare (especially *Titus Andronicus*, the parody in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth* etc.). The first recorded performance of Seneca (*Troades*) is from Trinity College, Cambridge in 1551. There are verbatim 'quotations' from Seneca's tragedies in, for example, R. Edwards' *Damon and Pythias* (acted in 1564), from *Octavia,* which today is not attributed to Seneca, Robert Greene's *The First Part of the Tragicall Raigne of King Selimus* (published in 1594, from *Thyestes*), in the Anonymous but famous *Arden of Feversham* (published in 1592, from *Thyestes*), in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus, His Fall* (acted in 1603, from *Thyestes* and *Phaedra*) and in Jonson's *Catiline* (acted in 1611, from *Thyestes* and *Phaedra* again), but there are echoes in Marston's *The Malcontent* (1604), Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, and Massinger's *The Duke of Milan* (1620), just to mention a few examples. As far as translations into English are concerned, Thomas Newton carefully edited and published them in London in 1581 under the title *Seneca: The Tenne Tragedies*[114], including Jasper Heywood's translation of *Troas*, *Thyestes* and *Hercules Furens* (1559-1561), Alexander Nevyle's (or: Neville's) translation of *Oedipus* (1563), John Studley's translations of *Agamemnon, Medea, Hercules Oetaeus* and *Hyppolitus* (~1567), Thomas Nuce's *Octavia* and his own translation of *Thebais* (1581, translated for his edition of the plays).[115] The translators were scholars, not men of the theatre and they used the 'fourteener', lines of fourteen syllables, often elaborating descriptive passages and even adding to one play from another (e.g. from *Phaedra* to *Troades*).

What Elizabethans liked in Seneca is easy to see: he represents not only pagan, and thus, subversive mythological tales in rivalry with a Christian order but epitomises everything that was feared in England after the civil war of the Roses (the Houses of Lancaster and York): chaos, disorder, perverse cruelty for its own sake, butchery, and, most importantly, the ritualistic dissection and dismembering of the *body* (perhaps the body politic), the power of evil to destroy good without considering the possibilities of a conflict between 'good' and 'good' (perhaps more apt for tragedy), a disastrous event foretold and anticipated from the start (in *Thyestes* by the Ghost of Tantalus and Fury) – all these horrors coming from an ethical thinker and a serious politician and statesman. Seneca's philosophical authority legitimised the blood and violence on the stage. The Elizabethans did not have *dramatic* access to these stories through other sources than Seneca, they did not know the 'original' *Oedipus* (even in Roman times they used Euripides as a model) and the stories – we should not forget – are fascinating in themselves. They liked Seneca's bombastic language – which served for Marlowe as a model to compose the 'mighty line' –, his technique of creating dramatic tension with the minimum of visual aid, his suspending the action for long monologues, or furthering the plot by *stichomythia,* a line-for-line 'fencing match' (quick exchange) between two opponents and the five-act-division. It was the power of the spoken word that was truly great in Seneca: note that horrors in *Thyestes* – the actual killing of Atreus's children – is not acted out but recounted by a messenger.[116]

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[114] The modern edition of Newton's book is by T. S Eliot in 1927, reprinted in 1964.

[115] Today *Thebais* is recorded under the name *Phoenissae*, *Hyppolitus* under the name of *Phaedra*, and *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Octavia* are said to be non-Senecan.

[116] Cf. E. F. Walting, op. cit., p. 27, and pp. 306-312

6.5. Renaissance English aesthetics: Sir Philip Sidney[117]

6.5.1. Sidney's life

Ten-year-old Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) entered Shrewsbury School in 1564, in the year Shakespeare was born, so both the kind of poetry he wrote and the poetry he mused on in his *The Defence of Poetry* (alternative titles: *The Defence of Poesy, An Apology for Poetry*) represent the values of a generation before Shakespeare (Sidney had been killed in the Low Countries even before Shakespeare reached London around 1588-90). If there was a perfect Renaissance gentleman, then Sidney was certainly one: he was courtier, soldier, a great swords- and horseman, a life-long friend of the Protestant scholar-diplomat Hubert Languet and of Fulke Greville (his later biographer), and the patron of young and talented Edmund Spencer (1552-1599), who dedicated his *The Shepheardes Calender* to Sidney as "the president [great example] of noblesse and chivalree". He was one of the most versatile men of his age. When he died after 26 days of agony of a wound he received at Zutphen on 13 September, 1586 in a battle against the Spanish army, the whole of England mourned him.

He was the son of Sir Henry Sidney, thrice lord deputy (Governor) of Ireland and of a sister of Robert Dudley's, Earl of Leicester (one of the most powerful men of Elizabeth's subjects). Young Sidney went to Oxford but never took a degree and travelled a lot on the Continent: he was, for example in Paris in 1572 and witnessed to the crucial events of Saint Bartholomew's Day on 24 August (when Catherine de Medici had 50 000 Huguenots slaughtered by Catholic mobs between August and September) and visited the court of the Emperor Maximilian II in Vienna in 1574-5 with the diplomatist Sir Edward Wotton (referred to in the first paragraph of *The Defence of Poetry*). Sidney was a convinced Protestant – for a while he fell out of the Queen's favour and was condemned to political inactivity (1578-81) because he opposed the idea of her marriage with the duke of Anjou; in this period, Sidney retired to his sister's estate in Wilton and wrote a long pastoral prose romance called *Arcadia* (existing both in an old and a revised version). He is also the author of the earliest and one of the most important sonnet-cycles of Elizabethan poetry, *Astrophil and Stella* ('Starlover and Star', 1576-1582) with 108 sonnets and 11 songs in the Petrarchan tradition. Behind the sonnets there is Penelope Davereux, a coquette 'in real life' but an icy lady in the sonnets, who married, in 1581, Sir Robert Rich (Sidney got married in 1583).

6.5.2. *The Defence of Poetry*: background

The exact date of the composition of the *Defence* is unknown but in 1579 Stephen Gosson, a Puritan, published a book called *The School of Abuse* in which he attacked poets and players, and dedicated his work to "Master Sidney". Sidney did not specifically answer Gosson's attack but he had to have it in mind and hence both the title and the apologetic character of Sidney's work. So the most probable date of the composition of the *Defence* is the winter of 1579-80. The confusion with the title dates back to the fact that Sidney's book was published for the first time in 1595 but then twice, and under two different titles. William Ponsonby, chief printer of Sidney's works, got the manuscript form Greville and Sidney's sister and entered it in the Stationers' Register on 29 November 1594 but for some reason he only had it printed in 1595 under the title *The Defence of Poesie* – this is the Ponsonby-edition, which is, interestingly, a rather sloppy version, with lots of misprints, with lousy

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[117] This section id based on Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (eds.), op. cit.

punctuation etc. In the meantime Henry Olney also entered the book in the Stationers' Register on 12 April, 1595; the Olney-edition, with the title *An Apologie for Poetrie* is exemplary, including even an errata-list for an otherwise almost spotless text. Olney's copies were sold in Paul's Churchyard until Ponsonby's earlier entry was discovered and acknowledged – Olney had to hand his copies over to Ponsonby.

Sidney's main source was the Italian-French Julius Ceasar Scaliger (1484-1558), chief humanist and Erasmus's important opponent; Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem* proved to be very influential in the 17th century, too – the (misunderstood) doctrine of the 'classic three unities of time, place and action' goes back to his commentaries on Aristotle's *The Poetics* (cf. 2.4.2.). Sidney further drew on Aristotle's *Poetics* directly, on Horace, Plato (in Henri Estienne's edition in 1578), on Greek poets and (pre-Socratic) philosophers (*Poesis Philosophica* [1573] and *Poetae Graeci* [1566], both books edited and prefaced by Estienne), and some Italian theoreticians (e.g. Minturno) but he seldom uses word-for-word quotations and much of his *Defence* is his own, original thought. The great influence of the work, already after its ('double') publication in 1595, owes a great deal to the fact that Sidney was not only a well-known scholar-patron and an important diplomat-courtier, but also an eminent and experimental poet himself.

6.5.3. The Argument of the *Defence*

Sidney wishes to establish that poetry is the highest form of learning, it is a kind of "science" (source of wisdom) in the sense that it conveys knowledge well before philosophy and history appear on the horizon. He mostly quotes Greek examples (Homer, Hesiod, (legendary) Orpheus, Thales, Empedocles, Parmenides, etc. but the English Gower and Chaucer, the Welsh bards and even the Turks, who have "besides their law-giving divines" "no other writers but poets", are also mentioned. He points out that among the Romans the poet was called "*vates,* [...] a diviner, forseer, prophet" and goes on to claim, in rhetorical questions, that David's Psalms in the Old Testament are divine poems, too. Yet, of course, the poet is also a *maker*, as the Greek word *poiein* ('to make') indicates. He places poetry among the other disciplines (astronomy, geometry, arithmetic music, natural and moral philosophy, law, history, grammar, rhetorics, logic, medicine, metaphysics): these all depend on nature, too[118]. Poetry also has nature as its object and chief constituent, yet it is the only one which really *invents*, so in some ways the poet is a kind of Creator (*maker* – see above). The poet "doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature": heroes, demi-gods, chimeras, furies, etc. Yet the skill of the "artificer standeth in that *idea* or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself" (Plato's influence); "with the force of a divine breath [the poet] bringeth forth" artefacts which are "surpassing" even the "doings" of Nature. Though we should not forget about the fall of Adam, it is "our erected ('highest') wit" which tells us what perfection is, while our "infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it". In other words: Nature is fallen through the sin of Adam, so 'to follow Nature' (as the Stoic precept goes) would be to copy the imperfections of the fallen state. But the unique scope of poetic imagination ("the zodiac[119] of his [= the poet's] own wit") transcends this *essential* state of things as they *are* since wit (=rational intellect) can see ideas beyond sensory perception: this precisely relates man to God; through wit we can *see* and remember the lost *idea*s (*idein* means 'to see') of 'first Nature', which are shown to fallen (sinful) 'second Nature' (cf. Plato again). Poetry is

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[118] It is interesting that for Sidney 'abstract' metaphysics depends on nature, too; his argument is that although metaphysics deals with "second" (i.e. 'derived') and abstract notions, it takes its ultimate source from sensory perceptions, from 'direct' experience.

[119] The celestial zodiac is the perfect circle within which nature is confined.

the effort of the individual mind to bridge the [ontological] gap between our fallen, sinful state and the lost paradise, the 'golden age' of the human being.

For Sidney, there are basically three types of poetry: divine (David's Psalms, Solomon's Song of Songs. etc.); philosophical (Cato, Lucretius, Virgil's *Georgicon*, etc.) and the third belongs to the *vates*, who, "with learned discretion" does not talk about what is, was or will be but about "the divine considerations" of "what may be and should be" (Aristotle's influence) and he teaches and delights (Horace's influence). Delight moves people and makes the subject matter familiar, while teaching makes people know "that goodness whereunto they are moved".

Probably on the basis of Horace and Quintilian, he subdivides poetry into heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral poetry, "and certain others". Verse is only an ornament (but the "fittest raiment") and not an essential part of poetry. To know through poetry is to "lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to his [=the human being's]" enjoying "his own divine essence".

Sidney often comes back to the difference between philosophy, history and poetry. The philosopher – besides being sometimes difficult to understand – presents the "abstract and general", which still has to be applied. The historian is tied not to *what should be*, but to *what is*, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, so his example has not the force of the necessary consequence philosophy may provide (clearly Aristotle's influence, see below). The poet, on the other hand, performs both what the historian and what the philosopher does, respectively: "for whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in someone by whom he presupposeth it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example. A perfect picture, I say, for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of what whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as the other doth". For example, compare the definition of a rhinoceros or elephant with a well-painted picture of theirs: poetry illuminates and figures forth a speaking picture.

The stress in Sidney's aesthetics is unusually great on memory. To Sidney, the poet's method depends heavily on his ability to conceptualise ideas in such a way that they become memorable; the speaking picture of poetry is like the mnemonic image containing an entire concept or argument which the philosopher's method could only describe circumstantially. In traditional *ars memoriae*, each fact or part of an argument was translated into a striking image and next associated with a sequence of relatable places, e.g. to a room divided into many places, well and thoroughly known, from which the orator could fetch them back at any later time. These 'natural seats' have much in common with the *loci*, with the places or topics of conventional logical inquiry. The poet is "the food for the tenderest stomachs, the poet is indeed the right popular philosopher".

When Sidney separates history and poetry, he directly refers to Aristotle's differentiation in *The Poetics*, even using his terminology: poetry is more philosophical and more studiously serious than history, poetry dealing with the universal consideration, history with the particular. "Of all sciences, [...] the poet is the monarch" for he teaches through pictures, music, proportion, meter and tales "which holdeth children form play and old men from the chimney corner".

Sidney allows the "conjunction" of prose and verse, comedy and tragedy, the heroic and the pastoral. Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, handling domestic and private matters. Tragedy opens the "greatest wounds" and shows "the ulcers that are covered with tissue", that makes kings fear to be tyrants; with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration; tragedy teaches the uncertainty of this world and upon how weak foundations "gilded roofs are built" (this is truly Aristotelian again, with some elements of the Boethius (*de casibus*) tradition).

In the second part of the *Defence*, Sidney defends poetry from four common charges: 1. that there is a better way to spend time, 2. that poetry is a mother of lies, 3. poetry is the nurse of abuse, infecting us with "pestilent desires" 4. that Plato banished poets from his Republic. As to charge 1: poetry is useful, it teaches and delights (Horace!), as was demonstrated; as to charge 2.: the poet is the least liar (as opposed to the physician, for example, who promises that a certain drug would help), since he never affirms, claims or states anything. As to charge 3. (the most serious for Sidney) he says, among other things: with the sword you can kill a father but also defend the country; like everything, poetry can be abused, too. As to charge 4: Plato (whose authority Sidney greatly admires) was a poet himself in his dialogues; besides he only banished the bad poets (Sidney claims) who spread wrong opinion on the gods and who were imitating wrong opinion already induced. Plato – Sidney says – "attributeth unto poesy more than myself do, namely, to be a very inspiring divine force, far above man's wit": Sidney refers to poetic rapture and fury, which he – eventually – does not subscribe to.

In what he calls a Digression (a kind of conclusion or appendix, in fact), Sidney talks about poetry in England. He praises Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the *Mirror for Magistrates,* and Spencer's *The Shepherd's Calendar* but from among contemporary tragedies he only likes *Gorboduc* (of course, all this is before even Marlowe) "climbing to the height of Seneca's style", otherwise he is very critical of the writers of tragedy for not observing the three unities ("by Aristotle's precept and common reason" the "uttermost time" should be one day); as for place[120] Sidney remarks that in contemporary drama "you shall have Asia of the one side and Afric of the other"[121]; or three ladies walk among flowers, and you have to think it is a garden, then at the same place we hear of a shipwreck and we have to accept the same sight for a rock; "in the meantime two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers: and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?"[122]; comedies are too vulgar and the plots of both comedies and tragedies are highly implausible. Sidney's positive example is here Euripides's *Hecuba.* There is also an unnecessary mingling of "kings and clowns", i.e. of tragedy and comedy; there is but loud laughter and no proper delight taken in comedy and no admiration and commiseration as it is fit for tragedy. Delightful themes are a fair woman, good chances, the happiness of our friends, etc. It is wrong to laugh at deformed creatures, mischance, mistaken matter; to laugh at sinful things is plainly forbidden by Aristotle – Sidney says.

Finally, he talks about love-poetry, about the English language and about English verse; he praises English for being suitable for both "ancient" and "modern" poetry; the former marks the quantity of each syllable, the latter observes only number (with some regard of accent) and the chief life of it stands in "like sounding of the words, which we call rhyme".

6. 6. Thomas Kyd: *The Spanish Tragedy*

It is time to look at two of Shakespeare's early contemporaries, Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe, and to see how drama is done in practice. We know very little about Kyd's short life (1558-1594); it is certain that he was baptised in London and was the son of a scrivener and that he attended Merchant Taylors' School in London, where he was a

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[120] It cannot be emphasised enough that the doctrine of the 'unity of place' (that the space of the plot should be confined to roughly the same place, e.g. a room, or castle, or at lest one town, is an invention of Renaissance aesthetics and cannot be found in Aristotle's *The Poetics.*

[121] It is true that lots of Renaissance playwrights can be found guilty of this charge even later, cf. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine,* or Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.*

[122] Cf., with respect to "armies", Shakespeare's *Henry V.*

contemporary of Spenser's. He began his career as a translator and dramatist, most probably entering the service of The Lord Strange's Men in 1590. Between 1591 and 1593, he seems to have lived with Marlowe. *The Spanish Tragedy* (probably written in 1587) gained immense popularity, it was frequently reprinted and renewed: Philip Henslowe asked Ben Jonson for extensions in the late 1590s.

The main plot is as follows: Revenge (a character in the play!) and the Ghost of Don Andrea oversee the disasters that follow from Don Andrea's death. In a battle between Spain and Portugal, Don Andrea, a Spanish nobleman, died at the hands of Balthazar, Prince of Portugal. Horatio, Don Andrea's best friend in the Spanish Court, and Lorenzo, a Spanish nobleman are in rivalry for the credit of having captured Balthazar, and both Horatio and Balthazar soon fall in love with Lorenzo's beautiful sister, Bel-imperia. Lorenzo and the Spanish King favour the match with Balthazar for political reasons, yet Bel-imperia loves Horatio, and meets him secretly. Serberine (Balthazar's servant), Lorenzo and Balthazar stab and hang Horatio, and imprison Bel-imperia. Hieronimo, Horatio's father goes mad, but is sane enough to plot revenge: he stages a play for the combined royal courts, and the action on Hieronimo's stage turns cruelly 'real': Hieronimo stabs Lorenzo, while Bel-imperia kills Balthazar. Andrea's ghost rejoices over the happenings, putting the wicked one into Hell and the virtuous ones to the "Elisain fields'.

The structure is almost absolutely symmetrical: there is Spain *versus* Portugal; there are the "wicked" and the "good" ones, there are the victims and the victimisers. The sub-plot, featuring Serberine and Pedringano (servant to Bel-imperia), is carefully woven into main one, and they especially significantly meet when Pedringano's letter to Lorenzo falls into Hieronimo's hands.

One of the main topics of the play is illusion *versus* reality; Kyd is among the first playwrights to discover that madness is able to create, for the mentally disturbed person, a kind of 'reality' which is much stronger than 'ordinary, everyday' facts: in his madness, Hieronimo will for instance take an Old Man – who is pleading for justice on behalf of his own murdered son – to be his Horatio. (cf. III,13;132-175)[123]. No wonder that madness becomes a 'chief ally' for Renaissance drama in creating 'real-like-illusion'; it becomes one of the '*as-if*-s' against which the 'make-belief' on the stage may be tested. The play-within-the-play seems to be Kyd's invention, too: in rivalry with the very play called *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's play re-figures the 'original', as well as concluding it, making the actors act and get transformed even *within* the play.

The meta-theatrical element, the theatre's own interest in itself, is present in other ways, too: for example, there are plenty of references to *tragedy* in the text: Lorenzo tells Pedringano: "But if I prove thee perjured and unjust / This very sword wheron thou took'st thine oath / Shall be the worker of thy tragedy" (II,1;91-94); and further he says: "And actors in th' accursed tragedy / Was thou, Lorenzo, Balthazar and thou, / Of whom my son, my son deserved so well?" (III,7;41-43).

Another major theme – to return in Shakespeare's plays as well – is the conflict between the private and the public: Hieronimo'a personal misery (the loss of his son, for which revenge is perhaps justifiable) is the result of public interest (the reconciliation between Spain and Portugal through marriage), while public interest, in turn, is carefully combined with the King's and Lorenzo's private goal, which is power. Personal misery is chiefly communicated here through soliloquies of feeling (a kind of lament, telling about a conflict 'within', full of parallels and repetitions). Yet there are so-called self-revelatory soliloquies, too, in which characters talk about their real motives or goals. The manipulators of the public *versus* the private spheres correspond to the two main plot-makers on the stage: Lorenzo's

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[123] References to *The Spanish Tragedy* are with respect to the following edition: Katherine Eisman Maus (ed.), *Four Revenge Tragedies*, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 1-91.

plot is in constant rivalry with Hieronimo's, the latter eventually introducing, as we have seen, his plot *within* the plot, i.e., his own theatre of cruelty.

However, *The Spanish Tragedy* might be called a "parody of tongues" as well; as early as Act One, Scene 2 (line 161) Hieronimo ironically says that "My tongue should plead for young Horatio's right"; then, when lamenting over his son's death, he exclaims: "My grief no heart, my thoughts no tongue can tell" (III,2;67); in his play, there is a strange mixture of "unknown" languages (Latin, Greek, Italian, French) and finally he produces the 'perfect' speech-act: at the end of the play, he bites his tongue off.

Yet Kyd's play is first and foremost a revenge tragedy, one of the most popular genres in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, to be imitated by Shakespeare (*Titus Andronicus*, *c.* 1591; *Hamlet*, 1599-1600), by John Marston (*Antonio's Revenge*, 1600), by George Chapman (*Tragedy of Bussy d'Ambois*, 1604), by an anonymous author producing *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher writing *The Maid's Tragedy* in collaboration in 1611, etc. One of he most important features of the revenge-tragedy is the convention of the Ghost (here: Don Andrea), who gives some clue to a close-family member (father, son, daughter, etc.) to take revenge for him (or her). The dramaticality of revenge is twofold: on the one hand, revenge, even in its 'raw' or 'ordinary' sense, contains the necessity of planning, of plotting, of designing, of structuring in itself: the hero, whose task is revenge, inevitably becomes the 'writer', the 'stage-manger' and the 'principal actor' of the play. And since, on the other hand, it is a blood-relative (of the same *kind* as the hero) to be revenged, the revenger's contemplated act (which still counts as murder, of course) is not only totally motivated but, on the basis of an 'ancient', or 'natural' law, it seems even *morally justifiable*, yet it soon finds itself in perfect conflict with the Biblical teaching that it is only God who is entitled to take revenge and to give the just punishment for sins.

The revenge play, however, carries an inherent dramaturgical paradox as well: revenge cannot be taken immediately, even if the criminal is clearly identified: revenge should be the climax of the play; if it were done at the beginning or at the middle of the drama, the play would simply be over. This is why *delay* is invariably introduced in revenge plays: Kyd – unlike Shakespeare in *Hamlet* – first of all puts the crime (the slaughtering of Horatio) to the middle of the play and then introduces delaying factors like Hieronimo's doubts concerning Bel-imperia's letter; later suitors, an Old Man and some citizens, will prevent Hieronimo from working on his plans; for a while he hopes for public satisfaction or justice from the King, while the murder of Serebrine and the trial of Pedringano will also interfere with his plotting and taking action.

Finally, the fact that close family ties are on display helps the hero in one of the trickiest implications of drama: to recognise himself in the Other (say, a father in his son, a friend in a friend, etc.), to realise that the victimiser might become a victim himself, that a play-within-a-play can reflect the whole play, as the father might be the mirror-image of the son, etc. And the recognition is there to underscore the difference, the distance, the gap, too: for example, Bel-imperia is almost 'courting' Horatio, as an index of some confusions around the gender-roles; Lorenzo is striving with Horatio for the title of the conqueror of Balthazar as if they were both falling in love with him, etc.[124] As Oedipus' example has shown, the plotter might easily find himself to be the main hero of his own tragedy, while he experiences the split to the full.

Kyd is also a champion in presenting a conflict between love and fate: the passion of Bel-imperia towards Don Andrea, and his 'substitute', Horatio, is twice terminated in the death of the beloved one, also establishing a close association between love and death, a well-known metaphorical tie not only on the Renaissance stage (cf. Shakespeare's *Othello*, for

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[124] LORENZO: "I seized his weapon and enjoyed it first" / HORATIO: Bt first I forced him to lay his weapons down" (I,2;155-158).

example) but in the whole history of European literature. The love-scenes are often accentuated by the rhetorical device of *stichomythia*: a concise, quickly changing single-line dialogue, moving at a great pace and also figuring the split, the difference between the characters[125]. Stichomythia – amply used by Seneca, too (cf. 5.3.) – is also the ancestor of the wit-combats, the clever, quick exchanges in comedies, too.

A tragedy would not be tragedy on the Renaissance stage without mixing the tragic traits with some comic elements: Kyd is cautious in following this very common practice in *The Spanish Tragedy*, yet Pedringano and the Hangman do have "double talks", bringing about some comic effect. Yet Kyd – as many others later on – makes much out of certain tokens, like letters, a glove, or Bel-imperia's handkerchief, dipped in Horatio's blood (cf. Desdemona's handkerchief, or the significance of several letters sent in Shakespeare's plays).[126]

6.7. Christopher Marlowe

Although Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), son of a shoemaker and educated in Cambridge, was born only two months before Shakespeare, he is considered to be his 'elder', arriving earlier in London than Shakespeare, establishing and perfecting the richly poetic-rhetorical blank-verse (decasyllabic iambic pentameter) on the English stage, and creating the type of tragedy in which there is an extraordinary and highly ambitious character (an 'over-reacher') in the centre, around whom minor characters revolve[127]. Marlowe's output, up to his premature death on May 30, 1593[128] even seems to be superior to Shakespeare's until the same date. Though Marlowe did not write any comedies and only one history play (*Edward II*), his poetic talent (cf. also his narrative poem, *Hero and Leander*) and dramaturgical skills secure him a front seat even among such eminent playwrights of the age as Shakespeare, Kyd, Webster or Ben Jonson.

Marlowe's great theme is the fall of a never-compromising man, passionately in search of ultimately the unattainable – *absolute* political power, *total* revenge or *complete* knowledge –, entirely obsessed with this single idea. In the two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great* (*c.* 1587), the title-hero (a Scythian shepherd-robber) wades in blood, exterminates whole cities and butchers peace-seeking virgins. He is in war with the whole World – and thus Marlowe wins great territories over for the stage in terms of 'theatrical space', as well, taking his hero from Egypt to Babylon. *The Jew of Malta* (*c.*1589-90) is one of the first and most powerful examples of the 'revenge-play', in which Barabas, unjustly deprived of his great wealth, heaps horror on horror (including poison, massacre and a hot 'bath' in a cauldron, where Barabas ultimately meets his own end). In most probably his last play, *Doctor Faustus* (*c.*1593, though a version may have been ready by 1588), based on the well-known German

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[125] E.g.: "HORATIO: The more thou sit'st within these leafy bowers, / The more will Flora deck it with her flowers. BEL-IMPERIA: Aye, but if Flora spy Horatio here / Her jealous eye will think I sit too near. HORATIO: Hark, madam, how the birds record by night / For joy that Bel-imperia sits in sight. BEL-IMPERIA: No, Cupid counterfeits the nightingale, / To frame sweet music to Horatio's tele" (II,4;23-30).

[126] Cf. Wolfgang Clement's chapter on Kyd in *English Tragedy before Shakespeare*, London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1955, pp. 100-112 and William Empson's essay on *The Spanish Tragedy* in Kaufmann, R. J. (ed.), *Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 60-79.

[127] This structure used also by Shakespeare in his early *Richard III*, for instance.

[128] Marlowe was killed while eating and drinking with three other men at a place called the 'Widow Bull': one of his companions, Ingram Frizer, thrust a dagger into his left eye. The immediate cause of the deed was reported to have been a "quarrel over the bill", yet we have good reasons to suppose that there is more to this because Marlowe may well have been a spy for Elizabeth's Privy Council, or even a double-agent. The circumstances of his death and his whole life is wrapped up in legends, for sure.

Faust-Buch (1587, English translation in 1592), he, for the first time in the period, detects a direct connection between *tragedy* and *knowledge*, making tragedy a *condition* of the human being's insatiable desire to know. Faustus, in order to inquire into more than is humanly possible, makes a bargain with the devil, having to offer his soul to Mephistopheles, while the Good and the Bad Angels fight for and against him throughout the play. The problem of Faustus here coincides with that of the playwright: Marlowe should, at least in principle, know more, when writing the lines for Mephistopheles, than he himself does. The 'solution' is the fatal and miserable disappointment of Faustus, who soon finds out that the devil is not wiser than him about questions he would really be interested in ('are there many spheres above the moon?' II,2;35) and some questions and requests ("who made the world?" [II,2;68]; "let me have a wife / The fairest maid in Germany" [II,1;140-141])[129] cannot be satisfied because the devil is bound by his own perspective (e.g. that he cannot utter God's name or approve of the holy sacrament of marriage) more than a human being is. The childish tricks (the snatching of the meat from the Pope, or the conjuring up of Helen of Troy) only help pass the time, which, in turn, is running shorter and shorter, and amazing the German Emperor is very poor compensation for the price Faustus, according to his bond, has to pay: the eternal damnation of his soul. The 'comic' episodes (a horse Faustus sells turning into straw when it is ridden into water, Faustus allowing the swindled horse-courser to 'pull his leg off', then, upon his departure, putting his leg 'back' to its place, so, all in all, low practical joking and 'horseplay') contrast so markedly with especially the finest first scene (where Faustus gives a broad overview of the whole of Renaissance learning) and with the equally fine last scene (where Faustus desperately tries to fight time and avoid getting physically torn apart), that they might not even be from Marlowe at all.

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[129] References to the text are according to the following edition: E. D. Pendry (ed.), *Christopher Marlowe. Complete Plays and Poems,* Everyman Library, London: J. M. Dent and Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1976, pp. 273-326.

Chapter 7

Renaissance Drama II.
William Shakespeare: Histories and Comedies

7.1. Shakespeare, the playwright

William Shakespeare (1564-1611) is more than simply a chapter in the history of English literature: he has become – in one way or another – part of the cultural heritage of almost the whole world, from England to Japan, from Hungary to many countries of Africa. Shakespeare is an 'international institution' and Shakespeare-criticism an 'industry' (the state of which is also an index of the state of literary criticism as a whole), but Shakespeare is very pleasant reading, too, an author one can thoroughly enjoy both at home and on the stage. To enlist the reasons for his popularity would take another book, yet his extraordinary talent, his ability to combine a sense for dramatic structure with great poetry[130] are surely among them. In his lifetime – apart from one attack at the beginning of his career[131] – he was well esteemed and even financially abundantly rewarded[132] (he is one of the few who became considerably rich by being a man of the theatre). Yet he by no means was considered to be the 'greatest'. He was not taken to be the most outstanding poet – that was John Donne; or the most learned playwright – that was Ben Jonson; or the most prolific writer – that was Thomas Heywood (who claims to have had 'an entire hand, or at least a main finger' in 220 plays). Shakespeare, however, was noted – by Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* (published 7 September, 1598) – as "the most excellent in both kinds [tragedy and comedy] for the stage"[133]. He was called 'honest Will', and the fact that seven years after his death, in 1623, his fellow-actors, Hemminges and Condell complied his 'complete works', the famous 'First Folio'[134] may show that Shakespeare was well-liked, fondly remembered and considered to be a good colleague and friend. He was perhaps the most faithful of all playwrights and actors of the age: while others often went from company to company (the companies themselves often breaking up and reorganised again), we find Shakespeare for certain with the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594 (when the group, after a plague, made a new start) and he remained with them[135] – their name changing to the King's Men in 1603[136] – until his strange 'retirement' around 1610.

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[130] Please take note also of his *Sonnets* [*c.* between 1592-95]; and his two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* [1593] and *The Rape of Lucrece* [1594], both dedicated to the Earl of Southampton.

[131] Robert Greene, another popular dramatist, warned his fellow playwrights in a pamphlet written literally on his deathbed (title: *Groatworth of Wit, Bought with a Million Repentance*) in the autumn of 1592 that 'there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde* [parody of Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 3*; I,4;137] supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes fac totum* [='Johnny-to-do-everything'], is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in the country.' The 'Johnny-to-do-everything' most probably refers to the fact that Shakespeare was playwright *and* actor at the same time (and later even shareholder in his Company) – a rare combination then indeed. He was not a great actor, but we have evidence that in 1598 he acted in Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humor* and in 1603 in Jonson's *Sejanus* and perhaps he played old Adam in his own *As You Like It* (maybe even the Ghost in *Hamlet*?).

[132] We have evidence that on 4 May, 1597, for example, Shakespeare, for 60 pounds, purchased 'New Place' in Stratford, the second most beautiful (stone) house in town, and on 1 May 1602 he bought 107 acres of arable land in the parish of old Stratford for 320 pounds, then an enormous sum of money.

[133] Meres talks about 'mellifluous and honey-tongued' Shakespeare and adds that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine filled language if they spoke English.

[134] From the First Folio, *Pericles* is missing with respect to the now-accepted Shakespeare-canon.

[135] Shakespeare was also one of the twelve share-holders of the company.

7.2. Shakespeare's (unknown) life

   William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, most probably on 23 April[137] 1564, was the third child and the eldest son of a glove-maker, 'whittaver'[138], landowner, money-lender, and dealer in wool and other agricultural goods, John Shakespeare. Until 1577, William's father was a well-to-do and esteemed member of his town. Around 1557 he married Mary Arden, whose Catholic family could trace back their ancestry in an unbroken line to Anglo-Saxon times, something which only two other families were able to do. Yet by that time, Mary's father, Robert Arden of Wilmcote was a wealthy farmer in the Stratford-area.

  We know nothing certain about William's childhood and his younger years. He had seven siblings, yet only one of his younger sisters, Joan (b. 1569) and two of his younger brothers, Gilbert (d. 1612) and Edmund (d. 1607) survived early childhood. Gilbert became a haberdasher in Stratford, Edmund tried to become an actor in London but evidently without much success and William's interest in his brother's fate might not be more than an expensive funeral in Edmund's memory. In 1576, John Shakespeare applied to the Herald's College for a coat of arms, which would have meant the family's elevation from middle-class to that of the gentry. Yet this was granted only twenty years later, probably through William's intervention, who, by 1596, had become a successful actor and playwright. In the late 70s, John Shakespeare started to experience financial difficulties. In 1586 he was replaced on the city-council, though he had been the bailiff (equivalent of "lord mayor") of Stratford and in 1592 he is among those who do not dare to attend church for fear of being arrested for debts. There are no records on why he went bankrupt, yet it is probably for this reason that William could not go to university. He had to rest satisfied with the education he got in Stratford's grammar school, though surprisingly there are again no records on that. Yet education was not bad in a provincial yet quite prosperous market-town like Stratford. Though Ben Jonson later claimed that Shakespeare "had small Latin and lesse Greek", young William – among other things – surely went through Ovid (the *Metamorphoses* was, judging by his plays, one of his favourites), Apulueus' *Golden Ass*, Aeasop's *Fables*, Plautus, Terence and Seneca. The next record shows that on 28 November, 1582, 18-year-old William married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway and that in May, 1583, their first daughter, Susanna was born; on 2 February, 1585 their two twins, Judith and Hamnet [sic!] were baptised (the boy died in 1596). What Shakespeare had been doing before he made his appearance in the theatrical world in London (around 1590, but in 1587 the earliest) remains a secret. According to a popular legend, he had to leave Stratford because he had fallen into ill company and made frequent practice of dear-stealing in the park that belonged to a certain Sir Thomas Lucy. Another story has it that his first duty in London was to wait at the door of the play-house and hold the horses of those who had no servants. But a young and married man coming from a good grammar school[139] but without a university education, could clerk for lawyers, or teach in a 'petty' (elementary) school, or – worst – help in his father's shop. We have no idea how Shakespeare got to London, but we know that in 1587 the Earl of Leicester's Men – led by James Burbage, a joiner, who built the first permanent theatre in London, "The Theatre"[140] –, The Queen's Men and also The Earl of Worcester's Men[141] all visited Stratford. Shakespeare may well have joined one of them.

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[136] In 1603 – most probably because they were 'the best' in London – James Stuart I 'claimed them', having ascended to the throne after the death of Queen Elizabeth.

[137] The date is not certain while we only know that he was baptised on 26 April, and then children had their baptism three days after their birth.

[138] A whittaver is the curer and whitener of animal skins.

[139] At the grammar-school of Stratford, Oxford graduates were teaching, and the curriculum comprised, in the 'humanities', the usual *Grammatica Latina* by Lily; Cato; Aesop's *Fables*; the *Eclogues* of Mantuanus and Vergil; Plautus; Terence; Ovid; Cicero; Ceasar; Sallust; Livy (cf. 3.1.3), and even some Greek

[140] That was The Theatre (cf. 5.2). James Burbage later became the 'entrepreneur', the 'producer', the 'manager-and-accountant' of Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, like Henslowe was the entrepreneur for

From the theatrical point of view, Shakespeare appears in a highly competitive London,

What Shakespeare was doing in Stratford after his 'retirement' roughly between 1610 and 1616 (his death) remains an enigma. *The Winter's Tale* (1610) and *The Tempest* were – most probably – both written in Stratford and Shakespeare had a hand in *Henry VIII* (a genuinely weak or even bad play) and perhaps in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (not always accepted into the Shakespeare-canon). But he would have had plenty of time to polish and edit his own plays (something Ben Jonson actually did; he put his plays, revised and carefully edited, into a Folio). But Shakespeare seems to have had little interest in his own plays and it is difficult to swallow that the author of *King Lear* or *Hamlet* died rather as a wealthy land-owner, in the second most beautiful stone-house of Stratford ('New Place') than as a man-of-the-theatre. But perhaps he never edited his plays precisely because he *was* a man-of-the-theatre: he thought that a play existed genuinely only in its performance and not in its written version. So it fell to his friends and fellow-actors, Hemming and Condell to put one version of his plays together in the famous 'First Folio' of 1623. Most of his contemporaries considered him to be an eminent playwright, yet no one really thought that he would be 'Shakespeare', *our contemporary* as well.

7. 3. The 'history play' and Shakespeare's two tetralogies

7.3.1. The genre

The 'history play' (as opposed to tragedy and comedy) is a 'native' English development. It dramatises, even if it seems to concentrate on, e.g. 'the life of Henry the Fifth' (as the full title suggests), the life of a nation, or at least its governing class. The main character, a king (or 'monarch' or 'sovereign' or 'England', as he was also called in Shakespeare's time[142] is conceived as an endless generational succession, inheriting a political and historical situation from the ancestors and passing it down to the descendants. The history play as a genre is not Shakespeare's invention (Marlowe, Greene, etc. also wrote histories) but it was Shakespeare's idea to produce two *tetralogies*, two *series* of *four pieces* – one about the time of the Wars of the Roses (1420-1485): the three parts of *Henry VI* (*c.* 1590-1592) plus *Richard III* (1592 or 1593) and another about the times *before* the Wars of the Roses (1398-1420), comprising *Richard II* (*c.*1595), *Henry IV, Part 1* (1596), *Henry IV, Part 2* (1597) and *Henry V* (1599), with, of course, lots of other plays between these. (*King John* [*c.*1593], somewhat a parody of the first tetralogy, stands alone, and so does the 'last' play, *Henry VIII* (1613), most probably from various hands, one of them being Shakespeare's.) The great popularity of the history plays (first large 'tableaux', 'dramatised chapters' of mainly Raphael Holished's *Chronicle*[143] has to do with English people, amidst their 'changing' geographical position on the map (sea-commerce moving from the Mediterranean region to the Transatlantic one) and, further, under the constant threat of the Catholic Spanish Armada (the most decisive year being its 'defeat' in 1588) and, even further, after (and before) a civil war and desiring, most of all, *order*, were exceedingly interested in seeing themselves on the grand stage of History.[144] Not only Holinshed but other historians like Polydor Virgil, Edward Hall, Richard Grafton and, most importantly for the figure of Richard III as Shakespeare

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the Lord Admiral's Men. James's son, Richard (Dick) Burbage played all the great Shakespearean roles from Richard III through Hamlet, Othello and Lear to Macbeth.

[141] Among them, then, Edward Alleyn, later Marlowe's tragic actor, playing Barabas, Faustus, etc.

[142] Curiously, even Queen Elizabeth was referred to in official documents as 'he'.

[143] Shakespeare used the second, enlarged edition of 1587.

[144] Adventurers or 'pirates', like Captain Drake, were even in the confidence of the Queen.

portrayed it, Sir Thomas More's *The History of King Richard III* (1513-1514)[145], asked the significant question: who makes history? A great figure? The people? Fate? God?

Shakespeare was no philosopher of history: he re-presented it rather than explained it but these representations – interpreted by one group of Shakespeare-critics as part of the ideological *preservation* of the Royal order and also, by another group, as a *subversive* force in Elizabethan England – have some logic: Shakespeare starts with the pious but weak Henry VI, continues with the horrible Richard III; then, in the second tetralogy, he starts with another weakling again: Richard II. Then comes the 'making of a monarch' (Prince Hal, later Henry V, 'educated' by the remarkable and comic Sir John Falstaff), to round the series off with the 'good' King (or the imperialist?), the mature Henry V, in a campaign against France.

7.3.2. *Richard III* – God'd scourge?

Richard III is unique because here Shakespeare moves, for the first time, towards tragedy, still of the Marlovian pattern (one highly colourful character in the centre, driven by uncompromising ambition, the others mostly side-characters in the 'grand show'), also using some of the Medieval models, making Richard explicitly identify himself as Vice or Iniquity of the morality plays[146] the whole play also reminiscent of the Medieval *de casibus* tragedy, the 'fall of the great ones', according to the 'Wheel of Fortune'. But Richard is also a typically Renaissance figure in a very important sense; in being a typical 'Machiavel'[147]. In England the Italian statesman and founder of political philosophy, Niccoló Machiavelli (1469-1527) became – quite unjustly and under the influence of the distorted representation by Innocent Gentillet[148] – the symbol of ambitious, cruel, immoral, sinister, treacherous, guileful and anti-religious principles on the English stage, the Machiavel being a criminal *from choice* (cf. "I am determined to prove a villain" (I,1;30).

The play becomes a 'study' in power indeed, where the limping and physically deformed Richard is always a few steps *ahead of* the others, always wanting what his enemies want (who are far from being angels), but he wants it *before* (*earlier than*) they do. He causes the death of altogether eleven people, but here practically everyone is a murderer. His first greatest scene (Shakespeare's, Burbage's first greatest scene) is with Lady Anne, whom Richard can persuade into marriage while standing next to her father-in-law's coffin, poor Henry VI murdered by Richard himself. Here Richard's trick is a constant changing-of-the-roles: for example, he hands his sword (the 'manly weapon') over to Anne. Shakespeare's first great character is an actor *within* the play, too, playing the roles of the lover, the good uncle, the pious man, etc. to attain his single goal: the crown. Richard's greatest weapon is the *power of speech* against which the curses of especially Margaret (all coming true in the end) are too weak in the beginning. Yet when Richard is already on the throne, he has to realise that the goal has exhausted itself in its very accomplishment: the throne is in fact, empty, he has nothing to desire any more, he literally forgets his lines (in IV,4;452-455), he has nobody to rely on and one can neither annihilate a whole country, nor can he turn *totally* inhuman. Richard gets in conflict with Richard, Richard fears Richard in the famous 3rd scene of Act V (lines 178-207), where Richard can no longer separate 'deceit' form 'reality' (dreaming and being awake, love and hatred, etc.), since he has nobody to imitate (to 'conquer') now but himself. Richard enters into a 'mimetic' relationship

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[145] More's book on Richard III was later used by the other historians working on the 'Tudor myth'.

[146] RICHARD [while talking with the young Prince, later his victim]: "[*Aside*] Thus, like formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralise two meanings in one word" (III,1;82-83). All references to Shakespeare's plays are according to the relevant Arden-editions.

[147] Here Shakespeare follows the Marlovian tradition again, cf. Barabas from *The Jew of Malta,* especially.

[148] Gentillet, *Discours ... contre Nicolas Mchiauel* (Paris, 1576, no English translation is known till 1602.

with Richard, so the circle is complete and the total theatre (the 'one-man-show') collapses onto itself. He is heroic enough to face his doom but his previous comedies haunt him just as much as the ghosts of his victims: he offers his Kingdom for a *horse*. He might be 'God's scourge' (*flagellum Dei*), i.e. the punishment of England, but his great performance is diabolically attractive and Richmond (the future Henry VII), coming as a redeemer at the end of the play, is too much of a conventional 'good man' to be interesting in comparison with the 'actor's actor'.

7.3.3. *Henry V* – the conflict of Tudor myth and reality

In the national legend, it is Henry V who seems to remain the most heroic of English kings. On 25 Oct, 1415, Henry V of England stood at the head of 6000 British soldiers outside of the village of Agincourt. In this battle he lost 300 men, the French 10 000. A contemporary Parisian wrote: "Never since God was born did anyone [...] do such destruction in France." From the English point of view, Henry is the talented and intelligent 'good king', the 'good prince', Richard III's direct opposite, also in Machiavelli's sense: he leads the army himself and fights with his soldiers as a simple 'man-of-arms'; he successfully tries Scrope, Cambridge and Grey and discovers their conspiracy against him (cf. II, 2); at the end of the play he cheerfully woos Catherine (whom he would marry anyway) in one of Shakespeare's most successful wooing scenes. He gets for his people what is their due and even worries about the public and the private man within himself: in IV, 1 he goes into the camp disguised and has a long discussion with Bates and Willimas on royal responsibility: is there a just war? Is the King responsible for the death of a soldier? Should the Christian prince answer for the fall of his subjects on the Day of the Last Judgement? Henry (disguised) will say 'no', Bates will agree, but Willimas remains a sceptic. Henry is also a wonderful orator: with his 'Saint Crispin's day'-speech he is even able to create a new mythology.

However, Shakespeare was careful to put several question-marks around this success story, especially in the context of England's invading Ireland under the leadership of Essex, Queen Elizabeth's dashing young favourite, and the campaign proved to be a disaster. Patriotism started to mix with nationalism, and England's foreign policy was hotly debated again: after a period of defending herself (mostly form Spain – see the eventual defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588), England started to act like an 'Empire' (as the beginning of a long and successful period for the next three centuries), not only with respect to Ireland but with respect to the New World, too (cf. Sir Walter Raleigh founding later Jamestown and Virginia as a colony in America). Yet right at the start, Canterbury's reasoning to justify the invasion of France is so complicated that nobody can really follow it, it seems to be mere rhetoric, especially because we very well know that Canterbury fears the loss of church-property and his interests are all with the war. Further, Henry obviously enjoys playing the cat-and-mouse game with Scrope, Cambridge and Grey. Even further, from the famous battle of Agincourt, Shakespeare puts one single incident on the stage: Pistol sparing the life of a French soldier for two hundred crowns. In this subtle comparison, Henry, in a certain sense, *is* Pistol. Williams is given his glove back full of gold coins but it is never clear whether he eventually accepts it. But, most of all, through the employment of a constantly present, all-knowing Chorus, Shakespeare constantly emphasises the theatricality, the illusionary character of his theatre: "Can this cock-pit hold / The vastly fields of France? Or may we cram / Within this wooden O [the theatre, maybe the Globe already] the very casques [helmets] / That did afright the air of Agincourt?" (Prologue, 11-14), perhaps as a direct response to Sir Philip Sidney's *A Defence of Poetry* (cf. 5.4.3.). We do not know for certain whether Shakespeare read Sidney or not (it is very likely that he did), yet the Chorus provides an ironic distance between homespun glory and the spectators anyway: Shakespeare keeps myth and reality apart. The

Chorus ends the play reminding the audience of the gloomy story of Henry VI, with which Shakespeare's first tetralogy (and career) started (see 6.3.1.). Shakespeare ends, for good, the writing of history plays (which an act of the Queen prohibited anyway) by going back to the beginning.

7.4. Shakespeare's Comedies: three types

According to Ben Jonson (1572/73-1637)[149] , author of the best satirical comedies of the age, Shakespeare surpassed the greatest classical dramatists for comedy. Among his contemporaries, Shakespeare was indeed more highly esteemed as a writer of comedies than of tragedies or histories. When Hemminges and Condell put Shakespeare's plays into groups in the First Folio of 1623, by 'comedy' they meant a play ending in *marriage*, (whereas the 'terminating' metaphor of tragedy was the *death* of the protagonist or an important character. Hence for them *Troilus and Cressida*, for instance, was a tragedy.) Today, Shakespeare's comedies are further subdivided, usually into three major groups:

1.) 'green comedies': the only typical example is *As You Like It* (1599), permeated with the atmosphere of optimism; having a festive ending; including, as a leading topic, the education of young lovers (by the circumstances and by one another), to deserve each other in marriage; with the 'witty dialogues' ('wit-combats') as its organising principle, women always being the wittier. Green comedy bears the marks of the 'pastoral tradition'[150], with the elderly characters being basically benevolent towards young love (but mark the stock-character of the 'comic old father', threatening his daughter with a nunnery, etc., if she marries against his will, e.g. Egeus is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or even old Capulet and, to some extent, Brabantio, in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Othello*, respectively). Yet, with some qualifications, 'green comedies' are the probably earliest *The Comedy of Errors* (1591) (based on two Plautus-plays, with the important problem of identity, though); *The Taming of the*

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[149] Ben Jonson was born near or in London, in the May of either 1572 or 1573. He was the (posthumous) son of a clergyman. He attended Westminster School and did military service in Flanders around 1592. He worked for various companies: for the Lord Admiral's Men (Henslowe mentions him as both player and dramatist in 1597), for the Lord Chamberlain's Men (including Shakespeare), for the Children of Queen's Chapel and the Lady Elizabeth's Men. He was the hero of great scandals of the theatrical world, taking active part in the 'Theatre Warfare' (referred to also in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, beginning in the autumn of 1599 and raging on in 1600): as early as in 1597, all the theatres were shut between July 28 and autumn by the order of the Privy Council (so this time not by the City authorities but by the Queen and her ministers) because the Earl of Pembroke's Men put on a seditious and topical comedy called *The Isle of Dogs* by Thomas Nashe and Ben Jonson. Jonson spent the summer in prison. In 1600, Jonson, then already a leading writer of comedies (having established his reputation with *Every Men in his Humour* in 1598 [in which Shakespeare also played]), ridiculed the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare's Company!) in his *Poetaster*, to which Thomas Dekker replied in *Satiromastix* (performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1601). His best plays are *Volpone* (1606) and *The Alchemist* (1610), both performed by the King's Men. He became a leading figure in court masques, written for the King, the scenery designed by the architect Inigo Jones. Jonson lost royal patronage in 1631, on quarrel with Jones. In 1616 (the year Shakespeare died), Jonson carefully edited and had printed his 'complete works' in a folio.

[150] The pastoral tradition usually shows shepherds in nature, philosophising about the way of the world and love, important not only around 1599, but also around 1609-10, when Francis Beaumont (1584/5-1616) and John Fletcher (1579-1625) revived it. Both of them had written plays before, but their real success came when, in 1609, they started they collaboration in *Philaster*, to be followed by at least 5 plays written together. Being closely associated with the King's Men, they may have influenced Shakespeare's last, romance-writing period considerably. After Shakespeare's 'retirement' around 1610, his place as leading playwright and reviser of plays was most probably taken by Fletcher. It was Fletcher who collaborated with Shakespeare – perhaps with others, too? – on *Henry VIII* (1613, at one of the performances – perhaps at the very first – the Globe burnt down, the second Globe was built in 1614) and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613). *HenryVIII* is part of the Shakespeare-canon, as his 'last' play, *Kinsmen* is a debated issue.

Shrew (1592) (a typical 'battle of the sexes'-comedy, with the 'taming' of, rather, Petruchio instead of Kate); *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (a 'love versus friendship'-play), and *Love's Labour's Lost* (the most typically courtly and 'wit-combat' -comedy, disturbed, however, by the news of death at its end), both from 1593; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-96; see below,), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597, most probably between the two parts of *Henry IV*, closest to the Jonsonian 'satirical comedy', with a 'contemporary setting', and with Sir John Falstaff, popular from the *Henry IV* plays), *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598) (another 'battle of the sexes' play, yet containing strangely 'tragic' monologues, see below); the above-mentioned *As You Like It* (1599) (mostly set in the forest of Arden, 'disturbed' by the 'melancholic' voice of Jacques, though) and perhaps the finest *Twelfth Night* (1600), in the neighbourhood of *Hamlet*, with the revival of the twin-theme of *The Comedy of Errors* (but this time sister and brother, not brother-brother), and disturbingly cruel towards the end. One of the most important characters of these comedies is the Fool, in the earlier comedies played by the dancing-acrobatic-juggling William Kempe, e.g. Dogberry in *Much Ado*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*; later, when Kempe left the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare wrote comic roles for the more philosophical-contemplative-bitter-'melancholic' and elder Robert Armin, also an excellent singer, playing Feste in *Twelfth Night*, but most probably the First Grave-digger in *Hamlet* and the Fool in *Lear*, too, perhaps his first role being Jacques in *As You Like It*, where Kempe was still Touchstone.

2.) the 'problem plays' or 'bitter comedies', written *between Hamlet* (1599-1600) and the continuation of the tragic sequence (with *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*): *Troilus and Cressida* (1602) (a travesty of some episodes of the Trojan war, where Ulysses is a cunning old fox, Thersistes a cynic, Achilles and Patroclus lie idly in the same bed and Cressida turns a whore); *All's Well That Ends Well* (1603) (a parody of the love-comedy, or an anti-love farce, with a forced 'happy ending' after a series of mutual humiliations) and *Measure for Measure* (1604) (where the strange Duke of Vienna teaches everybody a lesson, mostly in disguise and arranges three marriages in the end, almost as punishment). A typical feature of the problem-comedies is *filth*, they are, according to István Géher's apt phrasing, 'comedies set on a tragic stage', with an irredeemable moral universe in their centre (redeemable, perhaps, only in the sacrifice of the *tragedies*: Desdemona, Cordelia, etc.). *The Merchant of Venice* (1596, written around the time of *Romeo and Juliet* and MND) deserves special attention: for its comic frame, it is often put among the 'green comedies', for its especially tragic fourth act (where, in the figure of Shylock, Shakespeare may have 'discovered' tragedy) it is grouped with the problem plays.

3.) the 'romances' or 'tragicomedies', written in the last phase of Shakespeare's career, (*after* the great tragic sequence). The romances are *Pericles* (1608-9, of dubious authorship, not in the first Folio); *Cymbeline* (1610) (somewhat a parody of *Lear*); *The Winter's Tale* (1611) (to some extent re-figuring the jealousy-theme of *Othello*) and the great synthesis, *The Tempest* (1611). A common feature of these is that, according to István Géher again, they are 'tragedies set on a comic stage': they are 'almost' tragedies, with some transcendental intervention (a statue 'coming to life', Prospero's magic, etc.) preventing the tragedy. They were mostly written when Shakespeare was already back in Stratford (especially the last two) and they were designed with the King's Men 'private theatre', the Blackfriars in mind (though they were most probably performed in the Globe, too). They all heavily reflect on Shakespeare's previous oeuvre (he becoming a 'classical author' for himself) and on the workings of the theatre itself: they display Shakespeare's *meta*-theatrical interest in the most obvious way. Sometimes *Henry VIII* (by no means a 'typical' history-play) is put among the romances, too.

7. 5. Shakespeare's Green Comedies

7.5.1. A Midsummer Night's Dream – and interpretation

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we may witness to some typical features of the Shakespearean (green) comedy: it is not 'satirical' in the Jonsonian vein, where the source of the 'comic' is an exaggerated human feature, anchored *in* the person him/herself, each character bearing *one* of these, e.g. Volpone avarice, Mosca impertinent wit, etc., or cf. Moliére's comedies or the later comedies of the English Restoration. It is based on the *situational* transformation of characters, i.e., the mechanical repetition of circumstances with small but decisive variations, these variations being the swapping of the positions of the characters; cf. the constant re-ordering of the pattern of young lovers, as if they were taking part in a round-dance:

Hermia and Lysander are mutually in love, while Demetrius is after Hermia, and Helena is chasing Demetrius in vain; Lysander 'falls in love' (as an effect of Puck's love-juice') with Helena, Hermia is still doting on Lysander while Demetrius is after Hermia, but still chased by Helena; Demetrius (as a result of the 'second round' of the 'love-in-idleness' flower and Puck) now also falls in love with Helena, who would be in love with him were she not suspecting mockery, Lysander is still chasing her, while Hermia (now alone, as Helena was at the beginning) is desperately trying to win Lysander back; finally, after Oberon sets things right, Lysander will love Hermia again and Demetrius will love only Helena, with the remarkable fact that the girls never change and with the uneasy 'trace' of the night in the woods on Demetrius's eyes: he only loves Helena as a result of the love-juice, which never gets wiped off. The main scene, the 'green wood' is the opposite of 'civilised' Athens, the town standing for institutions, dictating, from the start, with fatherly-monarchical authority to the young lovers. Yet the forest is not only the place of 'freedom'; it is also the world of unforeseeable, ghastly and sinister forces, a place of the 'collective libido' (Géher), where the 'dream' displays total promiscuity.

The handicraftsmen (Bottom and his gang) are at the 'bottom' of the social ladder, performing the parody of the whole play at the *end* of the play, as well as the parody of *Romeo and Juliet,* by putting on stage a *tragedy* "the very tragical mirth" of Pyramus and Thisbe (turning into a farcical comedy) at a *private* performance, while Shakespeare's play *itself* was most probably privately performed, too at the wedding of Elizabeth Carey (Queen Elizabeth's goddaughter and the granddaughter of the Lord Chamberlain[151], the patron of Shakespeare's company), and Thomas, Lord Berkeley. So Shakespeare, to please an illustrious audience, had to write a *perfect* play, including its own parody to escape (and promote) ridicule. This marks the beginning of Shakespeare's metatheatrical interest, i.e., when the theatre is about itself.

The 'bottom' meets 'the top': Bottom encounters Titania; the 'ethereal', 'airy', celestial realm is penetrated by the 'down-to-earth', well-meaning but clumsy and also highly potent world of the 'physical workers' and here transformation becomes 'translation': Bottom not only gets into a totally new (and pleasant) situation, but gets changed, transformed ('translated') temporarily into a creature with an ass-head. Both the Platonic, mystic, spiritual side of love and its physical, bodily, violent aspects are captured in one image, as a kind of 'wedding present' for the wedding night of Elizabeth Carey and Thomas Berkeley. Yet the only truly *private* (intimate) scene is precisely between Titania and Bottom again with the other fairies serving them: otherwise love is lunacy, bringing humiliation, jealousy and

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[151] Called Henry, Lord Hunsdon.

threats, till the very end, when the self-parody of the 'tragic mirth' (where the *tragic* aspect is equally important) exorcises disharmony and brings, finally, concord. However, the traces of confusion remain not only on Demetrius's eyes but also in Titana's shame in and Bottom's famous 'dream', about which he says: "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was" (IV,1;209-212). This is clearly a burlesque of I Corinthians 2:9 in the New Testament, also containing interesting references to one of the main themes of the play: the perversion of perception.

7.5.2. *Much Ado About Nothing* – an interpretation

Much Ado is one of Shakespeare's lightest – though not "greenest" – comedies: it is less mechanical, and the love-theme is more emphatic in it than in *The Comedy of Errors*; it is more elaborated than *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*;, the battle of the sexes is less violent than in *The Taming of the Shrew*; it does not end on the note of death as *Love's Labour Lost* does (though the Biron-Rosaline pair is very much a prefiguring of the Benedick-Beatrice couple). *Much Ado* does not exploit the twin-theme (as *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night* do) but it is more carefree than *Twelfth Night,* yet it is less green or "bucolic" than either *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As You Like It*: much of *Midsummer* takes place in the forest near Athens, and almost the entire *As You Like It* in the forest of Arden, and though the Prince's garden (or orchard) plays an eminent role in *Much Ado*, most of the scenes are played indoors, in the "civilised world", where the emphasis on polite conversation and social manners (in striking contrast with some spontaneous outbursts) point towards the wit-combats of the comedy of manners, so important at the end of the 17th century. When the significance of mannered conversation grows, the theme of transformation – even through magic, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – becomes less important; although Benedick, Beatrice and Hero (and, to some extent, Claudio, too) go through a transformation[152], it is less obvious and especially less visible than e.g. Bottom's or Lysander's or Demetrius's in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Less is at stake, so the plot and even the creation of the central "problems" (will Benedick and Beatrice fall in love? Is Hero chaste or not?) is more artificial: as far as these questions are concerned, "much ado" is really about "nothing", since Beatrice and Benedick can be claimed to be in love form the start, just they do not want to acknowledge it, and their mutual recognition of a certain value (which they first identify as theirs but it is recognised in *the other*) comes, to a great extent, through conspiracy and social "pressure". And Hero's chastity is so obvious that only Don Pedro and Claudio *really* believe the opposite.

Yet *nothing* has two other very important meanings here: in Shakespeare's time *nothing* also meant the female genitals (often linked to the shape of zero), while the *thing* was the male genitals. Cf. *Hamlet,* for example:

> Hamlet (to Ophelia): Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
> Ophelia: No, my lord.
> Hamlet: I mean my head upon your lap?
> Ophelia: Ay, my lord.
> Hamlet: Do you think I meant country matters? [Do you think I meant rustic doings; with a
> pun on *cunt* in *country*]
> Ophelia: I think nothing, my lord.
> Hamlet: That's a fair thought to lie between maid's legs.

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[152] Cf. "Benedick: I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster [shut me up like a clam], but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool" (II; 3; 22-24).

Ophelia: What is, my lord?
Hamlet: No thing (III; 2; 101-109).

Then – as the pun in Shakespeare's time also goes – nothing is not *nothing* at all, and, paradoxically, it must still be, because the word itself says that *no thing* is involved; being (every human being) gets engendered in a kind of non-being (in the female "nothing"), thus non-being cannot be "nothing", yet the moment one grants a kind of being to nothing or non-being, one denies non-being's (nothing's) very essence, i.e. its *being*. Thus, it might be said that "much ado" goes on about far more important *things* than simply nothing; it goes on about *the thing* and *nothing*. Even further, critics have also noted that *nothing* in Shakespeare's time could also be pronounced as *noting*: "The *o* in *nothing* was long, and the *th* could be sounded as *t* (as still in some regional or plebeian speech)"[153]. So when Balthazar apologises for his bad voice and says: "Note this before my notes; / There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting" and Don Pedro answers: "Why, these are the very crochets ['musical quarter notes'] that he speaks! / Note notes, forsooth, and nothing!" (II; 3; 54-57), he might mean: 'pay attention to the musical notes and nothing else is important' or: 'To pay attention to musical notes is to note nothing worth noting'[154] or: 'you note the notes and then you go on noting them: this is all what singing is about'. Thus, then the title *is* telling 'the truth', since the play is about various forms of right or wrong noting, spying, eavesdropping and overhearing; it is *noting* that keeps the plot moving.

The play is not noted in Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia*, which was entered in the *Stationer's Register* on 7 September, 1598, while Meres lists for example Everard Guilpin's *Skialethia*, which was registered 8 days after Meres's own work, so he was pretty up-to-date. Meres does not list *The Taming of the Shrew,* either, but he does mention a play (besides *Love's Labour Lost*) called *Love's Labour Won*, which was later on identified as an alternative title either for the *Shrew* or for *Much Ado*. Yet in 1603 a London bookseller, Christopher Hunt listed all his books and there he mentions "*loves labor lost*", the "*taming of a shrew*" and "*loves labor won*", yet by then *Much Ado* had been published (in 1600) in a Quarto-form and the title-page has the accepted title and no other. So *Love's Labour Won* must be a lost play, with a mysterious identity. Now from a speech-heading in the 1600 Quarto we also know that Dogberry's role was played by the famous comic actor, Will Kemp(e), yet he left the *Lord Chamberlain's Men* in early 1599. Thus, the play must have been written in late 1598.

The theme of the falsely accused woman (in Shakespeare: Hero) is very widespread in Renaissance literature; it can be found in the 5th Canto of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516), where the lovers are called Ariodante and Genevra. In 1566 Peter Beverly wrote a poem on the basis of Ariosto's 5th canto called *The Historie of Ariondo and Ieneura*, and the whole of *Orlando* was translated by Sir John Harington in 1591. Yet the story is there in Matteo Bandello's *La Prima Parte de le Novelle* (1554), where the lovers are Sir Timbreo and Fenicia. A French translation appeared in the 18th tale of the 3rd volume of Francois Belleforest's *Histories Tragiques* (1569).

For the Beatrice-Benedick-story, the major source is more difficult to find. The love-heretic, who finally "gives in" is popular, however, from the story of *Troilus and Cressida* (to which there is even a reference in the play [by Benedick]: "Troilus the first employer of pandars", V; 2, 30), to Spencer's "haughty Mirabella" in *The Faerie Queen* (VI/VII). Yet the most important source of social doctrine and polite conversation was Baldassare Castiglione's (1478-1529) highly popular *Il Cortegiano* (1528), translated under the title *The Courtyer of*

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[153] A. R. Humphreys (ed.): *Much Ado About Nothing. The Arden Shakespeare*, London and New York: Methuen, (1981), 1985, p. 135; cf. Stephen Greenblatt (et. al.) : *The Norton Shakespeare.* New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997, p. 1383.
[154] Cf. Greenblatt, op. cit., p. 1407, Humphreys, op. cit., p. 134.

Count Baldassar Castilio in 1561 by Thomas Hoby, and there were further editions in 1577 and 1588; even Roger Ascham recommends this work in his *The Schoolmaster* in 1570. Yet the playwright who stared to write comedies about mannered society, working out the dramaturgy of such comedies of manners was one of the "university wits", John Lily, also influencing the prose (of which there is unusually much in *Much Ado*) with his *Euphues*.[155]

There are two main groups in the play: one is led by Leonato of Messina; he has a brother, Antonio (who plays a negligible part in the play), a daughter, Hero, and a niece, Beatrice (without parents), and Hero has two "gentlewomen attending her", Ursula and Margaret. The other group has Don Pedro of Aragon as its central figure; he is coming to Leonato's court form the wars, together with Claudio, a Florentine (to fall in love with Hero), and Benedick from Padua, who, as it seems, was once in love with Beatrice but then something unspecified happened and they broke off.[156] The third group is the group of intriguers (Don John, Borachio and Conrade), yet they are loosely connected to Don Pedro, since Don John is Don Pedro's misanthropic bastard-brother. Borachio gets connected to the other group through Margaret, with whom (though, it seems, without her conspiratorial knowledge) he carries out the great deception-scene (which we only hear about but do not see). Lovers and intriguers with two well-meaning, quite good-humoured and basically encouraging senior members: this is a nice circle for a social comedy, yet one needs, besides the comic theme of love, wit, intrigue and misunderstanding, the level of boundless foolery, buffoonery and even farce as well, and this is provided by a lower level of society: Dogberry, the "master constable", and the two watches. Dogberry is self-important, full of malapropisms, and he is really making much ado, yet he significantly contributes to the plot through the discovery of truth. Borachio will rightfully say at the end: "I have even deceived your [Don Pedro's] very eyes: what your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light" (V; 224-229). *Time* and /or *sight* unfolding the truth is an important theme is comedy, and here this feat is given to real fools, who do it in their simple-mindedness and faithfulness to their duty. Folly (in the sense of Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly*) triumphs, in a special but significant way, not only over evil scheming but sophisticated wit as well.

The Friar, a minor outsider, is a wise go-between here, who does not believe in Hero's unfaithfulness and comes up, practically, with Friar Lawrence's trick from *Romeo and Juliet* at the end of the play: Hero should be reported dead, so she "dies" for the slanders and is reborn for a better Claudio.

At the beginning of the play there is peace, since the war is over, so instead of swords, tongues and even "double tongues" may fight (cf. Don Pedro's: "there's a double tongue, there's two tongues", V, 1; 166-167). Yet tongues are acknowledged as dangerous weapons which can kill even within the play: it is precisely Hero who says, half-mockingly, in the deception scene she plays with Ursula that "one doth not know / How much an ill word may empoison liking" (III, 1; 85-86) and she, in a sense, dies and gets "resurrected" in the course of the play (like Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*) but if there is no Friar trusting her innocence, if there is no Beatrice being convinced that this is just a misunderstanding, and if there is no Benedick ready to challenge Claudio into a duel (to prove his love and manliness to Beatrice as well), the epitaph Claudio reads out for Hero's tomb would become permanent. Love moves in the dangerous presence of death all the time, as Leonato's strange, almost Lear-like outburst ("Could she here deny / The story that is printed in her blood? / Do not live, Hero, do not ope thine eyes", IV, 1; 121-123) also indicates. And there are plenty of half-cheerful, half-serious references to poison, hanging, plague, burning at stake, etc.

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[155] The data of the previous two paragraphs come form Humphreys, op. cit., pp. 2-33.

[156] Cf. Beatrice: Indeed, my lord he [Benedick] lent it [his heart] me awhile, and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one. .Marry, once before he won it of me with false dice, therefore your Grace may well say I have lost it. Don Pedro: You have put him down, lady, you have put him down" (II; 1; 261-264).

Claudio falls in love with Hero at first sight and Don Pedro is ready to "assume" Claudio's part "in some disguise" and "to tell fair Hero I am [i.e. Don Pedro] Claudio", to court her and then to speak with the father, Leonato and though for a while Claudio thinks Don Pedro did all this for himself, that misunderstanding is soon cleared away and by Act II Scene 1 everything is fine: they can go to church and get married. Their love is constructed almost totally by the others, and they conventionally fit into its frame very well, so if evil Don John did not plot against them, they could not even realise, as the Friar puts it that "what we have we prize not to the worth / Whiles we enjoy it, but being lack'd and lost, Why then we rack the value, then we find / The virtue that possession would not show us / Whiles it was ours" (IV, 1; 218-222).

Don John is unhappy with the happiness of others: he has no other motivation to start the plot of intrigue than that he is a "plain-dealing villain". He is a bastard, so he is an outsider for ever, yet Conrade relates that "You [Don John] have of late stood against your brother [Don Pedro] and he hath ta'en you newly into your grace"(I, 3; 19-21), yet his answer is: "I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace" (I, 3; 25-26) and he emphasises his independence and his inability to flatter. A typical "bad guy", perhaps a Vice-figure, who is only there to mar the others' joy. Borachio is ready with the plan: "offer them [Don Pedro and Claudio] instances, which shall bear no less likelihood than to see me at her chamber-window, hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term me Claudio [sic!]; and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding – for in the meantime I will so fashion the matter that Hero shall be absent – and there shall appear such seeming truth of Hero's disloyalty that jealousy shall be called assurance and all the preparation overthrown" (II, 2; 41-50). This is a rather precarious plan, especially because it is hard to see what Borachio means by "Hero shall be absent" and what "proof" there would be of her disloyalty if Claudio and Don Pedro hear Margaret-Hero call him "Claudio". Perhaps he means that Hero should not discover him and Margaret in the garden, and maybe Margaret has to call him Claudio because then Claudio will think that the wooer enacted him, which might be even a graver sin. But it is obvious that it is *the secret meeting in the night itself* which is to mar Hero's reputation and Claudio and Don Pedro are just as readily gullible as it is accidental that the two watches overhear Borachio boasting to Conrad how well his plan worked, and how much money (a thousand ducats) he has earned. It is also significant that Borachio uses the word *fashion*, which here means 'shape', yet the play, in its social manners and speech, is much dominated by *fashion* as 'what is in vogue'.

The main plot – obviously – is the series of wit-combats between Beatrice and Benedick, with important turning points in Act II, Scene 3 and Act III, Scene 1. In II; 3, Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato, very well knowing that Benedick is hiding "in the arbour", tell how much Beatrice is in love with Benedick. The plan works; Benedick says "This can be no trick. The conference was sadly borne [seriously conducted]. They have the truth of this from Hero" (II; 3; 211-213), so here it is precisely Hero's trustworthiness on which Claudio and Don Pedro built their plans. The next step is taken by Don Pedro again: "Let there be the same net spread for her [Betarice]" (II, 3; 205), but before that Benedick meets Betarice. Now Benedick already thinks that Beatrice is in love with him, and immediately starts to read a "double meaning" into Beatrice's sentences: " 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come to dinner' – there's a double meaning in that. 'I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me' – that's as much as to say, 'Any pains that I take for you is as easy as thanks'" (II; 3, 248-252). Beatrice's turn to be tricked into love comes in III, 1: Margaret is "used" here by Hero and Ursula; Margaret calls Beatrice "into the arbour" to "overhear" their conversation, and, of course, the topic is how much Benedick is in love with her. Here gossip, and noting this gossip, produces what the love-juice does in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Beatrice concludes that she was too proud and adds: "For others say thou dost deserve, and I /

Believe it better than reportingly [better than as mere rumour]". There is plenty of the constructed, coming from the outside, from society, even in the love between Benedick and Beatrice; perhaps – and especially in contrast with Claudio and Hero – their example testifies to the happy fact that even in spite of social arrangement, recommendation and even conspiratorial fabrication, two people can still find real love.

So the whole comedy turns on the wheels of words and belief. At the beginning Beatrice charges Claudio with having "caught the Benedick" (I; 1, 81), as if her future bridegroom were a disease; now in the play belief is like a disease, and most of it is false. Words are able to create a reality and then "real" reality catches up with it (as in the case of Beatrice and Benedick, in the sense that they eventually will admit they are in love), or created reality must finally be erased, as in the case of virtuous Hero. Two really theatrical and courtly factors play additional roles: disguise and dance. There is a dance at the beginning of the play (when Don Pedro proposes to hero in Claudio's name and they all wear masks) and at the very end (before that, both Hero and Beatrice also come out in disguise). And there is the disguise of Margaret, giving rise to false accusations. Everybody unmasks in the end: Hero takes off the mask of disgrace, Claudio the mask of disbelief, Beatrice that of scorn and pride, and Benedick gets rid of the bachelor's mask, always worrying about horns. Hero and Claudio markedly do not woo each other and they are very reticent: they have to learn to speak. Beatrice and Benedick talk far too much and they constantly abuse each other: they have to be "silenced with a kiss". Words are double-edged, as swords: they tell the truth and they create false reality. Do we ever get to know *reality*, then? Benedick says in Act II, Scene 1 (189-190), after the fist dance-and-mask-scene: "But that my Lady Beatrice should know me, and not know me!" And earlier he made reference to "an old tale" (a kind of Prince Blue-beard story) when mocking at Claudio's love; the tale has a sort of "refrain" coming back again and again in the course of it: "It is not so, nor 'twas not so: but indeed, God forbid it should be so". The last phrase ("God forbid it should be so") is a wish one might utter at the beginning of a tragedy, though there it turns out that God generally does not "forbid that it should be so". But "It is not so, nor 'twas [it was] not so" is strangely true of all stories of the imagination, and especially of comedy, (this is also the key in which metaphor works): a semblance is created that shows an aspect of reality (of the "real world", as we know it), yet this aspect of reality is precisely of that kind in which this semblance is *different* from this reality, while the semblance is, in its being there, in its being constructed, still *real* in the sense that we are able to interpret it for our world (for the "real world"). And the double negation in "nor it was not so" is very significant: as regards the work of imagination, we do not say "it was so" but: "nor it was not so", only *implying* that *it was so*.

7. 6. Shakespearean problem plays (bitter comedies)

7.6.1. *The Merchant of Venice* – a problem play, with question marks

> I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his suffrence be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction. (III,1;49-61)

– Shylock tells Solanio and Salerio (two practically indistinguishable characters) at the beginning of Act III. This is one of the most often quoted passages[157] of *The Merchant of Venice*, a truly dramatic monologue, heavily *laden* with rhetorical questions, which give it an agitated, yet at the same time also a bitter, heavy, sorrowful, almost *leaden* ring. The reason for this leaden feature of the soliloquy is partly the predominance of the passive voice (*fed, hurt, healed, warmed,* etc.) and partly the fact that the 'stimulus and response'-pairs (*prick-bleed; tickle-laugh; poison-die*) put irresistible, almost automatic reactions on display, with a heavy emphasis on human defencelessness. This defencelessness is given a twist in the pair 'wrong' and 'revenge': 'revenge' is the only truly active verb in the whole sequence but because of the analogous syntactic patterns which have preceded it, it is presented as a human response which is just as 'normal' or "natural" as laughter or death. It is on this 'normalcy' and 'natural quality' that the legitimacy of revenge is based, the analogous syntactic patterns, now mostly in the form of conditional rhetorical questions, implying a kind of equality between Jews and Christians, as if they were weighed against each other in the respective two pans of a carefully balanced pair of scales and the pointer of this scale were the very word 'if'. Finally, Shylock puts more weight on **his** revenge in the form of the verb "better', which carries the old adjectival comparative degree in itself.

However, even the initial equality is anchored, from the beginning of the monologue, not in identity but in likeness and resemblance and, thus, paradoxically, in difference, too. In weighing, one may establish quantitative equality between lots of substances (e.g. between gold, lead, silver, or even human flesh), yet this by no means implies that the substances in question would necessarily be the same in any other respect than this single quantitative one. In observing human behaviour, one may read the same bodily reactions (bleeding, laughing, dying) as originating in organs which are at least generically the same, but it is precisely the hiddenness of the "inner', one of the indices of our separatedness, which will allow for the possibility that we might be wrong: the same result will not automatically guarantee the same origin. Both you and I may well share Shylock's inventory – eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses, etc. – , we may both be exposed to the same internal and external circumstances – to pain, illness, heat, cold, etc. – yet, on the one hand, how can I know whether your eyes *really* perceive things as mine (since your eyes are, ultimately, yours and mine are mine), how can you *ever* know if what I feel is *truly* pain or not (since you can never feel *my* pain) and how can we know, on the other hand, whether the other, with all his or her "normal outward reactions on display' is really and truly a human being inside, too, and not, for example, an automation, cleverly disguised as a human being?

I neither claim that these would be the *only* questions of *The Merchant of Venice*, nor that there are answers to *all* of them in it. These questions rather invoke, to a certain degree, the context in which Stanley Cavell deals with the play in a brief but highly challenging section of his famous *The Claim of Reason*, a context I would wish to share with him to some extent in what follows below. As the first instance of this shared context, I wish to claim that the measure and the extent of quantitative and qualitative sameness, difference, resemblance and, thus, personal identity are central themes of the play, as also symbolised by the "balance' (IV,1;250) Shylock has ready to hand in the trial scene. I will further claim that sameness and difference, identification and separatedness are subject to constant and, more importantly, to

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[157] E.g. Stanley Cavell, who briefly but very originally deals with *The Merchant of Venice* in his *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) quotes the passage in full (p. 478), and so does Sarah Kofman in her psychoanalytic study of the play: 'Conversions: *The Merchant of Venice* under the Sign of Saturn' (Transl. by Shaun Whiteside, In: *Literary Theory Today*. Peter Colier and Helga Geyer-Ryan eds., London: Polity Press, 1992, pp. 142-166), p. 161. Cavell makes it a starting point, Kofman a kind of conclusion. As it will become clear below, I am heavily indebted to both analyses.

shockingly and even humiliatingly *public* interpretations and reinterpretations, thematising *choice* more than in any other Shakespeare-play; "O me, the word 'choose'!' – Portia exclaims as early as in her first longer monologue of the drama but "hazard' (cf. II,7;11; II,9;16 and 20; III, 2;2) or "lottery' (cf. I,2;25; II,1;15) – as they also like to call it – does not only involve the three caskets and their internal difference from, or resemblance to, Portia but, for example, Bassanio's identification with Antonio *or* Portia, or the sameness and the difference between Shylock and Antonio – the other "outsider' – too. Even further, I would like to claim that the interpretations and reinterpretations go along three basic attitudes to meaning, and that the three fundamental semantic strategies the main characters follow might be correlated with three "magic objects' of the play: the *casket*, the *ring* and the *bond*, respectively, each implying the semantic attitude in question by its very nature, and thus, to some extent, 'carrying' this attitude "in itself', too. I am more than aware that this three-fold division sounds a bit too neat and that it does not, by any means, "exhaust' the "meaning' of *The Merchant of Venice.* Yet I hope they will prove to be at least a convenient starting point.

As regards meaning, I, as a first step, would like to return to Shylock's monologue for a moment. It is in no way surprising that it is Shylock, the "stranger', the "alien', in his overall deprivation and humility, who is brought to the point where he simply *has to* give an inventory of the most basic human functions, capabilities and means in order to establish some bond between Christians and himself. One might read his list (*eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses*, etc.) as one that is going through the prerequisites of meaning, the "stage setting' before the act of signification, the necessary, though not necessarily the sufficient conditions of being able to make sense. Yet it is remarkable that the word *means* occurs in this central monologue, too ("healed by the same *means*'), a word which in another context is connected with the very word *meaning* as early as the first scene in which we hear Shylock speak, the connection amounting to a pun through their proximity:

> My meaning in saying [Antonio] is a good man is to have you understand me that he is sufficient. Yet his means are in supposition (I,3;13-15)

Indeed, in *The Merchant of Venice*, *means* ('method', 'instrument', 'money') is often taken to be the prerequisite of coming into a position to make and interpret somebody else's *meaning*: Bassanio's borrowed means will enable him to take his stand in front of Portia's caskets; for him means mean the possibility to mean at all and he will confess to her that he has "engaged' himself "to a dear friend, / Engaged [his] friend to his [his friend's] mere enemy, / To feed [his] means' (III,2; 260-263). Bassanio lives, exists by Antonio's means, which was offered to him, in the 136th line of the drama, with the following words:

> ...be assured
> My purse, my person, my extremest means
> Lie all unlocked to your occasions. [I,1;135-137]

Yet the play works inversely, too: the successful choice of the meaning of Portia's father does not only mean choosing Portia[158] but gaining her (seemingly infinite) wealth (means), too, and the right or wrong interpretation, the coming into the actual possession of meaning and, thus, the possibility of its manipulation will literally create and undo human existence: having chosen the right casket, Bassanio could in principle pay "he petty debt' (III, 2;306) to Shylock, and Portia, having gained meaning in Act IV can deprive "the Jew' – in his very interpretation – of his life / When [she does] take the means whereby [he] live[s]" (IV,1; 371-372). Finally, means is even ***identified*** with meaning, i.e. words are interpreted as instruments by Antonio, when, in the trial scene, he tries to convince the others about the futility of the venture to "alter' (IV,1;257) Shylock:

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[158] Cf. Nerissa's words to Portia: '...who chooses his [Portia's father's] meaning chooses you [Portia]' (I,2;27).

You may as well do anything most hard
As seek to soften that – than which what's harder? –
His Jewish heart. Therefore I do beseech you,
Make no more offers, use no farther means. (IV,1; 77-80)

Means means meaning and meaning means means in the play: the question is where a character imagines means to be in order to gain meaning, and *vice versa.*

The first possibility crystallises around Portia's three caskets. Here the required procedure Portia's father blessed or cursed his daughter and her suitors with, models one of our most fundamental – and perhaps most common – hermeneutical practices: because meaning is hidden, because it is inside, we have to find it, to unlock it, to poke it out by staring from the outside, where we are initially positioned, and what we are given are signs, readable (decipherable) on the surface of the very things calling for interpretation. Thus the objects (the caskets) are not "dead' in the traditional sense of the word; they do give a "shining', they even "talk' in a certain way, their "openings', their "mouths" being partly the conventional words they bear as inscriptions (a sentence, a label on each), and partly the traditional associations going with the respective metals – gold, silver and lead – they are made of. Thus, within a traditional system, the six signs – i.e. the three labels and the three metals – form a small system, where each member will have to be interpreted both vertically and horizontally: the inscription and the metal will be compared along the paradigmatic (vertical) axis and the inscription-and-the-metal (the caskets themselves), put side by side, will create the syntagmatic (horizontal) axis. The choice itself will be nothing else but stopping at one of the items along the syntagmatic axis but the speciality of this particular system is that here the success or the failure of interpretation is literally encoded in the object itself: inside there are further signs ("schedules" (II,9;54), "scrolls" (II, 8;64; III,2;129), "pictures" [II,7;11], "forms" ['images', II,7;61], "portraits" [II,9;53], "counterfeits" [III,2;115] and 'shadows' [III,2; 127, 128]) which will not only let the choice-maker explicitly know if has picked the right casket or not but will also instruct him as regards the reasons for his good or bad selection. Thus this semantic system is – at least at first sight – is an ultimately happy one: there *is* a correct interpretation, so the decoder is not sent along the 'endless chain of signifiers' because there is a terminal, 'an unlessoned girl' (III,2;459) with a house and servants. To what extent Portia is decipherable herself and what lessons she *really* holds in store is another question. But, after the correct choice, the referential link from the inside of the leaden casket to the real woman is easy to find: it is ensured by the close resemblance of her portrait and herself.[159]

Thus, as regards the three caskets, the richness of interpretation depends on how far one ventures to go along the horizontal and the vertical axes. What the suitors say during their hermeneutical quests may already count as lessons in interpretation.. The point, of course is, that their choice will qualify them: they will find as much as they have brought, they will recognise themselves both in the outside and the inside of the caskets. Yet this is far from simple, precisely because here one has to guess *somebody's* (Portia's, Portia's father's) specific meaning, which has been placed into the caskets earlier and which cannot be altered in the hermeneutical process itself: the interpreter may ultimately have no influence with his signifiers on the signified. Each casket gives a response but there is no dialogue; a casket is more like an automat rather than the model of the secret of a human being. Thus, although there is only a single correct meaning, there is no such thing as a single correct *interpretative strategy* either logically, or morally, or even ontologically. Who could tell, for example, whether it is any 'better' (more justifiable, more ethical, more revealing, etc.) to see an

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[159] The close resemblance between Portia's 'counterfeit' and her face is underscored by Bassanio several times: 'What demi-god / Hath come so near creation? Move these eyes? Or whether, riding on the balls of mine, / Seem they in motion?' (III,2;115-118).

inscription as being in harmony or in conflict with the traditional interpretations of the metal it is attached to? Does the outer conceal, or does it already communicate the inner? It can, of course, do both. Gold goes with the words 'gain', with 'many' and with 'desire': ''Who chooses me shall gain what many men desire' (II,7;5)[160]. Silver carries 'get', 'much' and 'deserve': 'Who chooses me shall get as much as he deserves' (II,7;7). It is only lead whose inscription does not promise anything to the choice-maker in exchange but rather puts a heavy demand on him: 'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath' (II,7;9). The key-words here are 'give', 'hazard' and 'all'. Should one therefore immediately dismiss gold on the grounds that countable *many* and uncountable, yet still quantifying *much* are less 'valuable' than the infinity of *all*? But *many* will only mean the 'common spirits' and 'the barbarous multitudes' (II,9;31-32) for Aragon; he, the aristocrat wishes to emphasise individual dignity, bought by one's personal merit, irrespective of his origins ('How much low peasantry would then be gleaned / From the true seed of honour' [II,9;45-46]). Is that wrong? And if it is, in what sense? Only in the sense of Portia's father? For the Prince of Morocco 'many' means precisely 'all': 'Why, that's the lady! All the world desires her.' (II,7;38). Or should we blame the Prince of Morocco for choosing gold because he should know that it is the object of greed and, thus, of strife and destruction, as it is – perhaps – encoded in the word 'gain'? One may even point out that he, whose very entering speech warns against mixing up outward appearance and internal value – the blackness of his complexion and the redness of his blood[161] – should not be misled by the 'glistering' (cf. II,8;65) substance. But gold is also the traditional colour of the sun, of the source of life and it is precisely this 'spiritual' sense which gives it the Platonic value.

> A source of light and radiance, it is a symbol of fertility, and [...] it is associated with the ram, the emblem of generative potency. The golden fleece is the insignium of the master and of initiation.[162]

– Sarah Kofman writes in her highly learned essay 'Conversions: *The Merchant of Venice* under the Sign of Saturn'. One could even argue that Morocco, the perfect and polite gentleman, chooses gold not only because he is the 'neighbour' and the 'near bred' of the sun (cf. II,1;3) ('A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross' [II,8;20]) but because for him the traditional evaluation of his skin *versus* his blood is only acknowledged but not approved of: he chooses gold precisely because he believes that things are really what they are when they are of the same substance through and through and where there is no alienation between what is inside and outside. Kofman even points out that gold, silver and lead, in the alchemist interpretation of Shakespeare's time, are far from excluding one another:

> The alchemists, in particular Paracelsus, are actually aware of this: lead is the water of all metals; anyone aware of its content would swiftly have abandoned all other materials to work with lead alone, for white lead implies the possibility of transmuting the properties of one body into that of another and the general properties of matter into the quality of the mind. Lead symbolizes the most humble base from which a transforming evolution can emerge. By means of the transmutation of lead into gold, the alchemists sought symbolically to escape individual limitations in order to attain collective and universal values. A 'binding agent' between all metals, it is also – and this is its other face – the symbol of unshakeable individuality, and is therefore linked to Saturn, the god of separation whose scythe cuts through all bonds, all ties. Lead, like Saturn, is therefore the condition both of all connection, transformation, creation, and of all mortal separation,

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[160] I give the locus according to the first occurrence of the inscriptions – they are quoted several times.

[161] Cf. Morocco's entrance: 'Mislike me not for my complexion, / The shadowed livery of the burnished sun, / To whom I am a neighbour and near bred. / Bring me the fairest creature northward born, / Where Phoebus fire scarce thaws the icicles, / And let us make incision for your love / To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine' (II,1; 1-7).

[162] Kofman, op. cit., p. 151.

division and dissociation. Choosing lead therefore means, as the phrase on the casket says, choosing to 'give and hazard all [one] hath', for it means opting for the choice that involves the risk of catastrophic death, while the choice of gold – or of silver – for anyone who misrecognizes their profound kinship with lead, is an illusionary choice of incorruptibility, a refusal of risk and hence of choice.[163]

Kofman goes a long way along the line of the line of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes: while reading Freud's seminal essay entitled 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' (1913), she allows not only for an alchemy of metals but for the alchemy of words, too. Freud remarks that there is something forced in Bassanio's speech with which he chooses lead instead of gold or silver; indeed Bassanio never confronts the inscriptions of the metals, at least not publicly and instead of his reading them out we hear a song in which the three first lines rhyme on *lead* (*bred, head, nourished*). Further, the third inscription says 'Who chooses me must give and hazard all he hath' – but what does B. have? All his means, as we pointed out, are from Antonio. So is there a hazard at all? Yes, Antonio's (but not B's !) heart but Portia soon realises that even Antonio's heart is already in a certain circulation, not only of blood (about which Renaissance people learnt more and more) but also in what we may call *'social' meaning*, as represented by the circular shape of the *ring.*

According to the 'ring-interpretation' of meaning, the key to understanding is not transformation, not change (as the alchemy of words allowed) but exchange: meaning circulates like social energy, it is once yours, once mine and there is a rate of exchange decided by the market. If it is true what W. R. Elton claims in his 'Shakespeare and the Thought of the Age' that 'Shakespeare's age participated in the transition between the older 'use value', by which price was conceived according to a form of intrinsic utility, and 'market value', price rising or falling according to scarcity or plenty of the commodity', then transition from the casket to the ring may illustrate precisely the transition Elton talks about, since the value of the respective caskets turns precisely on the fact that each will have meaning only if each remains unopened, intact – they have value *in* themselves, which is to be found. In the ring-interpretation, the very nature of meaning is that it is public, it is precisely one's duty to touch it, get it, send it on, etc. The ring-interpretation has at least two consequences: that meaning is relative or arbitrary; this is emphasised by Shylock when he says 'What if my house is troubled by a rat, / and I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats / To have it baned {poisoned} ?' (IV,1;43-45) – meaning is measured along a scale of values but the rate of exchange is decided by the individual. So meaning can do three things: it remains on a certain level, or it grows, or it wanes. This is precisely the subject-matter of the 'ancient grudge' between Antonio and Shylock, Shylock arguing for the legitimacy of the growth of money, of the 'well-won thrift {profit, interest}' (I,2;42). Acc. to Shylock, gold and silver are ewes and rams and they should 'breed fast' (I,3;93). The emphasis is on continuity, on cause-and-effect, on the unbroken line (notice that in the play only Shylock and Old Gobbo have children, Antonio, who objects to the 'barren metal' 'taking breed' is described as a 'tainted wether of the flock', a 'castrated ram'.) Jessica is ready to give her mother's ring for a baboon, Shylock thinks this is blasphemy, so for Shylock there *is* an absolute limit. But Portia will catch Shylock with the theory both of them are well acquainted with; Portia says, 'Nothing is good, I see, without respect {reference to context}' (V,1;98); when she tells Shylock (disguised as Balthazar) that he can cut a pound of flesh from Antonio's body but without a jot of blood, she simply pays attention to the context of flesh, takes the consequence, the result, the cause-effect relationship between flesh and blood into consideration. Now does blood belong to the human flesh (does flesh contain blood naturally) or is it already a different thing, something that is additional or external to it? In a way Portia undermines here all human communication

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[163] Kofman, op. cit., p. 152.

because it is simply impossible to spell out everything, even literal meaning can only be interpreted against a relative set of background assumptions.

Shylock is well-acquainted with the ring-theory of meaning but, as we saw, there is an absolute limit for him. According to Shylock there is an absolute form of meaning and that is the *bond*, which he mentions seven times in Act III, Scene 3: 'I'll have my bond, I will not hear thee speak / I'll have my bond...'. The insistence on the bond putting out human speech ('I'll not hear thee speak') is symbolic of the divine nature of the bond, which is the covenant: the wish to weigh the pound of flesh on a pair of scales still belongs to the ring-interpretation of meaning but in wishing to *carve* it, the bond recalls Genesis 17:13: 'the covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant'. Shylock's conception of meaning is also connected with material. But this material is not shining gold or pale silver or base led but 'carrion' flesh. The instruction with which Shylock has 'bettered' the instruction he has so far learned (see the first monologue above) is that besides the equal exchange value ('And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot' (Deuteronomy 19:21) there is the possibility of 'cutt[ing] it off / Nearest the merchant's heart', that meaning is no meaning until it is not only dependent on the bond, but it is the bond, the covenant itself, the covenant which is 'in your flesh': 'And ye shall the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you' (Genesis, 17: 11). The commandment of which the greatest is 'And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might' (Deuteronomy, 6:5) is in the heart because 'the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live' (Deuteronomy, 30:6): 'But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord. I will put my law in their inward parts, and will write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people' (Jeremiah, 31:33). Shylock's insistence on the bond might be absurd but is it not equally absurd to swear (as Bassanio does) that 'But when this ring / Parts from this finger, then parts life from hence, / Oh then be bold to say that Bassanio's dead' (III,2;182-184), and to give the ring away at the request of Antonio immediately? Shylock with the bond stands for the violence and the singularity of meaning, where the human being is simply and inseparably one with meaning because it is written, and not by the human being, into his/her flesh, into his or her heart.

7.6.2. *Measure for Measure* – a more typical problem-play (bitter comedy)

Measure for Measure is a typical bitter comedy – Shakespeare almost shatters the "normal" limits of the comic form. He used Giraldi Cinthio's Italian novella as a source (the novella on the story of *Othello* is from Cinthio's book, too) but one version of the story can be found in George Whetstone's Promos and Cassandra (1578), which Shakespeare surely knew. The title of the play is from Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount": 'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again' (Matthew, 7:1-3).

Whereas in other comedies marriage automatically entails a happy union, in MM marriage is only represented through sex, and sex is shown as the darkest and filthiest thing the human being is capable of (including Claudio and Juliet, the latter pregnant form the former). It is not marriage but prostitution which flourishes in Vienna and syphilis a familiar ailment.

The conflict is between charity and desire, between desire and sacrifice, and sacrifice and selfishness. There is a constant urge to exchange one value for another value of the same kind (a woman for a woman in bed, a head for a head) but this hardly brings about redemption. The question marks are even more numerous by the end of the play: why does the

Duke trust Angelo when he knows that his deputy has an (almost) wife, why does the Duke lie to the others, why does he escape the responsibility, why does he torture Claudio, Juliet and even Izabella? Some critics claim that he is a mere tool to serve dramatic purposes (the "missing" director), some argue he is an allegory of God, some consider him to be a political schemer, and some even suggest that he is mad (István Géher). The play surely negates that marriage could establish any kind of solution or union – marriages are ordered at the end of the play as punishments to the respective men of dubious couples. One wonders whether Izabella's muteness to the Duke's proposal is a token of such a consideration. The immoral universe cannot be redeemed because no one is willing to perfrom – and no one is worthy of – a sacrifice.

7. 7. Shakespearean Romance – *The Tempest*

7.7.1. A synthesis?

Yet Shakespeare changed genre and went on. One possible way out for him was to transfer the *whole* world on display into the realm of the *'as if'*, i.e. to consciously and deliberately *reflect* on the very medium in which his drama had always been: the *theatre* itself. In his last period, Shakespeare clings to the very order and coherence which, to a greater or lesser extent, has always organised his plays: the *plot* and the *theatre*, making these themselves become the subject matter of his dramatic works (see the details of the genre of the *romance* in the general characterisation of comedy). In *The Tempest* (1611), his best romance, he creates 'the metaphor of metaphor' – not only by furnishing the stage with a fairy-world, where, through magic, through the power once held by Puck and Oberon, everything is possible but also by constantly *reflecting* on his own oeuvre, by employing a great number of the motifs he once used. Thus *The Tempest* can also be read as a 'running commentary' on his own 'complete works', a strange play, in which Prospero, the playwright and stage-manager, starts a great many plots and then impatiently brushes them aside, as if he were assuming that his audience are familiar with the topic and the outcome anyway. Here we are in the realm of the comedian performing in the convention of comedies: since everybody knows the jokes, he need only refer to a gag by number and the house breaks into laughter (Mc Donald). These 'gags' or 'triggering signals' function almost as 'footnotes'; as if Shakespeare-Prospero were implying: 'for an elaborate treatment of the *tempest*, see my renowned *King Lear*, Act III, Scene 1, for a particularly illuminating study in the problem of regicide, see *Richard III* and *passim*, especially *Macbeth*, Act I, Scenes 5-7 and Act II, Scenes l-2, etc.; for the problem of young lovers, how they educate each other to become not only lovers but also friends, see *As You Like It*, for the problem of the Stranger (now: Caliban), see Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* or *Othello*, for the question of drunkenness (Trinculo, Stephano) see selected passages of *Twelfth Night* (Sir Toby and Sir Andrew), for the problem of brother-rivalry (Prospero-Antonio) see, for example. Edgar and Edmund in *Lear*, for the question whether an intellectual (Prospero) makes a good Prince or not see *Hamlet* (note that Prospero and Hamlet are the only intellectual-protagonists in the whole oeuvre), and so on. Of course the question of the *metatheatre*, the theatre-in-the-theatre and the theatre-about-the-theatre had been an important topic all along, too (in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – the performance of the artisans; in *As You Like It* – 'All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players', [III,7; 139-166]; in *Henry V* – the strange Chorus asking: 'can this cockpit hold / The vastly fields of France?' [*Prologue*, 11-12]; in *Hamlet* – 'to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature', [III,2;25-26], or see the 'poor player', the 'walking shadow' in *Macbeth* above. Yet now the *whole* play is devoted to the workings of the theatre.

7.7.2. Structure

Shakespeare had another good reason to make the theatre his main target: his company, the King's Men, undoubtedly the best and richest group of players of the time, could now afford to perform in the smaller and indoor Blackfriars as well, also influenced by the great fashion of the courtly masque-tradition (the whole Royal Court in expensive costumes and in masks, promenading and dancing, arranged particularly by Ben Jonson and the architect, Inigo Jones). *The Tempest* contains two masques (the banquet-scene, III,3; and the grand performance of Nymphs and Reapers for Miranda and Ferdinand in IV,l) and an anti-masque (a parody of it, in IV,2, where Ariel and Prospero are chasing Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano as dogs). Yet this fairy-tale-theatre-masque world is cunningly made 'real' by Shakespeare: he makes fancy (imagination) coincide with 'reality' by making the time necessary for the play's performance (i.e. audience-time, measurable by our watches) coincide with the time Prospero needs to bring his plot to completion (audience-time = plot-time; and please notice that Shakespeare very seldom observes the classic 'three unities' of place, time and action). Here the play is confined to the Island: Prospero insists that 'The time 'twixt six and now [= 2 or 3 in the afternoon] / Must by us [= Prospero and Ariel] be spent most preciously' (I,2;240-241) and the plot-lines are tightly held together by Prospero and all meet at the end of Act V. In fact there are three plot-lines: the characters of **Plot A** are Gonzalo, Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian (Alonso's Court); the hero of **Plot B** is Caliban, with the minor characters of Trinculo and Stephano, this line almost developing into a sub-plot since this is the one over which Prospero has the least control; **Plot C** stars the young lovers, Miranda and Ferdinand. So the structure of the play can be represented as follows:

Acts	I	II	III	IV	V
Scenes	1 2	1 2	1 2 3	1	1
Plot-lines	**A B C**	**A B**	**C BA**	**CB**	**ACB**

7.7.3. Black or White Magician?

Thus, the play displays an almost perfect symmetry and order of design. In its pivot we of course find Prospero, who, by employing Ariel (whose figure can easily be interpreted as a minor *demon*) could well pass, especially by Protestant standards, as a black magician, as well as a white one. There is as much blackness in Prospero's art as there is in Art in general – Prospero's figure is dangerously benevolent and benevolently dangerous. He explains himself to Miranda at the beginning of the play (rich in theatrical metaphors), in Act I, Scene 2, where he openly confesses that he 'grew' to his state 'stranger', 'being transported / And rapt in secret studies' (I,2,76-77). Much of his play will be devoted to the transformation of this *strangeness* in the sense of being 'alien, alienated' into *strange* in the sense of 'wonderful' (cf. 'so, with good life / And observation *strange*, my meaner ministers, / Their several kinds have done', [III,3,86-88] and, 'all thy vexations / Were but my trials of thy love, and thou / Hast *strangely* stood the test' [IV,l;5-7] – in both cases *strange* is in the sense of 'wonder'.) Now the *strangest* (most alien) creature of the play is Caliban, whom Prospero cannot educate (nurture), whom he cannot know, who remains stubbornly irrational (producing one of the most beautiful instances of poetry, beginning 'Be not afraid; the isle is full of noises...' [III,2, l33-l4l]), full of desire (to rape Miranda to populate the island with little Calibans), with

whom Prospero is hysterically impatient (perhaps because Caliban has given voice to some incestuous desire of his) and whom Prospero can only acknowledge: 'this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine' (V,l, 275-276). Caliban, in a way the rightful 'citizen' of the island (cf. 'This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother' [I,2,333]) is everything Prospero is *not* but precisely this acknowledgement-adoption is necessary for the transformation of *strangeness* into *wonder*. And the embodiment of this 'wonder' is Miranda (even in her name). Miranda and Ferdinand represent that innocence, that wonder which Prospero wishes to regain: the innocence of the *audience*, the eyes which are able to look at the world and say: 'O, wonder: / How many goodly creatures are there here: / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, / That has such people in't!' So, in a way Prospero is not only the writer of his play, he is not only the stage-director and the magician but he also approaches the edge of the stage more and more to become his own *audience* as well, to combine absolute knowledge with total innocence, the innocence which can still view a play not as a *product*, as an artificial broth of the magic cauldron but as wonderful and enjoyable wonder and miracle. Prospero wishes to restore our vision, our vision for the theatre. And when he buries his books, breaks his magic staff and decides to go back to Milan as an 'ordinary' Duke, he also displays the wisdom that a world which one can totally manipulate and control is no World at all – the element of chance, of the accidental and the contingent must be retained in it; it is the incalculable in the world which sets us free.

> As you from crimes would pardon'd be
> Let your indulgence set me free.

Chapter 8

Renaissance Drama III.
William Shakespeare: Tragedies

8. 1. Shakespearean tragedy

Renaissance tragedy found the possibility of the metaphorical expression of *the tragic* in an indisputable quality of death: irreversibility (cf. comedy, where everything is precisely reversible). Tragedy opens up the eye for the greatest scandal and the most incomprehensible absurdity of human existence: the fact that one day we shall be no more. The tragic hero's human dignity (something not even Macbeth, the bloodiest murderer is able to lose) lies in his full knowledge of his position (cf. the case of Dr. Faustus), in his awareness that he is as much the *sufferer* of his inevitable fate as he is the fully *active maker* of his destiny *at the same time*. Therefore, the tragic hero's enterprise *must* include death: full awareness of *being* is impossible without the full awareness of *non-being*, the task of the tragic hero is 'to be *and* not to be' simultaneously. He, in King Lear's words, becomes 'the thing' (III, 4;104) by including everything through the incorporation of even *nothing*.

Shakespeare wrote three tragedies before *Hamlet*: the earliest one, *Titus Andronicus* (1591) sounds rather as a parody today;. it closely follows the pattern of tragedy Elizabethans thought to have found in the bloody plays of Seneca: Lavinia is raped, her hands and tongue are cut off, and the criminals later are 'both baked in [a] pie; / Whereof their mother daintily hath fed' (V,3;60-61). *Romeo and Juliet* (1595) is closer to the poetic melodrama than to tragedy and starts, in fact, as a comedy until, in the agony of Mercutio, all comedy dies and Romeo has to face and kill an emotion which is as strong as love: Tybalt's hatred. In this play, Shakespeare seems to leave a lot to pure chance and the tragic end is presented through nothing more (and less) than the violent nature of love itself, somehow 'consuming' its own perfection. *Julius Caesar* (1599) is often regarded as a tragedy of Brutus rather than that of Caesar, and the young Roman, torn between his love for his country and the typical, tyrannical and ambitious father-figure foreshadows the figure of Hamlet (Mercutio, the intellectual also pre-figuring Hamlet in *Romeo and Juliet*).

The grandiose tragic sequence comes with the four plays A. C. Bradley called (in his *Shakespearean Tragedy* [first published in 1904], a milestone in Shakespeare-criticism) 'the four great tragedies'. In *Hamlet* (1599-1600), one of the central questions is whether *being* may consist in existing cognitively, whether one can absorb the 'everything' through *thinking*, whether the human mind could ever rival divine intelligence in keeping record of each and every fact of the world, including even itself: the mind tries to incorporate even the thinking mind itself. It is here that Shakespeare discovered the possibility of putting part of the conflict *within* (inside) the hero. *Othello* (1604) investigates existence (being) entirely through the Other in marriage; it asks whether the self *may be* through the other self, whether it is possible for two selves to merge completely. *King Lear* (1605), Shakespeare's most 'existentialist' play studies how many layers of being the individual has and is able to bear, and what remains as the 'core' of existence if these layers are mercilessly and methodically taken away. What is necessary for man to remain man, and what is superfluous? .Does man's existence coincide with the condition of the naked, 'poor, bare, forked' (III, 4;104) animal, or with the mode of the madman with a kingly vision of the relativity (but not of the non-existence) of sins, or rather with the status of the impotent God, unable to give life to his most beloved child for the second time? *Macbeth* (1606) is most exciting from the point of view of the Renaissance problem of the freedom of the will (cf. Lorenzo Valla, Pietro Pomponazzi, Erasmus, Luther

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and Calvin on this subject, for example); Macbeth knows his future and if for Hamlet it is thinking that paralyses action, then for Macbeth it is action that drowns first imagination and, later, thinking. Macbeth tries to meet non-existence face to face by becoming a fully active ally to destructive forces. So: the possibility of existence through *thinking* (*Hamlet*), the possibility of existence through *the Other* (*Othello*), the possibility of existence *as such* (*King Lear*) and the possibility of existence through *destructive action* (a special type of *non-action*) (*Macbeth*).

8.2 *Hamlet*

Hamlet is perhaps the most famous play of Western literature. Thus, not surprisingly, there are as many 'Hamlets' as there are readers. Yet literary criticism does not proceed according to the logic of natural sciences: our *Hamlet* must be different from all others and one (interpretation of) *Hamlet* does not render another obsolete.

Most probably Shakespeare was ready with a substantial part of the play in 1599, it may well have been acted even before the end of 1599 and in the course of l600 – the passages on the troubles of the actors and the references to the 'theatre warfare' (II,2;325-365) – are later interpolations from 1601. Further complications with the text are that there is a 'bad Quarto' from 1603 (a 'pirate', i. e. illegal edition, most probably dictated to someone by the actor having played Marcellus, but dismissed from the company), a 'good Quarto' from 1604 (most probably edited by the company to counterbalance he effect of the bad quarto) and the Folio text from 1623 (Hemminges and Condell). The Folio-version is shorter than the good Quarto by some 200 lines but contains 85 new lines. Most modern editions contain all the lines but it is still a matter of controversy which :version should be considered as 'basic' – the good Quarto (the more accepted alternative nowadays) or the Folio (see the Oxford Shakespeare series for more details, and a similar debate concerning *King Lear* has also emerged).

We have external evidence (Thomas Lodge's allusion from 1596) that by the time Shakespeare settled down to write his own *Hamlet*, the phrase 'Hamlet, revenge' had become a byword. Henslowe's Diary also records the performance of a *Hamlet* in June 1594. It can be reasonably assumed that this play – known in the critical literature as the *Ur-Hamlet* ('ancient, old'-Hamlet), now lost, and most probably written by Thomas Kyd – was the immediate source of Shakespeare's version (though there are many other possible sources as well – we can trace the figure of the Danish Prince back to Scandinavian legends). The role the *Ur-Hamlet* plays for Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is somewhat similar to the one the Ghost of old Hamlet plays for his son: Shakespeare is reluctant to write a traditional revenge-play (as Hamlet is reluctant, for a long time, to act according to the 'script' handed down to him by his Father). While in traditional revenge-plays the Ghost – as Horatio puts it – 'the sheeted dead / Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets' (I,1; 118-119, cf. also *Julius Caesar*) Hamlet's Father appears (most probably form the little trap-door in the middle of the stage called 'Hell') as a dignified and respectable warrior, speaking in a low voice and in terms of almost 'materialistic' reality (cf. 'and a most instant tetter bark'd about / most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust / All my smooth body', I,5;71-73). Hamlet's task is also made obscure; on the one hand it is crystal clear: 'If thou didst ever thy dear father love – ... Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder' (I,5;23-25), yet the Ghost also says: 'Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest. / But howsomever thou pursuest this act, / Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven, / And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge / To prick and sting her.'(I,5,82-88). Hamlet would have to separate man and wife, Claudius and Gertrude, two bodies obviously happy in the bed of 'incest', while the private and the public (the son and the Prince), the tribal and the

Christian (revenge and heaven), the Protestant and the Catholic (Hamlet's Wittenberg and the Ghost's purgatory) and illusion and reality (the Ghost's very appearance and Claudius's very ability to 'smile and smile, and be a villain' (I,5; l08) are hopelessly entangled.

Hamlet's task thus becomes to incorporate the equivocality which surrounds him. He 'reflects', and reflects on this ambiguity in ambiguous terms: 'A little more than kin, and less than kind' (I,5; 65) – this is the first sentence Hamlet utters in the play, well before his encounter with the Ghost, as a retort to Claudius's 'But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son – ' (I,2; 64). The historical sameness of the root of *kin* and *kind* emphasises the identity of Hamlet's and Claudius's ancestors, while the ambiguity of the two words communicates that Hamlet is neither a distant relative, nor is an individual in the Claudius-species and, therefore, he does not really like his uncle-stepfather. Hamlet creates one pun after the other ('I am too much in the sun', (cf. the homophony of *sun* and *son* (I,2;67)), and Hamlet's having two meanings in one word and Claudius's ('double') ability to '*smile*, and *smile*, and be a villain' (I,5;108) find a resonance in the whole play. There are two Kings and two husbands (Claudius and old Hamlet), being, in a sense, also two fathers – this is why the Queen claims that Hamlet has 'cleft' her 'heart in twain' (III,4;158); Polonius blesses Laertes twice (because a 'double blessing is a double grace' (I,3;53);:Claudius, in his prayer, describes himself as a man who is to 'double business bound' (III,3;41), and wishes to rely on the 'twofold force' of prayer (III,3;48), and there are the *two* gravediggers, there is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (a double 'zero'), there is the Mousetrap-scene enacting Claudius's murder twice (once in the dumb-show, and once 'dubbed', when the King finally rises), and there is finally Claudius himself', whom Hamlet kills twice (once with the poisoned rapier and once with the poisoned cup). And there are various attitudes to these different kinds of duality: Claudius tries to reconcile them in his oxymorons (a rhetorical device which combines incongruous or even contradictory meanings: 'with mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage' (I,2;12) he has taken Gertrude to be his 'imperial jointress' (I,2,9), most probably meaning that they are going to rule together. (Cf. Hamlet's famous : 'time is out of *joint*' (I,5; 169). Polonius, another example, tries to scurry between two extremes, searching for the 'golden mean' with: 'Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar' and 'neither a borrower, nor a lender be' (I,3; 61 and 75).

Hamlet's attitude to ambiguity throughout the play is to sustain it, to intensify it, to make it even more complicated. His key-word is not Claudius's *and* but *or* : 'To be, *or* not to be'. Claudius's crime is primarily in the testimony of the Ghost – but what if he is not telling the truth (cf. 'The spirit that I have seen / May be a devil' (II,2; 555))? We must notice that Hamlet neither says he is a devil, nor that he is not: he wants to maintain the suspense of ambiguity as long as he can, and ultimately kills Claudius when he, too, has the poison in his blood and has been responsible for several murders (most notably for the death of Polonius and of Ophelia), so, in a sense, he is Ghost, too.

Hamlet's (impossible) strategy is to think something and to immediately think that thought's opposite, without discarding either of them, This is why he delays action and this is why Shakespeare found it fit to call attention to his main character's hesitation (contrary to the tradition of the ordinary revenge-plays, where all authors, including Kyd, Marston, etc., tried to hide this). The crime is not only in the Ghost's testimony but also in the conscience of Claudius and to catch it,(see the Mousetrap-scene), Hamlet must think as the murderer does. The first paradox is: Hamlet should act, but in order to act he must think and use Claudius's head but while thinking, how could he possibly act? Second paradox: if Hamlet succeeds in making his mind work as the mind of the murderer does, is he any better than the murderer himself, i.e. does he still have any moral right to pass judgement over Claudius? Hamlet should identify with both his father and with Claudius and in a sense he is *too* successful: in his running commentary on the Mousetrap, he will describe the murderer approaching to kill

the King as 'this is one Lucianus, *nephew* to the King' (III,2;239), i.e. he lends the murderer *his* relation to Claudius, and not Claudius's to Old Hamlet [which would be *brother,* of course], so we shall never know whether Claudius rises because the Mousetrap struck home or because Claudius thinks that this is Hamlet's way to let him know that he is going to kill his uncle. Hamlet should identify himself with both his father and with Claudius at the same time. The Prince has to acquire the ability to see *to be* (dreaming, thinking) in *not to be*, (in action, in death) and, in turn, to see *not to be* in *to be*, while realising, in the famous monologue, that for the human being, while he is alive, there is no *real* alternative: he should have to decide the question from the realm of *to be*, while the 'bourne' of non-being is neither available for a comparison (one cannot 'not be' and 'come back' to 'compare it' with being) , nor is there any guarantee that in death (traditional non-being) there is *real* end to consciousness, to thinking. Thus we reach the 'credo' of the tragic hero, whose failure is always his success and whose success is always his failure: to be *is* not to be. (István Géher). This is the 'basic pattern' of Shakespearean tragedy.

8. 3. *Othello:* a domestic tragedy

8.3.1. Othello's entry

Othello is typically a 'domestic tragedy', a tragedy 'in the house', the most 'private' among the four great tragedies. As early as in the first scene of the first act, Iago does everything to tarnish 'the Moor' before Roderigo, Brabantio and, of course, before us. Yet the couple, appearing in front of the Council of Venice and the Duke, provide us with the 'ocular proof' that the non-matching colours of *black* and *white* may as much exclude (as Iago, Roderigo and Brabantio think), as they can complement and support each other, the opposition between the two colours becoming more the metaphor of the difference between *man* and *woman* – since can there be a greater difference between tow human beings than one being female, the other male? For Othello, this marriage is the consummation of his life, for Desdemona it is transformation: Othello seems to get the 'reward' for his troubled past, and Desdemona suddenly grows into a woman (for Othello: *the* Woman) from an obedient daughter (cf. Desdemona: 'That I did love the Moor, to live with him, / My downright violence. and scorn of fortunes, / May trumpet to the world: my heart's subdued / Even to the utmost pleasure of my lord: / I saw Othello's visage in his mind, / And to his honours, and his valiant parts / Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate', I,3;248-254). The speeches of the newly wed couple (cf. especially I,3;77-94 and 128-170, Othello's orations in his defence) win the Council over to his side, i.e., to the side of love, although Shakespeare was careful to leave a trace of uncertainty behind here as well: we will never know what the Duke's verdict would be if Venice were not badly in need of a military commander to fight the Turks (cf. Duke: 'Be it, as you privately determine, / Either [Desdemona] for stay or going, the affairs cry haste, / And speed must answer; you must hence tonight'. (I,3;275-277). Nevertheless, the first act, the part of the drama *in Venice* ends as a comedy should: in marriage, with the (ambiguous) blessing of the older generation. Tragedy only starts *in Cyprus*. But there it does.

Indeed, the legislation of marriage by the Council is not enough; love is also *war* – as the threat of the Turks and the journey from Venice to Cyprus, the strange 'honeymoon', suggest. Marriage has to get consummated in the marriage-bed, the scene we are denied to see till the end of the play when Othello already kills Desdemona, when it is already over. Yet on the fatal wedding-sheets and in Desdemona's *death* (a metaphor in Shakespeare's age for the act on the wedding-night itself, cf., for example, Juliet's famous lines: 'O happy dagger / This is thy sheath. There rust, and let me die.' *Romeo and Juliet,*V,3;167-168) something gets

defeated, something which attacks this marriage not from the *outside*, so, ultimately, not from Iago, but from the *inside*, from Othello's heart and mind. The riddle of the play has always been why Desdemona has to die from Othello's hand and why Othello commits suicide if they love each other. The short answer: *jealousy* is not enough, not only because jealousy is a typical theme for *comedy* (and there are a lot of the comic traits in Othello's mad jealousy indeed) but also because this jealousy – at least at first sight – is aroused in Othello by Iago, so then the whole play would go to the 'Machiavel', to the 'stage-villain', the drama we call *Othello* being about nothing else than Iago's triumph, about a clever intellect deceiving all the others, those who are 'gull', 'dolt', 'as ignorant as dirt' (cf. V,2;164-165), who cannot see through his machinations till the very end. As early as 1693, Thomas Rymer suggested indeed that 'the tragical part is, plainly none other, than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour'. And *jealousy* will not answer the question which is just the counterpart of the one inquiring into the necessity of Desdemona's and Othello's death: why does Othello *believe* Iago, why does he find it fit to talk about his most private problems with his ensign ('zászlós')?

8.3.2.. Tragedy or bloody farce?

Various answers have been suggested to explain both Othello's gullibility (that he has an inferiority complex because he is black and/or old, that he is in love and therefore he is naive, or cannot think, or that he is too noble to suspect foul play, or that he has secret sexual problems, or that he is simply stupid) and Iago's motives (*why* he wishes to ruin Othello: because he was not promoted, he takes revenge on Othello for having slept with Emilia [Iago's wife], he is in love with Desdemona, or with Othello (sic!), or even Cassio (sic!)) – to the latter problem (Iago's motives) Coleridge, in his Shakespeare-notes, simply answered: Iago's case is one of 'motive-hunting of motiveless malignity', explaining Iago as the incarnation of the Evil principle itself, who is *himself* in need of motives, because he does not know why he is doing the whole thing, either. It is true, indeed, that none of Iago's motives are convincing enough, because they change too quickly and Iago, eventually, drops all of them in the course of the play. So what is at stake, in short, is whether the play is a tragedy at all.

My argument is that the play is a tragedy, the tragedy of a *good* marriage, where what is at stake is the possibility of the total union of two people, where we may investigate the question whether one may exist, *may be* entirely through *the Other*. To my mind, the play can be best understood as contrasting two meanings of the verb *to know*. One meaning is represented by Iago, he stands for *knowledge* in the sense of 'information': Iago is the one who is always well-informed, who knows all about the customs of Venice, who knows that marriages usually end in cuckoldry (the favourite topic for comedy), that a marriage, at best, is a kind of 'second-job' (like his with Emilia). Iago stands for the *ordinary*, average, sober and, thus, *reliable* wisdom and knowledge of Venice ('of the World'): 'for I do know the sate' (I,1;147), 'I know our country disposition well; / In Venice they do let God se the pranks / They dare not show their husbands: their best conscience / Is not to leave undone, but keep unknown' (III,3;205-208) and also cf. Othello's acknowledgement of Iago's 'wisdom': 'This fellow's of exceeding honesty, / And knows all qualities with a learned spirit, / Of human dealing' (III,3;262-264). When Othello says: 'A horned man's a monster, and a beast', Iago's answer is: 'There's many a beast then in a populous city, / And many a civil monster' (IV,1; 62-64). Thus, what Iago insinuates, (and never *directly* formulates) on the basis of his knowledge of 'the world' Othello does *want* to hear; the situation is not one in which one speaks and the other shuts his ear but precisely the opposite: Othello squeezes Iago for what is inside him, he wants to devour more and even more from Iago's poison (which, as in *Hamlet*,

yet there physically, enters the brain characteristically through the *ear*, cf. <u>Iago</u>: 'I'll pour this pestilence into his ear' (II,3;347).

8.3.3. A lesson in knowledge: epistemology

Thus, Othello knows that Iago knows something which he, the newly wed husband needs. Not only because Iago, in his average and ordinary wisdom, represents the reliable ('honest') *common* sense, a sort of general (and here filthy and vulgar) agreement which no one in need of knowledge can disregard but also because the Moor is precisely in the process of wishing to '*get to know*', yet in the *other* sense of the verb 'to know'. Othello behaves not as one who has had, say 'a good opinion about Desdemona' and now, in the light of Iago's 'evidence' (especially the famous handkerchief), he sadly has to think otherwise – Othello does not want to know *about* Desdemona, but wishes to know *Desdemona*, as a husband wishes to *know* his wife, in the Biblical sense of *to know*: 'And Adam knew Eve, his wife; and she conceived and bore Cain' (*Genesis*, 4:1). Othello speaks as the one for whom his whole life, whole existence and being, and even the whole vast Universe is staked upon the Other: 'But there, where I have garner'd up my heart, / Where either I must live, or bear no life, / The fountain, from the which my current runs, / Or else dries up, to be discarded thence, / Or keep it as a cistern, for foul toads / To knot and gender in!' (IV,2;58-63). 'Heaven stops the nose at it [at what Desdemona 'has done'], and the moon winks, / The bawdy wind, that kisses all its meets, / Is hush's within the hollow mine of earth, / And will not hear't:...' (IV,2;79-82). Othello wants to be *the Other*, while Iago always *another*: Iago, this chameleon-like actor tries to lose himself in the particular character he happens to be talking with. Iago represents the pseudo-from of the couple's enterprise, the most dangerous quality Shakespeare considered to threaten a marriage: the mediocre, dull, grey quality of 'the world', together with the corrupting power of *time* (cf. <u>Iago</u> [to Roderigo]: 'Thou knowest we work by wit, and not by witchcraft / And wit depends on dilatory [both in the sense of 'flowing' and of 'accusing'] time', II,3;362-363). The problem which a married couple has to face after long years of marriage (boredom, getting 'used to the other', the loss of 'excitement'), Othello has to fight in the course of a single day (please notice that from act there, scene three we are made to believe that there are no more days: Iago tempts Othello in the afternoon and it seems that he kills his wife on the very night of that day).

Thus, Othello's struggle, in the person of Iago, is not with something petty and negligible but with the *basis* of human knowledge. Yet he could still arrive at a 'private', 'domestic' 're-definition' of knowledge together with Desdemona. What makes that impossible is the awakening to the horror that Iago is talking about something which Othello has suspected all along, which the Moor somehow 'knew' from the start, which gives him the 'ocular proof' that Iago, in his vulgar ordinariness, is, ultimately, *right*: separation is always already built *into* the act of union, that what happens between man and wife contains some violence and filth by its very nature. This is what finds metaphorical expression in the images of defloration (cf. 'when I plucked the rose, / I cannot give it vital growth again, / It must needs wither', V,2;13-15) and in the horror Othello feels over the compelling force of contamination, the sight of blood, of the stain on the wedding sheet, which should not be there if Desdemona were 'perfect' (i.e. non-human, an angel, for instance). And Othello cannot tolerate this imperfection: 'I'll not shed her blood, / Nor scar that white skin of hers than snow, / And smooth, as monumental alabaster' (V,2;3-5). In other words Othello is in love with Desdemona throughout, and precisely for *this* reason finds the unbearable 'proof' of human finitude in the image of blood on the wedding sheet.

However, Othello will never put up with this knowledge. He interprets everything Iago is able to bring forth (in the form of 'information', 'facts', 'proofs') on the level of his very

being, he 'translates' (transforms) Iago's *jealousy* (in Shakespeare's time also meaning 'careful scrutiny') into a study of his own existence *in* Desdemona. In the bed-chamber scene, he resorts to the impossible: he wants to become the Man of the Fall (Adam) and the jealous, vengeful, yet still merciful God at the same time. He is a petty murderer on the one hand, killing the weak and innocent one under a terrible delusion. Yet, on the other hand, he is the great, dignified, and noble tragic hero, saving his marriage for eternity, turning Desdemona into 'monumental alabaster', rescuing her from the corroding, corrupting, accusing time of Iago. He wants to separate (as God once separated light from darkness, or the waters from the waters [cf. *Genesis* 1]) the soul from the body, the white soul from the body that could be scarred; he wants to sacrifice the impure for the pure, the imperfect for the perfect, the average for the outstanding, the ordinary for the extraordinary, the finite for the infinite, the profane for the sacred, the human for the divine. Othello wants knowledge to *overlap* with being. He has to give both Desdemona's and his life to triumph in this enterprise. And the paradox of this construction in destruction is called, once again, *tragedy*.

8. 4. *King Lear*

8.4.1 "Which of you shall we say doth love us most?"- Introduction - Main Argument

King Lear is usually interpreted as the tragedy of old age. Is a man, with three daughters, at the age of eighty, still expected to learn anything new? According to Shakespeare, the answer seems to be yes. He has to learn the fact that he has killed love (hence the force of the unbearable metaphor: Lear carrying the dead Cordelia in his arms), he has to learn that the human being will do everything to avoid being seen, he will go to all lengths to hide his shame, to escape the eyes of the others (of, even, God's?). Lear's vulnerability is the vulnerability of love – real love (Cordelia, cf. Latin cordis, 'heart' and delia, which might be an anagram for ideal, see also Samuel Daniel's sonnet-sequence called Delia from 1592) is unbearable, we rather yield to flattery (Goneril, Regan) than to love, genuine love, which might indeed be too much for the human being to bear and which cannot resurrect the most precious one (Cordelia) in the end. Man can give life to his beloved ones only once – here is another line of division between Man and God (one of the subject-matters of the four great tragedies). By claiming that the "four great tragedies" are concerned with the difference between God and Man I do not want to create the impression that Shakespeare can only be given a Christian interpretation; I rather think that Shakespearean drama is in rivalry with (traditional) religion, it tries to understand the human ability for faith by challenging it to it's limit.

8.4.2. "The King's three bodies"– philology

The play was performed on St Stephen's Night, in December, 1606 (acc. to the Norton Shakespeare in 1605), and in print it appeared first in 1608 as The History of King Lear (this is the Q {Quarto}-version). In the Folio of 1623 (published by John Hemminges and Henry Condell) it appears as The Tragedy of King Lear (this is the F {Folio}-version). There are considerable differences between the two plays, Q is longer by about 300 lines and F contains roughly 100 lines Q omits, and there are famous other, smaller differences, e.g. the last lines ("The weight of this sad time ...", V, 3;322-325) are spoken by Albany in Q and by Edgar in F; in Q Cordelia says "And what shall Cordelia do ? Love and be silent.", in F : "What shall Cordelia speak ? Love and be silent" (I,1; 61), etc. In F, for example, we do not find the

mock-trial scene of Act III, Scene 6, but the Fool sings more in F. The Oxford-Shakespeare (with Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells as general editors, 1986) thinks these are two plays in their own right and they print them separately; the most recent Arden-edition (ed. R. A. Foakes, 1997) has produced a conflated text but it includes, with markers in the form of superscript Q or F, the passages found in one text but not in the other. The Norton-Shakespeare (general editor Stephen Greenblatt, 1997) presents the Q and the F on facing pages but also a conflated text, ed. by Barbara Lewalski. Thus there are now three King Lear s – he has "given birth" to three texts (three daughters?)

8.4.3. "Give me the map there" - the division of the kingdom and measuring

King Lear seemingly starts like a fairy-tale: once upon a time there was an old King with three daughters and without a male heir to the throne. What should the King do? Lear "expresses" what he calls his "darker purpose" (I,1,35) very soon. This purpose is "dark" in more than one sense.
(1) Politically: it is nonsense, since the middle part of the country would go to a foreign power, perhaps to France (or Burgundy, i.e., either of Cordelia's suitors), and France is traditionally England's ("Brittany's") arch-enemy, besides the King may hardly "retire" while "retain[ing] / The name and all th'addition to a king" (I,1;134-135). The problem of the wish to "spy out" what will happen after our death, the impossibility of attending our own funeral and the "corpse" haunting his daughters.(2) From the point of view of measuring and proportions: it is governed by total confusion. Note that right at the beginning of the play Kent says that he "thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall"(I,1;1-2) and Gloucester replies that "in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the Dukes he [Lear] values most; for equalities are so weigh'd that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety" (I,1;3-6) and he will insist that Edgar is "no dearer" (I,1;18) to him than Edmund; Lear will introduce his son-in-laws as "Our son Cornwall / And [...] our no less loving son of Albany" (40-41) yet he will ask his three daughters: "Tell me, my daughters, [...] Which of you shall we say doth love us most? / That we our largest bounty may extend / Where nature doth with merit challenge." (I,1;50- 52). The pivot first seems to be equality: comparative degrees (e.g. more, dearer) are constantly negated (no dearer, etc.), yet Lear suddenly switches over into superlatives (most, largest). Goneril's and Regan's speeches are full of hyperboles ('overthrows', a rhetorical device meaning 'deliberate exaggeration', marking the 'edges' of language): Goneril: "Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter; / Dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty; / Beyond what can be valued rich or rare; / No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour; / [...] Beyond all manner of so much I love you" (I,1;54-60). Regan: "I find she [Goneril] names my very deed of love; / Only she comes too short: that I profess / Myself an enemy to all other joys / Which the most precious square of senses possesses, / And find I am alone felicitate / In your dear highness' love" (I,1;70-74). Lear refers to Regan as "Our dearest Regan" (I,1;67), then insists that "this ample third of" his "fair kingdom" is "No less in space, validity, and pleasure / Than that conferr'd on Goneril" (I,1;79-8l), and challenges Cordelia thus: "what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?" (I,1;84-85). So, what shall we say? Is the division really based on equality or not? Are there fairer ("more opulent") parts or not? Lear seems to be trying to convince himself that his loving Cordelia most is justifiable (because surely she will deliver the most beautiful speech and this will get public recognition) – what Lear is really worried about is not so much his daughters not equally loving him but his own inability to love them to the same extent. (3) From the point of view of the private and the public, there is total confusion again. How does the political power and the wealth Lear is giving away (never being able to give it away completely), relate to the love the daughters feel towards their

father? We can witness to the "birth" of tragedy; tragedy in Shakespeare is often based on the conflict between quality and quantity: tragedy starts when one tries to trade quantifiable good for qualities which cannot be quantified (e.g. love). No direct proposition can be established between pieces of land and love. And why is this love-contest carried out in front of the court? Does Lear want to secure his power in a legal fashion in addition to his position as a father?

8.4.4.. "Speak"– bespeaking the Other

With Cordelia's famous "Nothing, my lord" (I,1;86), the problem of proportions and of measuring gets connected which "bespeaking" the other. To bespeak has four basic senses: (1)'to engage, request, or ask for in advance' (2) 'to indicate or suggests': e.g.: this act bespeaks kindness (3) 'to speak to, address' (4) 'to foretell'. Lear is speaking to Cordelia, he is addressing Cordelia, requests her to speak, wants to bring her into speech with speech, and he is ignorant of what Cordelia's nothing indicates/suggests and what it foretells. Cordelia's nothing indicates a "negative hyperbole" all her words have been used and abused by her elder sisters; meaning itself has become empty, words have been deprived of their creative (royal and divine {'performative'} power). (Cf. when Kent is in the stocks and, in II,4;11-22, Lear is denying reality in front of his eyes). But nothing also suggests that love is "no-thing", i.e. that the language Lear is speaking wants to find tangible, neatly defined things behind each and every utterance, it is a conception of language which thinks that language is not meaningful if there is no thing, no object ('referent, denotatum') with clear boundaries "behind" each and every word. (The "postman's view" of language). Speaking language is naming, it is categorisation, it is constant "measuring" but not only that (cf. Cordelia measuring: "I love your Majesty / According to my bond; no more no less."(I,1;91-92). (Do we bespeak our children/our students in Lear's manner? Do we want them to comply with our "divisions" of things? Do we want to hear the words we have put into their mouths? Do we want to hear their voices, or our voice from their mouths? Are we able to see a connection between tragedy {"domestic" tragedy, tragedy in the household, where that we, in the family, resemble one another, is so relevant} and the view of language which insists that language is only there to name and measure things? How do we come to language? Our parents name some object and we grasp what that object is called when we hear the sound they utter and their pointing gesture to the thing together? Is this the whole story? Is there a connection between teaching and learning language and human tragedy?). Cordelia's nothing also bespeaks, foretells the upcoming tragedy: Cordelia is the "vanishing point" (the "invisible" focal point in perspective painting, see the mirror in Jan van Eyk's The Arnolfini Wedding) through which the whole play can be understood, thorough which we can peep into the "nothingness" inside Lear, through which we can see his (our) inability to love, and through which Shakespeare is able to "vacuum out the universe". (Cf. Cordelia's nothing, Gloucester telling Edmund that "The quality of nothing hath no need to hide itself" (I,2;33-34), the Fool instructing Lear: "I am better than thou art now; I am a Fool, thou art nothing" (I,4;190-191); Edgar saying: "Poor Tom! / That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am" (II,3; 20-21) Lear telling Edgar: "thou art the thing itself" (III,4;104) and Lear telling the blind Gloucester and Edgar: "they [who flattered me] told me I was every thing [sic!]; 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof" (IV,6,105).

8.4.5. The "Thing itself"

What is the human being? Need and necessity: King Lear is very much the tragedy of "things": what constitutes the "thing", what is the "essence" of the human being?
(1) Mother Nature and Art: "natural man" (Edgar; Lear: "fantastically dressed with flowers (IV;6)). Nature: nurture and judgement – the "storm and tempest" (in Lear's language!) and Edmund's "Thou, Nature, art my goddess..." (I,2; 1-23): the "lawful" and the "natural" ("bastard") son – Gloucester's symbolic "adoption" of Edmund in the first lines of the play versus Lear's disowning Cordelia. Which is superior: the laws of nature or the laws of society? Does Man need (man-made, "artificial") clothes (cf. Lear: "O! reason not the need" (II,4;262))? Does Lear need the 100 attendants? (See Goneril and Regan haggling with Lear over the knights {a hotel without dogs, a piano, etc.?} and please recall that Lear is being difficult!) (The parable of the 100 angling rods). (2) The necessity and, thus, ambiguity of clothes ("layers of human existence" – undressing in the storm; disguise for the faithful ones – Kent and Edgar; the Fool's disguise: playing the "fool", Edgar playing the "mad beggar" ("Tom o' Bedlam"); the Fool's "lesson" to Lear on "more and most", teaching Lear "the other" language: "Have more than thou showest / Speak less than thou owest..." (I,4;116-117). The Fool investigating the connection between need (necessity), quantity, (the 'amount' you have of something) and language. The other alternative to Lear's "quantifying" language in Act I, Scene l is not only Cordelia's "nothing" (the ineffable, the unsayable) but also "qualify": to see qualitative differences. (Cf. Fool: "Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a bitter Fool and a sweet one? (I,4;134-135) and Kent's words to Oswald: "I'll teach you differences" (I,4;86)).(See also the tradition of the same person playing Cordelia and the Fool, the Fool's sudden and mysterious disappearance and Cordelia's return and Lear's association of Cordelia and the Fool: "And my poor fool is hang'd!" (V,3;304)).

8.4.6. "Bless thy five wits!"{III,4;57}– the human being's essential sense-organ

Which of the five human senses corresponds to Man's "thing-ness itself"? Which sense makes sense? Hearing: already corrupt in Hamlet and Othello (cf. Claudius's and Iago's poison trough the ear). Lear: the tragedy of seeing, Lear's avoidance of sight (e.g. Kent's early interference and warning: "See better, Lear" (I,1;57), and Lear (to Cordelia): "Hence, and avoid my sight!" (I,1;123), and to Kent: "Out of my sight!" (I,1;156). Lear is one of the tragedies not only showing, displaying something, but also making seeing (the audience's essential relation to drama in the theatre) itself a subject-matter of the play, it reflects on the very relationship between viewer and stage, it shows a "meta-theatrical" interest also in the very medium a play exits in. (Cf. a similar interest in Sophocles's Oedipus Rex). Hence the importance, of course, of the tragedy of Gloucester, who cannot differentiate between the handwriting of Edgar and Edmund, and who is to be blinded in order to be able to see. Gloucester's story: "argument by analogy" (cf. Horatio), a "parallel case", "corroborating" the example of Lear, but Gloucester and Lear are also each other's "proxies": Gloucester goes symbolically mad and Lear gets symbolically blinded. (Cf. Lear's "Does any here know me? This is not Lear: / Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes? [...] Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (I,4;227) and Regan's substitution of Gloucester for Lear in III,7;91: "let him smell / His way to Dover"). In one of the most important scenes of the play, in Act IV, Scene 6, the mad Lear is revealing himself to the blind Gloucester, precisely because Gloucester is blind. In the overall chaos of sensation it is smelling which seems to be able to reveal who Man "as the thing itself" is. Smelling (distasteful? disgusting?): closest to the

unconscious and the least articulate with respect to human differentiation through language, the least elaborate scale of measures. (cf. our refined and detailed scale of colours). Cf.: Lear: "When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter, when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found'em, there I smelt 'em out" (IV,6;100-103); Gloucester: "O! let me kiss that hand. Lear: Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality." (IV,6;130-131); Lear: "If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes; / I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester; Thou must be patient; we came crying hither: / Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air / We wawl and cry" (IV,6; 174-178). And even earlier, references to smelling abound: see Regan's advice to Gloucester above about how to get to Dover and Gloucester's very early "Do you smell a fault?" (concerning Edmund's "origin", I,1;15), cf. also: Fool: "Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i'th'middle on's face? Lear: No. Fool: Why to keep one's eyes of either's side's nose, that what a man cannot smell out, he may spy into" (I,5;19-22) and the Fool again: "All that follow their noses are led by their eyes but blind men; and there's not a nose among twenty but can smell him that's stinking" (II,4;66-69). Even further, Edgar quoting the Giant's speech from the folk-tale "Jack the Giant-Killer" (or: "Jack and the Bean-Stalk"): "Fie, foh, and fum, / I smell the blood of a British man" (III,5,180-181).

8.4.7. "Look on her, look, her lips, / Look there, look there!"(V,3;309-310)

But to rely on smelling is too painful or humiliating or uncertain for Man: nothing helps. Lear has to learn that besides speech (language), there is also the howling of the wounded animal ("Howl, howl, howl" (V,3;256)) – the play is extremely cruel (Dr. Johnson was unable to re-read it); Lear's senses are restored, he is reconciled with Cordelia, the evil ones defeat themselves (Goneril and Regan: poison and suicide) or are defeated (Edgar's duel with Edmund) and still Cordelia has to die, still it must be displayed that Lear has murdered (avoided) love (cf. Stanley Cavell's "The Avoidance of Love – a Reading of King Lear", both in Must We Mean What We Say? (1976) and Disowning Knowledge in Five Plays of Shakespeare (1987); much of this lecture is based on this essay). Lear tries to resurrect Cordelia: does he die in the belief that he has succeeded? What remains after a tragedy like that? To "speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (V,3;323)? But this is how it all began. Tragedy is there to be displayed, read, to be seen (to be smelled) again and again: the best answer of tragedy to its own riddles is itself.

8.5. *Macbeth* and Late Tragedy

8.5.1. The villain as hero

The greatness of *tragedy* is that it is based on a paradox*: to be* is *not to be.* Tragedy strives at displaying, at bringing to the open, the unresolvable tension of human existence, the forever-suspended ontological difference between life and death, between God and the Human Being. Yet this world is hardly habitable and especially not for a long time. Right after *King Lear*, after vacuuming out the Universe with the death of Cordelia and Lear, Shakespeare wrote the fourth 'great tragedy', *Macbeth*, giving an alternative 'substance' to the *nothing* we heard first on Cordelia's lips. This 'substance' is now called Macbeth, one of Shakespeare's 'stage-villains', a descendant of Richard III, Claudius, Iago or Edmund. Yet whereas the split within Richard occurs only at the end of the play, in *Macbeth* murder takes place right at the beginning, in various forms (on the battle-field and in Duncan's bed-

chamber) and Macbeth will start talking about himself in the third person singular (the index of the 'split' in the tragic hero, which occurs only at the end of *Hamlet* and *Othello* but also at the beginning of *King Lear*) immediately after the crime: 'Methought, I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murther Sleep' ' (II,2,34-35). While Claudius 'splits ' only in his prayer and then 'recovers', while Edmund changes in his agony, and while Iago is deaf to the ontological register in which Othello speaks and interprets Iago's small-scale filth, Macbeth is interested precisely in the metaphysics of sin and guilt that dwells in him and within his good and loving marriage to Lady Macbeth. Macbeth becomes an ally to destructive forces but he never ceases to *reflect* on his position, trying to understand the precise nature of evil in his mind, heart and deeds. While Hamlet had to fight against the sluggishness and the impurity in his self, in *Macbeth* the problem precisely is that it is very difficult for Man to dissociate himself from his humanity, that it is as difficult to turn totally into a beast as it is to become thoroughly human. Hence the well-known riddle of *Macbeth*: can a villain be a tragic *hero*, may we talk about *tragedy* when a genuinely 'bad man' is suffering? The eclipse of the riddle starts when we begin to appreciate the human traits in Macbeth, when we realise that in Shakespeare even total condemnation is to be deserved and is in need of human dignity.

8.5.2. *Macbeth*

In the sequence of the four great tragedies it is only *Macbeth* which immediately starts with supernatural forces, the 'wound up charm' of the three Weird Sisters. They seem to be in full control of time (their key-term is 'when'), while in Duncan's camp people will mostly be worried about identities (here 'who' is repeated several times) and while the Weird Sisters destabilise and disrupt *meaning* from the start ('Fair is foul and foul is fair', [I,1;11], later echoed by Macbeth himself in his first sentence of the play: 'So foul and fair a day I have not seen', [I,3,38]), the reports of the battle in Act I Scene 2 desperately try to dispel the dubious and equivocal nature of all phenomena (including the ones in language) by insisting on a kind of quantitative equilibrium (as opposed to the qualitative blends of opposing qualities in the rhetoric of the Weird Sisters, who *identify* fair *as* foul, and vice versa): cf.: '*doubtful* it [=the battle] stood' (I,2;7), 'As cannons overchare'd with *double* cracks' / So they / *Doubly redoubled* strokes upon the foe' (I,2;38). So each 'doubt' is dispelled by a double amount of counterbalancing force, and see Duncan's attempts at a scale at balance: 'What he hath *lost* [=the Thane of Cawdor], noble Macbeth hath *won*' (I,2; 69). Macbeth's '*two* truths' (I,3;126) would have to find their place in Duncan's world, where the only thing 'left' to Duncan 'to say' is that '*More* is thy due than *more* than I can pay' (I,4,20-21) and : 'Noble Banquo, / That hast *no less* deserv'd, nor must be known / *No less* to have done so, let me enfold thee' (I,4 30-31). Macbeth is caught between two codes, each ambiguous in its own way and both trying to dress him up 'to the swelling act / Of the imperial theme' (the first metatheatrical instance in the play, I,3;128-129). It should be noted that one of the most important systems of metaphors in the play involves *dresses*, and *articles of clothing* in general – an observation first made by Caroline Spurgeon in her pioneering study in Shakespearean metaphor, further interpreted by Cleanth Brooks in his 'The naked babe and the cloak of manliness' (in *The Well Wrought Urn), one of the best essays ever written on *Macbeth*.

How does Macbeth react to this duality? Substantially, with *nothing*: 'And nothing is, but what is not' (I,3,142). This sentence is several times ambiguous – one may read it as a 'definition' of *nothing*, as an identification of *being* with *nothingness* and as a realisation, in a truly 'deconstructivist fashion', that being, the *thing itself* (*meaning*) are always deferred (Jacques Derrida); being, the thing-itself and meaning are *there* (they are *present*) in and through their *non-presence*, their *significant absence* (cf. the 'empty grave' of Medieval

drama, Hamlet's *not to be*, the 'ontological vacuum' embodied in Iago, Cordelia's *nothing* – and Beckett's Godot). From now on, Macbeth's efforts will be devoted to trying to catch up with that meaning, the equivocal meaning represented by the Weird Sisters in their prophecies. The Weird Sisters provide the *story*, the *plot* of the drama and Macbeth's endeavours will either be to stop the show ('if th' assassination / Could trammel up the consequence, and catch / With his surcease success; that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all' [I,7,2-5]) or to get *before* the next happening ('Time, thou anticipat'st my dread exploits: / The flighty purpose never is o'ertook, / Unless the deed go with it' [IV,l;144-146]), to control it, to master it, to have it in his *hand* (cf. 'From this moment, / The very firstlings of my heart shall be The firstlings of my hand' IV,1;146-148), Macbeth's famous *hand*, towards which, *before* the murdering of Duncan, a dagger appeared.

Yet as the hand, ready to kill, gets associated with 'firstlings' (meaning not only 'first ideas' but also 'first borne (sons)', *success* and the possibility of mastering (*handling*) the ambiguities of time as represented by the Weird Sisters, as well as the opportunity to stop time, get associated with *succession*: it is Banquo and not Macbeth to whom the conception of a dynasty is promised and the Macbeth-family suffers from the marked absence of children. The obscure fantasies of Macbeth and his wife about their children (Lady Macbeth: 'I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me' [I,7;54-55]) and Macbeth: 'Bring forth men-children only' [I,7;73]), clearly point toward this, as well as Macbeth's hysterical desire to murder not only Fathers (Kings) (God?) and friends (Banquo) but also offsprings (Fleance and Lady Macduff and her son and, finally, young Seward). However, in Shakespeare's fascinating 'double-edged' metaphors, Macbeth, while becoming Murder himself, is also the frightened *child* himself, playing the role of the absent Son at home and trembling at his deed together with his wife after the murdering of old King Duncan. Macbeth, 'too full o'th'milk of human kindness', is ultimately defeated by the *lack* of 'a naked new-borne babe' (I,7,2l).

Time, as given in the future and in *succession* (*apart* from success) is, indeed, one of the chief concerns of the play. Lady Macbeth, transforming-translating her female identity into that of a *witch* (the fourth Weird Sister?) tries to solve the riddle of time not by stopping or overtaking it like Macbeth but by trying to convince her husband that the present is *identical* with the future. Her advice 'to beguile the time, / *Look* like the time' (I,5;63-64) is more than a strategy for pretence – she is the one who 'feels now / The future in the instant' (I,5,58), she insists that ' 'I dare not' ' should not 'wait upon 'I would' ' (I,7,44) and that ' 'tis time to do't ' (V,1;34). Even in her sleepwalking-(mad) scene – from which the last quotation is taken – she transposes, through her brilliant-mad playacting, an incident of the past into the always-present-tense (and, hence, *presence*) of the theatre. For her there is *only* present tense, no past or future. She erases Duncan's *tomorrow* ('O! never / Shall sun that morrow see' [I,5;60]) and it is this *tomorrow* which is echoed by Macbeth after Lady Macbeth's death in the famous tomorrow monologue : 'To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow. . . ' (V, 5; 19). Macbeth, defeated by the equivocation which 'lies like truth' (V,5,44), (Birnam wood does and does not, after all, come to Dunsinane, he is and is not defeated by woman-borne) can no longer find meaning in the *story*, in the *plot* of his own drama. He becomes 'the poor player / That stuts 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*' (V,5,24-28). Since there is no future, *nothing* can now give meaning to *nothing*: nothing (not a thing) makes sense any longer, while we may now experience *nothing* to the full; *nothing* has reached it fullest meaning There is no 'tale' (plot) to redeem the tragic hero.

8.5.3. Late tragedy

After *Macbeth* (1606), Shakespeare wrote three more tragedies. *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607, sometimes also called the 'fourth great tragedy', when either *Hamlet* or *Othello* is omitted from the sequence) Shakespeare tries to fill his own vacuum with baroque pomp and heavy rhetoric: the two main characters undoubtedly move on a cosmic scale and they represent for the other the other half of the world, both politically and erotically. The grandiose scenes of bacchanalian revelries and desperate battles take place in front of the public eye – when two great powers make love and make each other idols and prostitutes, they lay claim to the attention of the whole Universe. However, the play lacks intimacy, precisely for this reason and the ageing lovers have to learn that neither new gains, nor new losses, neither new excitement, nor pools of wine can make up for the lack of young potency and juvenile, burning desire, so they take the most heroic option they can: instead of making death the 'totality and goal of love ' (Cavell), they treat it as if it were a piquant, never-tasted excitement and build death into life by transforming non-being into the climax of their ecstasy.

The title-character of *Coriolanus* (1608) is more of an army uniform stuffed with rhetoric than a tragic hero (Géher), and the again title-character of the last tragedy, *Timon of Athens* (1608) ritually buries *himself* at the end of the play, as Shakespeare buries tragedy for good.

8.5.4. *Antony and Cleopatra*

As usual, there are several interpretations of the play; our interest in it is now – at least – twofold: as a late tragedy in Shakespeare's oeuvre and as a typically "baroque" or Jacobean tragedy, in its diction heavily influenced by the emerging "metaphysical" poetry of especially John Donne. It is also important that this tragedy totally disregards the unity of place, time and action: it is jumping between Alexandria, Rome and even "Parthia" (Syria) (where, in III, 3 we can see Ventidius after his victory over the "Parthians"), it covers the period between 40 and 30 BC (Shakespeare faithfully following Plutarch, one of his favourite sources) and the play has an epic perspective, while being highly episodic: it starts with Antony moved out of Alexandria only by the news of his first wife's, Fulvia's death and of Pompeius's (Pompey's) mutiny; continues with the (short-lived) reconciliation between Antony and Ceasar (where the "price" is Octavia, Ceasar's sister married to Antony clearly for political reasons), the (once again) phoney reconciliation between Pompey, Ceasar and Antony (when Lepidus gets drunk, and which is quickly followed by Ceasar waging war on Pompey, later killing him as well), then we suddenly see Octavia trying to act as a go-between for Antony and Ceasar but Ceasar is already convinced that Antony is a traitor (since he in effect went back to Egypt instead of Athens), while Antony is offended because Ceasar leaves him out of his victories and the loot and, in III,7, they are at war again; Antony is defeated at sea (because Cleopatra's ships turn around and flee and Antony follows her); this results in Cleopatra's willingness to yield to Ceasar, prevented only by Antony's blunt refusal and his sending Ceasar's messenger, Thidias back to Ceasar cruelly beaten; then there is Antony's victory "by land", quickly followed by his defeat at sea once more (IV,13) and his (at first half-finished) suicide, and Act V is practically about Cleopatra's negotiations with Ceasar and her suicide. So the play is not only special because it is an – unconscious or conscious – mockery of the principles put forward by Sidney but because there is no attempt at a kind of *unity* in any sense. We learn about the events (which happen behind the scene) from chit-chatting (gossiping) politicians or soldiers and, in general, there are three types of speech-acts: descriptions of events (of battles, turns of

fortune, characters, etc.), negotiations (as between Ceasar and Antony in Act II) and taking leave (as III;2, Ceasar saying farewell to Octavia, or Antony to Cleopatra when he is dying at the end of Act IV). There are only few monologues (mostly by Antony, I;2 – on Fulvia's death; or Antony's "All is lost"-soliloquy in IV;13), and the play is heavily marked by the absence of intimacy (Cleopatra and Antony are practically never alone – in fact nobody is alone in the course of the play for more than a few minutes – cf. Hamlet's solitude), and by the lack of the mixture of tragic and comic elements (cf. *Hamlet* or *King Lear*, in the former, Hamlet takes the role of the dead Yorick as well, and in the latter, there is a professional Fool, joking even in the storm-scene; but even in *Macbeth*, a very sombre play, there is the famous and hilarious Porter-scene).

Detractors of the play take Antony to be seduced and abandoned by a sorceress, or by an Indian dancer, or a panther, or even by a wicked monkey, full of feline cunning, the representative of Oriental (exotic) luxury and vice – Cleopatra in the critical literature is often identified with the East, which is female, dark, colonised, available, animalistic, and excitingly dangerous. It is, indeed, never settled if Cleopatra's affairs (not only with Mark Antony, but, earlier, with Julius Ceasar and with Pompeius the Great) are part of a survival-game or if with Antony the tragic turn is that *this* time she really falls in love and this brings about her downfall, in which Antony is unable to let her hand go. As it is never settled in the play if she commits suicide because she is afraid of public humiliation by (Octavius) Ceasar (to be dragged in the streets of Rome) or because she really wishes to follow her "husband" (as she calls Antony in the 5th Act). Almost total unpredictability on Cleopatra's part is counterbalanced by the sober cunning of (Octavius) Ceasar, the future (first) Emperor of the "universal peace" (pax Romana): Augustus (the "universal landlord", III, 13, 72, who is most worried about the manner of Cleopatra's and her ladies' death, cf. V, 2, 127)). Ceasar is not entirely made of stone (he loves his sister, Octavia very much) but it is gentle and caring love, as opposed to the "dotage" of "the General" (Antony), "o'erfolw[ing] the measure" (I,1;1-2). One of the central questions, indeed, is, when somebody is really himself (cf. CLEO. "Antony / Will be himself" [I,1,44/45]; ANT. "how every passion fully strives / To make itself, in thee, fair and admired" [I,1;52-54]): *in* (*within*) himself or only within "the Other" (the eternal mother-lover), if one has to *restrain* himself in order to be who he is or, precisely has to *overstep* his own boundaries (cf. CEASAR, talking to ANT. about OCTAVIA: "You take from me a great part of myself. / Use me well in't" [III,2; 24/25], CLEO: "but since my lord / Is Antony again / I will be Cleopatra" [III,13, 188-189]). Is what we are in excess or in the (right) measure, the latter dictated by the necessities of the age? There are lots of metaphors in the play which suggest that, whichever road one takes, every passion, be it restrained, or boundless, will defeat itself:

> ANT (when Fulvia's death is reported): "The present pleasure, / By revolution low'ring [growing lower by turning], does become / The opposite of itself. She's good being gone; / The hand could [would wish to] pluck her back that shoved her on." (I,2;114-116).

> CEASAR: "This common body [the people] / Like to a vagabond flag [drifting reed] upon the stream / Goes to, and back, lackeying [following slavishly] the varying tide, / To rot itself with motion" (I,4; 44-47).

> LEPIDUS: "When we debate / Our trivial difference loud [loudly, violently], we do commit / Murder in [in the process of] healing wounds" (2;2; 20-22).

> ENOBARBUS (describing Cleo.): "On each side her / Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids, With divers-coloured fans whose wind did seem / To glow [make glow] the delicate cheeks which they did cool / And what they undid did" (II,2; 207-211)

ENOBARBUS (on CLEO): "Other women cloy / The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies. For vilest things / Become themselves in her, that holy priests / Bless her when she is riggish [acts like a slut]" (II,2;241-244).

ENOBARBUS: "Ceasar will / Unstate [overthrow] his [Antony's] happiness and be staged to th' show / Against a sworder! I see men's judgements are / A parcel of [consistent with] their fortunes, and things outward / Do draw the inward quality after them / To suffer all alike [to decay together]. That he should dream, / Knowing all measures, the full Ceasar will / Answer his emptiness!" (III,13; 28-35).

ENOBARBUS: "When valour preys on reason / It eats the sword it fights with" (III,13;201-202)

ANTONY: "Now all labour / Mars what it does; yea, the very force entangles / Itself with strength" [strength defeats itself by its own exertions]" (IV, 15, 47-49)

ANTONY: "I am conqueror of myself" (IV,15; 62)

CLEO: "none but Antony should conquer Antony" (IV,16;18) "a Roman by a Roman / Valiantly vanquished" (IV,16, 59-60).

DECRETAS: "that self hand / Which writ his honour in the acts it did / Hath, with the courage which the heart did lend it, / Splitted the heart" (V,1;23-25)

CLEO: "Nature wants stuff / To vie strange forms with fancy; yet t'imagine / An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy, Condemning shadows quite" [Nature lacks material to compete with imagination, but this time it is Nature which imagines and creates an Antony and thus Nature outstrips even fancy].

Shall we, then, call *Antony and Cleopatra* the tragedy of metaphors, i.e. where we may witness to the tragic end of metaphor itself? In the light of other conflicts one may detect in the tragedy, the answer seems to be "yes". Here is a random list of conflicts which might be responsible for metaphor's "suicide": the conflict between the "lack" (the "vacuum", the "emptiness") of Antony, (cf. "Wash the congealment from your wounds, and kiss / The honoured gashed whole" [IV,9; 9-10]) and the "fullness" of Ceasar; the conflict between old age and youth (Antony and Ceasar); the conflict between the Universe ("melt Egypt into the Nile"[II,5; 78]) and the frailty (mortality) of the human being; the conflict between love and death (death as a piquant, never-tasted desire, cf. "Eros, ho!" IV,13, 49; ANT. "I will be / A bridegroom in my death, and run into't / Ads a lover's bed" IV, 15; 99-101); the conflict between. fancy and 'reality' (mimesis within mimesis; cf. ANTONY: "and I fall / Under this plot" (IV,13;49); CLEO: "The quick comedian / Extemporally [in improvised manner] will stage us, and present / Our Alexandrian revels. Antony / Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see ? Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness I'th' posture of a whore" (V,2;212-217); the conflict between "privatising" the world and the "withdrawal" of the world: the world not returning Antony's love for it, and Cleopatra creating the *theatre* (the illusion) which *still* returns that love. The world can, at best be artificially re-created but reality and illusion not only annihilate each other but they annihilate themselves, too.

Chapter 9

Jacobean Drama

9.1. Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher and Philip Massinger

9.1.1. The Knight of the Burning Pestle [A lángoló mozsártörő lovagja] (1607)

Today, the play is wholly attributed to Beaumont, and it is true that we have evidence of Beaumont's and Fletcher's collaboration only from *around* 1606-1608 and the play was written *around* 1607. For many, this is the last play Beaumont wrote alone. It is also true that the play was included only in the second, enlarged Folio of Beaumont & Fletcher's plays from 1679, and it cannot be found in the first Beaumont and Fletcher Folio of 1647. (There is also a Quarto version of the play form 1612.)Yet even former philology thought that Fletcher's contribution was this time slight: traditionally, Fletcher is given the love-scenes of I, 1, 1-60; III, 1; and IV, 4, 18-93. Though there is an English translation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* from 1605, it is dubious if Beaumont (and Fletcher) knew it or not and it is possible that it was on their own that they "discovered" – on the basis of such English romances as Sidney's *Arcadia* and other romances popular on the Elizabethan stage – the comic potential of the self-made knight using romance-language and a chivalrous moral code unfitting the age.. Concerning authorship it should also be noted that Fletcher collaborated with almost everybody of his time, including Massinger, Jonson, Chapman, Field, Shirley, Rowley, Middleton, Webster, Ford and even Shakespeare (*All's True [Henry VIII]* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*).

9.1.2. John Fletcher (1579-1625):

Fletcher was born in Rye, Sussex, his father was the vicar of Rye and later became bishop of London but died in 1596 while taking tobacco. John, who was then, 16 may have been at Cambridge at the time, but nothing certain is known about his life until his collaboration starts with Beaumont (and perhaps with Shakespeare, though *some* evidence of that is not until around 1613). It is possible that he started to write plays because he had to leave Cambridge after his father's death and it seems probable that after 1612 he took Shakespeare's role as chief dramatist in the company of the King's Men (succeeded by Philip Massinger in 1625, when Fletcher died in the plague). Fletcher was in close connection with the Earl of Huntingdon's circle, most probably through Beaumont, who knew the earl almost from birth.

The collaboration-question is very complicated; the final result seems to be that Fletcher is involved in 51 plays, out of which he wrote 15 alone, 13 in collaboration with Beaumont, 19 in collaboration with Massinger (some of these in collaboration with others as well) and the remaining 4 in collaboration with others. What further complicates the question is that the dominant and distinctive tone of most of these plays was established in precisely those works Fletcher wrote together with Beaumont. This tone is that of *tragicomedy*, which is already there in the work of John Marston, whose *The Malcontent* (1602-03) was entered into the Stationer's Register as a *Tragicomedia*. The genre of tragicomedy was developed, in the first decades of the 17th century under Italian influence and it fitted well into the general tendency of the Start-age (from 1603), which moves plays away from larger and "vulgar" masses of people and directs them towards the court and towards a more polite, refined and aristocratic audience in general (cf. the opening of Blackfriars indoor theatre by the King's Men in 1608-9).

The two Italian sources of inspiration for tragicomedy were Giovanbattista Giraldi Cinthio and Giambattista Guarini. In 1543 Cinthio advocated a mixed form of Senecan-inspired tragedy and combined deaths for the evil characters and a happy ending for the good ones, while Guarini, in *Il Compendio della Poesia Tragicomica* (1601) implicitly disagrees with Cinthio, he thinks that deaths are not allowable in tragicomedy and defines tragicomedy "not as a mixture of comic and tragic outcomes but as a judicious selection of features form each of the two modes:

> He who composes tragicomedy takes from tragedy its great persons but not its great action, its verisimilar plot but not its true one, its movement of the feelings but not its disturbance of them, its pleasure but not its sadness, its danger but not its death; from comedy it takes laughter that is not excessive, modest amusement, feigned difficulty, happy reversal, and above all the comic order.[164]

Guarini also points to the Prologue of Plautus' *Amphitryon*, which talks about the play as a *tragicomoedia* and John Fletcher seems to have agreed with Guarini, writing, in his Preface to his *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608?) that "a tragicomedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths [lacks deaths], which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy ". The central to tragicomedy are danger, reversal and happy ending.

9.1.3. Francis Beaumont (1584-1616)

Beaumont he was born in Leicestershire and studied at Oxford and later law in the Inner Temple. Apart form his achievements with Fletcher, very little is known about his life; in 1613 he withdrew form playwriting, and from the lodging on the Bankside he shared with Fletcher and married an heiress. Shortly after this he suffered a stroke and died three years later. As to the Fletcher-Beaumont relationship, it seems to be that Beaumont was the more talented, yet the quieter and the less domineering one, while Fletcher was electrifying everyone around himself; he was more persistent but more superficial as well.

9.1.4. The play

The *Knight of the Burning Pestle* is several times embedded and for a long time it seems it does not even want to start. The Preface to the Readers is ironic, stating that the play is printed in a time when "there is no fashion", "for music there is no instrument" and as far as the plays are concerned, there is "no invention but touching particular people". In London at that time, exactly the opposite was true. The Prologue is conventional, it clearly addresses a "better" audience, since the play wishes "to move inward delight, not outward lightness", it wishes to achieve "soft smiling and not loud laughing", since the greatest pleasure is "to hear counsel mixed with wit". It is claimed that "Rome hissed at those who brought parasites into the stage with apish actions, fools with uncivil habits and courtesans with immodest words". Yet this is also largely ironical, too, partly because it is not true that Rome would have despised these characters, since Plautus, who had great success, used all of them (cf. *The Braggart Warrior*), and partly because a burlesque is to follow, making fun not only of romances and contemporary city-life but of the vulgar and uneducated audience as well. The soul of this drama is the Citizen (the Grocer) and his shrewish Wife, who move onto the stage where the gentlemen are sitting while the Prologue is still talking, and though these two honest Londoners in principle agree with the requirements the

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[164] W. David Kay (ed.): *John Marston: The Malcontent*, New Mermaids Series, London: A and C Black and New York: W. W. Norton, second. ed., 1998, p. xvii, the translation is by Alan H. Gilbert.

Prologue enlisted, they want to see *themselves* on the stage, the Citizen (George), a grocer by profession, insisting on a play in which a grocer does "admirable things" and his Wife wishes to see a hero killing a lion with a pestle. They agree that the Grocer's apprentice, Ralph is to play the main role and then a compromise is reached which is absurd in itself: the couple are responsible for Ralph's role and they are to insert it into the play which is already ready. How could one insert a hero into a play without re-writing it? Can a play be altered "in the making"? In Ralph, the Grocer and his wife, the respectable yet uneducated burghers of the city may *become* a knight, a "nobleman"; it seems that anybody may become an actor on the stage, a *body*, which, in Beaumont's and Fletcher's age represents the Universe in itself. The actor plays the role of the "philosopher's stone", that of Mercury, of lead (in the sense of *The Merchant of Venice*), of potential, who mediates between social classes just as much as between basic human values. Here the actor's potential resembles that of Puck or Ariel, who, in their sexless quality may become anything.

It is another question that in the *Knight of the Burning Pestle* the outcome will be thoroughly comic: while it is subversive in itself that a woman (the Grocer's wife) is allowed to appear on the stage (as a spectator but inevitably as an "*actress*" as well), her reactions will always run against the "natural" reactions of the audience: she will always side with "her Ralph", the comic "knight", and not with the lovers, Jasper and Luce, and she is unable to realise that Jasper already embodies the "ideal" apprentice, fighting for the right of love and free choice. The Grocer's wife is thus doubly comic because she represents emancipation and conservative values at the same time. And the "frame" into which the play is inserted (cf. Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* or the Interlude before Marston's *The Malcontent*) calls attention to the limits of the theatre as well, which does not only create a further distance from the main plot but makes these limits obvious, and awareness of one's limits – if these are not fatal – is comic in itself.

The plot is rather complicated and full of funny turns; the occasional appearances of Ralph – at the insistence of the Grocer and his Wife – add extra spice to it. Venturewell, a merchant has a daughter, Luce, in love with Jasper, Venturewell's apprentice. Venturewell wishes to marry his daughter to Master Humphrey, who seems to be a better match. Jasper explains it in vain that you cannot help love, he is sent away from the house. Venturewell encourages Humphrey to woo Luce with "his language"; Luce's condition of marriage is that her future husband should "steal her away". Humphrey runs to Venturewell to ask for his permission to steal Luce from the house, yet no sooner does he and Luce arrive in Waltham forest that Jasper appears and beats Humphrey up, stealing away with Luce. Earlier, Jasper went to see his family, yet his mother, Mistress Merrythought favours Jasper's younger brother, Michael and is unwilling to give him money. The father, Master Merrythought, in turn, is only singing, eating and drinking, enjoying a carefree life and not caring about the future. Consequently, he is not able to give Jasper more than 10 shillings as his dowry. The family-quarrel around Jasper ends in Mistress Merrythought leaving the house with Michael and a casket with jewellery worth a thousand (!) pounds; they are headed towards Waltham forest as well; Master Merrythought goes on singing and does not mind their absence too much. In the meantime, Ralph has become a "Grocer-errant", having read *Palmerin of England* and having obtained, in the persons of Tim and George (two other apprentices) a "Squire" and a "Dwarf", and he switches over into "knight-language" saying – as it is spelled out in the play – "right beauteous damsel" instead of "damn'd bitch" and "fair sir" instead of "son of a whore". Ralph immediately offers his services to Mistress Merrythought, yet the "knight" soon has to learn that becoming the bearer of the burning pestle involves more than switching into another language: he is badly beaten up by Jasper, who not only stole Luce away from Humphrey but by accident found his mother's casket with the jewellery. Beaten and weary, Ralph and his gang go into an inn. Jasper and Luce in the meantime lose their way in the woods, Luce falls asleep and Jasper puts her love to the test by waking her up and threatening to kill her (the Wife of course takes this to be "real" and wants her husband to "raise the watch at Ludgate"), yet while Luce assures her lover that she is ready to die, Humphrey and Venturewell (Luce's father) appear with men and force Luce form Jasper. Helpless and desperate, Jasper remains alone. Ralph and

the others owe the inn-keeper 12 shillings, which are finally paid by the Grocer. Mistress Merrythought and Michael decide to go home yet when they appear for their scene, the Grocer and his Wife send them away because they want to see Ralph fighting with a "giant" (the local barber), whom the inn-keeper "recommends" to Ralph. In fact, the inn-keeper sends a servant of his (the Tapster) to the barber, who is told to play the role of the giant (a further instance of the "theatre –in-the theatre"). All the men in the barber's shop and even a woman play the role of "prisoners", just to make it possible for Ralph to appear as a saviour-figure; Ralph eventually pardons "the giant Barbaroso" (the barber) and now everyone is satisfied and the show may go on. It goes on with Merrythought, who locks his wife and younger son out of the house for having abandoned him. In the meantime, the Grocer and his Wife persuade the Boy (who is at their service throughout the play) to make Ralph meet a King's daughter. So in the next scene Ralph encounters Pompiona, daughter of the King of Moldavia, whom Ralph eventually rejects for the sake of his beloved Susan, a cobbler's made in Milk street, and gives Pompiona three pence to "buy" herself "pins at Bumbo Fair". Mistress Merrythought tries to seek shelter in Venturewell's house with Michael but she is turned out of doors. The boy brings a letter from Jasper to Venturewell, which says that Jasper, writing these lines before his "death", asks for Venturewell's and Humphrey's forgiveness, the latter already preparing for the wedding. Jasper, in a coffin, is brought to Luce as his "last wish", and Luce is smuggled out of the house in the self-same coffin. In the meantime the Grocer and his Wife want to see Ralph dressed as a May-lord, and recite a long poem, praising London and its grocers. Jasper "haunts" Venturewell like a ghost and wants him to get rid of Humphrey, which Venturewell is willing to do. Ralph appears leading the "army" of grocers, poulterers and others, marching off to perform other great deeds. Jasper also "haunts" his father, who still goes on singing and then there is a great scene of family reunion, when all the misunderstandings are sorted out and everybody, including Venturewell, forgives everybody, not opposing the marriage any longer. Ralph still has a great "dying-speech" at the request of the Grocer and his Wife (Ralph is supposed to have got an arrow into his head in the war), yet the Wife quickly comes up with the Epilogue in which she thanks the audience to have loved Ralph, a poor fatherless child but leave it up to the spectators to applaud or not.

9.1.5. Philip Massinger (1583-1640):

Massinger was born near Wilton, the estate of the Earl of Pembroke, in whose service his father was employed. Massinger was educated at St. Alban's Hall, Oxford but he had to leave it in 1606, the year of his father's death. It is very likely that it was then that he entered the theatre-world of London, first as an actor and, after 1613, as a playwright as well. In his early career he collaborated with Nathan Field (earlier a boy-actor) on *The Fatal Dowry* (1616-19?), with Thomas Dekker on *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), and with John Fletcher between 1616 and 1625 on roughly 13 plays (some of them still listed in the Beaumont-Fletcher canon; the most famous among these is *Sir John Van Olden Barnvelt*, a tragedy; the play is also noted for a copy in which the prompter's and the censor's notes can still be found). With the death of Fletcher in 1625, Massinger became the chief dramatist of the King's Men, a position he held until his death. He wrote, or had a hand in, as a collaborator or as a reviser, in roughly 60 plays.

Massinger, in the early phase of his career, shows an ardent interest in Catholicism; later he switches over to plays topically related to important political issues and personalities of his day. For example in a play called *The Bondman* (1623), dedicated to the Earl of Pembroke, he presents a sharp satire of the Duke of Buckingham, a powerful enemy of the earl. In his *Believe as You List* (1637) he went a bit too far and the play was not licensed in its own day because it contained "dangerous matter" relating to political developments in Portugal. Massinger's best tragedy is *The Roman Actor* (1627?), and *The Duke of Milan* (1621-22?), the latter reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Yet Massinger was great at comedy, too, for example *The City Madam* (1632) is a forerunner of the Restoration comedy of manners, using motifs from Shakespeare's

Measure for Measure but advocating middle-class values, yet his best-known play is *A New Way To Pay Old Debts*, which at the same time is one of the most popular comedies in the history of the English Theatre. Massinger often lacks the passion and great poetry of other dramas in his age but he had real talent for effective dramaturgy and plot-construction.

A New Way To Pay Old Debts (1625?) is based on Thomas Middleton's *A Trick To Catch the Old One* (1608) and – at least on the surface – it is a typical comedy of intrigue. The central figure is Sir Giles Overreach, a misery and greedy knight, who tries to control the destinies of both his daughter and his nephew. He is thwarted in both of these attempts by the young people in league with a benevolent lady, Lady Allworth. The interest of the play – also explaining its popularity – is that Sir Giles is reduced to a raging madman in the end, which makes the role very attractive and provides some tragic features, against the backdrop of which comedy is more effective, yet is also undermined (see below). In his own times, it only added to the popularity of the play that the character of Sir Giles was based on Sir Giles Mompesson, a notorious and widely known scoundrel, who had to flee England in order to avoid a trial for extortion. There is a Quarto-edition of the play from 1633.

The genre-question is interesting because – in spite of the obvious moralising intent at the end of the play – the drama dares to raise doubts about its own status as a comedy; and it hazards it precisely on the level of ethics. There are two plot-lines, one featuring Wellborn, nephew to Sir Giles Overreach, the other Margaret, Overreach's daughter, and her lover, Allworth. The plot involves partly money, because Wellborn was tricked out of his inheritance by Overreach and partly love because of course Overreach wishes to marry his daughter to Lord Lovell, Allworth's master. Overreach is surrounded by corrupt servants, Marrall, a dishonest lawyer, and Greedy, an always-hungry Justice of Peace, responsible for the burlesque side of the play, always talking about fat capons, turkeys and other foods. The first problem is that the play's universe is sharply divided into the world of the evil ones and the world of the virtuous, and the bad ones are very bad and the good ones are very good. Th second problem is that when it comes to trick Overreach out of his possessions and even sanity, the good ones resort to deception and intrigue as well; the first step is that Lady Allworth, Allworth's step-mother gives up her sad widowhood and starts to entertain Wellborn and Marrall, which makes Overreach – who would like to marry Lady Allworth for her money himself – think that she is in love with Allworth. Thus Overreach gives Allworth a thousand pounds to pay back his debts and Allworth's "new way to pay old debts" is that he gives even more to his creditors than they actually demand. Yet, on Lady Allworth's part there is great amount of deception and pretence as well. Similarly, Lord Lovell, a relatively old man, quickly abandons the original idea of marrying Margaret when he learns that she is in love with his page, Allworth, yet he goes on wooing Margaret not to make Overreach suspicious and to trick a letter of consent out of him concerning the marriage of Margaret, a letter where the name is not filled yet and which is used by Allworth to marry Margaret and drive Overreach mad. It is true that Overreach is violent, aggressive and greedy, yet he is Margaret's father still and Margaret is not too much moved when his father, foaming and biting the carpet is carried away to Bedlam (the lunatic asylum). Nobody is moved by Overreach's great speech in madness beginning "Why, is not the whole world / Included in myself?" Great poetry is given to Overreach, which still indicates a kind of human dignity but – unlike in Shakespeare, for example – this is ignored by precisely the virtuous characters in the play and thus the play is running the risk of betraying the value of poetry itself. So Lady Allworth, Lord Lovell, Allworth and Wellborn all resort to deception, the latter even kicking and dismissing Marrall at the end of the play, though Marrall eventually helped Wellborn reveal the forged documents which tricked him out of his inheritance. Our moral sense is disturbed and it seems that the "good" characters are not very much better than the evil ones, or we should say that we can only laugh at this play if we disregard such family-ties as, for example, the father-daughter relationship. There is little consolation in Lord Lovell and Lady Allworth falling in love, too with a prospect of marriage; there is a bitter tone to the whole play, in which greed and appetite – represented physically in the figure if Greed – seems to be much stronger than love or duty. This world is much closer to the world of Thomas Hobbes

already, where everyone would gladly kill and eat everybody else, had the "Commonwealth", the institution and authority preventing this, not been established. Thus, Massinger's play, in my reading, is anything but a carefree comedy where the evil ones are punished and the virtuous and nice people are rewarded.

Chapter 10

Drama in the 17ᵗʰ Century

10.1. Background: 17ᵗʰ Century French Classicism

10.1.1. France in the 17ᵗʰ century

As Queen Elizabeth I was renowned for her relative tolerance towards both Catholics and Protestants during her long reign (keeping, for example, at limbo until her death in 1603, the infamous "Lambeth Articles", in which Calvinists were wishing to introduce the dogma of pre-destination into Anglicanism), in 1598 Henry IV of France ("Henry of Navarre", reigning between 1589-1610; who declared that Paris was "worth a mass" but remained a Protestant at heart, and was cruelly assassinated by Jesuits in 1610) passed the Edict of Nantes in 1598, putting, for a while, an end to the religious wars in France between 1562-1598, and granting religious and civil liberties to Protestants. Though the Edict was officially revoked (by Louis XIV) only in 1685, what followed, after 1610, was the slow establishment of a totalitarian regime in terms if religion and politics, yet in many ways it was also a kind of "golden age" for science, philosophy and literature, often associated with the name of Cardinal Richelieu, who was, as the principal minister of Louis XIII, in (absolute) power between 1624 and 1642, destroying the influence of the Huguenots and, for a while, making France the principal political force in Europe. Though, after Richelieu's death, "universal peace" was disturbed, in two waves (1648-49, 1650-53), by the famous "fronde" ('sling': the insurgent parliamentarians likened to saucy schoolboys with slings) against the ministry of Cardinal Mazarin and Anne of Austria in the reign of Louis XIV (*roi soleil*, the Sun King, 1638-1715, reigning betw. 1643-1715, effective ruler from 1661), France, in the middle of the century, could witness to the emergence of a 'literary audience' and a kind of consensus. While in England the theatres were closed in 1642 and, until 1660, a Puritan-Protestant absolutism (Oliver Cromwell) ruled after a decaying period during the reigns of James I and Charles I, in France this is the century of "literary saloons" (as, for example, the Marquise (marchioness) Rambouvillet's "blue room" from the 1620s, a great fan of Italian and Spanish literature), the founding of the French Academy (in 1635 by Richelieu, assembling a group of important writers as well – in England the Royal Academy was chartered only in 1660 by Charles II), of literary journals (such as the *Mercure galent*, edited by Thomas Corneille, Pierre Corneille's brother, also a playwright), and of the establishment of certain norms. One of the most important documents of this norm is the *Remarques sur la langue française* [Remarks on the French Language] by Vaugelas in 1647, providing the first normative grammar of the French language, authorised and protected by the Academy. Thus, debates about tragedy, such as the famous "*Le Cid*-dispute", initiated by Richelieu himself, and theoretical discussions of tragedy in general, was part and parcel of an age greatly concerned with norms on the one hand, and deeply interested in questions of strength, will and discipline as the highest human values, on the other.

9.1.2. Background: Renaissance drama in France

The French Renaissance inherited a kind of drama which was a strange mixture of sermons and farce (the word *farce* coming from the French verb *farcir*, 'to stuff, to interpolate passages'): serious stories, such as e.g. *The Acts of the Apostles* (1452-1478), combining allegory, scholastic debate and lament, were often accompanied by farcical scenes, verging on vulgarity. In 1548, the Parlement de Paris even banned the performance of all mystery plays, objecting to the burlesque quality of religious drama. In France, Humanists had access to classical Greek and Latin drama (Sophocles, Euripides and Seneca) and they translated Greek tragedy into Latin (François Tissard, 1450?-1500?, George Buchanan, 1506-1582, etc.) to emphasise the gravity and dignity of classical drama in opposition to the shapeless, popular dramas of the Middle Ages. In 1537 Lazare de Baïf even translated Sophocles' *Electra* into French. The result was dramas with religious themes, but in their form they mirrored classical tragedy, especially Seneca (e.g. Buchanan's *Jephthes sive votum* [Jephthah, or the Vow, 1539?1544?] and the remarks of Donatus on the difference betw. comedy and tragedy, yet Aristotle's *Poetics* is not available to French Humanists till 1561). Etienne Jodelle (1532-1573) not only composed the first tragedy in French (*Cleópâtre captive* [Cleopatra Captured, 1552]) but in a book called *The Defence and Illustration of the French Language* (1549) he even argued that tragedy and comedy should be restored to their original dignity. The first four acts of the Cleopatra-play are written in alexandrines (a metre becoming compulsory for later tragedies – an iambic line of six feet [12 or 13 syllables], often applied in rhyming couplets), the remainder (Cleo's death, Act V) in decasyllabic verse. Antony is only a ghost (appearing at the beginning of the play) and the tragedy closely adheres to the unity of place, time (one day) and action – Jodelle in facts treats what Shakespeare in *Antony and Cleopatra* will put into the 5th act. There is not much conflict, not even between Octavius (Ceasar – Augustus) and Cleopatra, rather the play is Cleopatra's postponement of her deed (without even inner conflict, i.e. hesitation). Though the Chorus refers to Cleopatra's "fault" (in Act II), which is basically pride, no attempt is made at interpreting this flaw as the source of her fate, the source of her tragedy.

In 1561 Scaliger published *Poetices libri septem* [Seven Books of the Poetics] which brought Aristotle's *Poetics* into the literary consciousness of the times. Interestingly, however, Scaliger's brief and fragmentary remarks on tragedy were read as a justification of the already existing practices of dramatic composition instead of bringing about revolutionary changes. Scaliger – notoriously – reproduces Aristotle's definition of tragedy in Greek, yet he provides – in Latin – not a translation but his own definition: "A tragedy is the imitation of the adversity of a distinguished man; it employs the form of action, presents a disastrous denouement, and is expressed in impressive metrical language". Ironically, both Jodelle or even Donatus would subscribe to this definition. So the discovery of Aristotle (though Scaliger also defines *peripeteia* and lists the six parts of tragedy according to Aristotle, and even mentions *catharsis*, though negatively, since, for him, not all subjects will produce it) at that time contributed little to the formulation of French classical drama to come. The principal playwrights of the time, ironically mostly Protestant Humanists, avoiding love-themes and continuing to dramatise Biblical stories (the stories of David and Saul were especially popular), interpreted Aristotle highly selectively in their prefaces to their tragedies; André de Rivaudeau (1540?-1580) insists on the unity of time but little else; Jacques Grévin (1538-1570) only remarks that he made his chorus speak in prose instead allowing it to sing because this makes the play stylistically more even, and it is only Jean de La Taille (1540?-1608) who discusses dramatic technique in detail in his *De l'Art de la tragédie* [On the Art of Tragedy, 1572?]. He insists on the necessity of the unities of place and time, he claims that tragedy should be devoid of allegorical figures and "edifying" theological arguments and, further, he

insists that the stories of Abraham or Goliath are not fit for tragedy, since the hero should neither be too virtuous, nor too wicked. Even Robert Garnier (1545?-1590), the most talented writer of 16th c. tragedies not effect significant changes in the concept of tragedy. (Garnier's *Marc Antoine* [Mark Antony] (1578) was translated into English in 1592, which Shakespeare also knew.)

10.1.3. French Classicist Tragedy

The term "classicism" is usually applied to French writers who reached maturity between 1660 and 1700 (Moliére set up his theatre in the Théâtre du Petit Bourbon in 1659, his mature plays came in the 60s – *Tartuffe* was produced in 1669) and who sought transparency, symmetry, and discipline in form, clarity and simplicity in expression and were interested in psychological and moral action. However, the golden age of the French stage began around 1630 and the classical "spirit" was born, through the early works of Corneille especially, around this date, too.

Although secular theatre was very much alive in Paris since 1548, the first permanent professional company of clowns and tragedians called "the King's Players" were only established, in the Hôtel de Bourgogne, in 1629, soon to be followed by a second permanent group, led by the actor Montdory, in the enclosed tennis court of the Marais district in 1634. These theatres were rather shabby: the Hôtel de Bourgogne was about 30 metres long and 16 metres wide; there was nothing in it but a gallery around three sides, a pit with no chairs and a stage of about 12 metres in depth. The visibility was very poor for most of the audience and it became customary to buy seats on the stage, which was very expensive. Yet, despite such discomforts, the theatre became an established institution: Cardinal Richelieu, who wrote plays himself, became the patron of the Marais theatre; he granted permission to – and kept an eye on – a number of playwrights, he organised police protection and made it respectable to attend the theatre. Previously, the audience was chiefly male and violent, consisting mostly of students, artisans and riotous soldiers; now in the lodges and galleries, the 'polite society', bourgeois and noble, male and female, made its appearance, ready for the analysis of delicately shaded feelings, for psychological realism and depth instead of the fantasies of the romance-tradition The new society was schooled on Italian and Spanish literature and especially on the emerging French lyrical and dramatic pastoral tradition (the Italian Torquato Tasso and Battista Guarini, the French Honoré d'Urfé and Racan). And from 1628 to 1631, Paris was witnessing to a kind of "theatre warfare" and a clearly identifiable doctrinal quarrel about the aim and form of drama, especially of tragedy.

The so-called irregular plays were still very much in fashion, with a great number of characters, lots of complications, noisy, bloody, glorious and often coarse adventures and lowly comic elements. The theatre-warfare, in effect, was triggered by François Ogier's Preface to the play *Tyr et Sidon* by Jean de Schélandre, in which Ogier argued for the freedom of mixed genres (tragic substance with comic details) and in the name of the relativity of customs he rejected the authority of unities and rules in general. However, in 1630, the classical 'avant-garde' made its appearance, too: Jean Chapelain wrote his "letter" on the 24-hour rule and in his "Discourse on Representative Poetry" he claimed that the rules were dictated not by the authority of Aristotle but by general good sense and the common practice of the great classical playwrights. Interestingly, both Ogier and Chapelain appealed to *verisimilitude*, to 'faithfulness to life'. More and more plays were produced adhering to the unities of action, time (24 or 36 hours), and place (the action must unfold within the boundaries of one forest or one city but several 'rooms' were permitted, these rooms built side by side on the stage, most of them covered by curtains, which opened and closed as the action

required). Interestingly again, behind the rigid rules there was the effort to increase *dramatic credibility*, by giving the action a fixed locality similar to the spectator's, and a time as close as possible to the audience's actual lived time (cf. Shakespeare's *The Tempest*). Playwrights tried to reduce bloody and violent actions on the stage and comic elements slowly disappeared from tragedies altogether. The most popular plays were *Sophonisbe* (1634) by Jean Mairet and *Mariane* (1636) by François Tristan L'Hermite, the former considered to be the first "real" classical French tragedy, in which a psychological crisis amidst political interests brings the protagonists to their deaths within a few hours, thus the three unities are masterfully used. But in 1634/35 season also witnessed to Pierre Corneille's first tragedy, *Médée* (earlier he wrote mostly comedies). The elements of the classicist dramatic universe are the following:

– ancient subject-matters
– a predilection for maxims and moral aphorisms (similar to Seneca's, very often used by Corneille)
– indulgence in sensual, almost lunatic passions (madness), communicated by (long) laments, but, interestingly, considering this self-abandoned state as a necessary evil and finding virtue in the recognition of this necessity
– use of premonitory dreams, or even magic
– erudite philosophical debates on e.g. the relationship between epicurianism and stoicism
– the effects of violence and surprise are brought together in one great psychological crisis

10.2. Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) and *The Cid*

Corneille could masterfully judge the taste of both the popular and the educated public. He came to the forefront with his *Le Cid* in 1637, performed in the Marais theatre. Though it is not a tragedy proper (it is, in fact, a tragicomedy with a non-bloody ending, which indicates happiness in the near future), and it is not the most typical play by Corneille, it triggered a heated dispute. Its immense appeal was due to its coherence and concentration, its lyrical and active characters, "beautiful souls" devoted to a dynamic ethic and displaying the ideal psychological grace of the nobility in the time of Louis XIII: generosity. The dispute (its immediate cause being professional jealousies, of course, especially on the part of Mairet, who accused Corneille of plagiarism), already shows the crystallisation of two trends within French classicism: one was represented by the public, who sought pleasure and emotion, which justified the rules that produced them, while the other trend was of the theoreticians, who started with the rules and denied, in the name of reason and (a misrepresented) Aristotle, that any pleasure was *in principle* possible outside the unities.

Corneille was the offspring of lawyers and administrators and he himself was a perfect one: for twenty-five years, despite a very active literary life (writing poems and comedies besides tragedies, too) and frequent visits to Paris, he dutifully and ardently worked in law and administration in various capacities. He began to write poetry in 1624, and before *Le Cid* he wrote one tragedy, one tragicomedy and five comedies. He was presented to Richelieu in 1633, who, in 1635, invited him to collaborate with four other playwrights. The idea was that Richelieu provides the themes and the poets write the plays under his patronage (and supervision). By 1639 the "Society of Five Authors" produced several plays for the Cardinal, though Corneille was hardly able to write to order. *Le Cid* brought absolute success, but the theoretical dispute wounded Corneille deeply and he responded with a three-year silence (1637-40).

The play is set in Seville and it is a reworking of a Spanish tragedy by Guillén de Castro (*Las Mocedales del Cid*, 1631). 'The Cid' (meaning 'Lord') is the protagonist, the young, valiant and attractive Rodrigue (Rodrigo in English), who loves Chiméne (Ximena), a

beautiful, noble and attractive girl; the only problem is that their respective fathers – Don Diegue (Diego) and Don Gormas (Gomez) – suddenly start to hate each other. Gormas (Chiméne's father) slaps Diegue in the face, and Rodrigue cannot but defend the honour of the family by challenging Gormas into a duel. Though Rodrigue had never fought before, he kills Gormas – one of the most famous scenes is when Rodrigue enters Chiméne's room to explain himself and the lovers agree that they try to remain worthy of each other. To complicate matters, the Infanta of Spain (the King's, Don Fernando's daughter) is in love with Rodrigue but stifles her feelings. Rodrigue learns that the Moors are planning a surprise attack on the city and he so successfully beats them off that they decide to take him as their conqueror and name him "the Cid" (their Lord, i.e. their ruler). Rodrigue becomes a hero yet Chiméne, with the permission of the King, appoints Don Sanches to take revenge on Rodrigue for her father. The second duel is symmetrically preceded by another clandestine meeting of the lovers, where Rodrigue offers to let himself be killed but Chiméne eventually persuades him to defend himself. Chiméne, after the duel, believes Rodrigue to be dead and betrays her love in front of the court but it turns out that Rodrigue in fact won the duel but spared Don Sanches's life. The Infanta, though deeply impressed by Rodrigue's heroism, withdraws her claim on 'The Cid' and – in a monologue to herself – generously gives him to Chiméne. The King finally allows Chiméne and Rodrigue to get married with a probation period of a year.

The debate over the play started with Scudery's attack ("Commentaries on *The Cid*", 1637), who accused the play of lacking verisimilitude (truthfulness to life). Richelieu, with the reticent approval of Corneille, handed the play over to the Academy for a decision in the quarrel. It fell to Jean Chapelain to formulate "the French Academy's opinion" on the play, which was, on the whole, very unfavourable. Some unquestionable merits of the play were readily admitted but it was accused of 'irregularity' (!), and – while the Academy clarified several theoretical issues for itself, too, such as the difference between verisimilitude and *truth* – it was pointed out that Corneille not only chose an unsuitable subject-matter but was also guilty of violating moral standards (Chiméne's shamelessness in agreeing to talk with Rodrigue, a man, privately in her room – though Elvira, Chiméne's confident and maid is present!) and the norm of 'realism' (credibility – how is it possible that Rodrigue does not meet servants while approaching Chiméne's room?). The enforced unities of time and place resulted, it was claimed, in too many events for twenty-four hours, and also in causing "a confusion in the minds of the spectators". The debate, which was becoming more and more *ad hominem*, was put an end to by Richelieu but it shows a deep concern for the desire to formulate tragic principles clearly and distinctly: playwrights wanted a form of tragedy where the unities were respected without effort (without any artificial burdening of the allotted time-span with too many events) and where the formal principles were turned into real 'content' in the sense that they themselves were communicating the transparency of commonly accepted moral norms. Even exalting and individual impulses should be subordinated to the 'good sense' everybody – at least in principle – shared.

In the tragedies Corneille wrote later (*Horace, Cinna, Polyecute,* etc. in the 40s; *Edipe* (1659), *Sophonisbe, Attila, Suréna, etc.* from the 60s to the mid-70s, together with some tragicomedies and comedies) he voted for the 'regular' theatre but he affirmed his independence within the bounds of the classical doctrines as well. For him, the theatre was primarily spectacular, which had to astound the audience. He loved historically 'true' yet highly surprising situations which force the heroes into decision and action, and even when they opt for heinous crimes or renunciation, there must be an element of transcendence in their choice which comes from their extraordinary powers. However, Corneille's originality does not consist in presenting heroes who have nothing to do but comply with a commonly accepted moral norm. There *are absolute* moral principles (especially two: *devoir,* 'duty' and *honneur*, 'honour', constantly referred to by especially the two lovers) but they are not

external but internal to the characters, in so far as they have completely internalised them, and Corneille creates the impression that they are generated by the heroes and heroines themselves. In Corneille, family honour, patriotism, religious faith and political duty are represented sometimes as *goals* and sometimes as *constraints* and it is the reconciliation of conflicting values which is finally achieved by making the heroes and heroines surpass ordinary morality. They must always take the most difficult and the most impressive alternative to shine both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the others. Thus, even if the protagonist has the 'flaws' of the criminal, (s)he can still come into the possession of the "ethics of glory", if (s)he is able to demonstrate his or her self-possession and superiority, which are the sole conditions of transforming personal values into absolute norms. Tragedy, for Corneille might be interpreted as a kind of 'ethical laboratory' – the dangers of this attitude, namely that thus any criminal act may become a heroic deed, was well sensed (though never explicitly expressed) by the critics of *The Cid*.

10.3. Corneille's *Discourse on Tragedy* (1660)

Though the theoretical writings of great playwrights should be taken with a pinch of salt, Corneille's *Discourse* is one of the best formulations of what classical tragedy is. It is an interesting polemic with Aristotle's *Poetics,* touching on the most hotly debated issues, and often referring to his own dramatic practice (still partly as a justification of *The Cid*).

Corneille starts with the problem of the interrelatedness of *pity*, *fear* and *catharsis*: "The pity for misfortune, when we see the fall of people similar to ourselves, brings to us fear of a similar one. The fear brings us to a desire of avoiding it, and this desire to purging, moderating, rectifying, and even eradicating in ourselves the passion which, before our eyes, plunges into misfortune the persons we pity; for this common but natural and indubitable reason, that to avoid the effect it is necessary to remove the cause." Corneille, in effect, says that we pity ourselves when we pity the other (a highly psychological interpretation of Aristotle) and in a typical manner, he traces the idea back to the universal principle of cause-and-effect. Corneille insists that it is not the high rank of the characters in drama which starts this complex reaction (kings and princes are also men) but the significance, the weight of the calamities in which they get involved.

Next, Corneille considers a similarly difficult question, the problem of the 'tragic flaw' (*hamartia*). Corneille says he does not understand why Aristotle gives Oedipus and Thyestes as the examples of the tragic hero, who, in Corneille's interpretation of Aristotle, "is nether entirely good, nor entirely bad and who, through a fault or human frailty, falls into misfortune, which he does not deserve". Oedipus, Corneille claims, committed no crime, since he did not know the old man he killed was his father and he "only contests, the way as a man of gallant soul against an unknown who attacks him with superior force" (thus Oedipus becomes a 17th century gentleman, a "Cid" of honourable deeds). Thyestes is guilty of incest *before* the play would start, so the play itself can hardly purge us from *that* feeling because the play is not about it, and in the tragedy proper he only believes his brother and it is unlikely that we should be purged of confidence and sincerity. Rather, contrary to Aristotle, Corneille argues with his *The Cid*, where the tragic conditions are met "with great success": Rodrigue's and Chiméne's passion causes their misfortune but hey are unfortunate "only to the extent of their passion for each other", and we all share the human weakness of love with them. "That this has wrung many tears from the spectators, there is no contesting". This pity ought to give us fear of falling into a similar misfortune and thus purge us from the excess of love. Corneille recommends the spectator to look into him/herself and see if the play has been successful in purifying excessive passions. He also allows for the possibility that the whole mechanism of

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pity, fear and catharsis is just a good idea on Aristotle's part and, in fact, no play has hitherto been written which could put this theory into actual practice. Yet martyrs are no subject-matter for tragedies for sure, since they suffer without fault.

The ideal tragic hero for Corneille is an honest man who, under ordinary circumstances, would "not go to the woods to steal" or would not murder anyone but, because of some high yet still *natural* passion (such as love) is forced to resort to deceit, theft or even murder in order not to lose this passion.

Then Corneille allows for an alternative interpretation of Aristotle, according to which Aristotle meant that pity cannot come without fear, while fear can be aroused without pity. Thus it is either fear, or fear-and-pity which are to be purged. This, more liberal interpretation does not make, for Corneille, *Oedipus* a tragedy, either, and he refers to his own plays again to show that he complies even with the more rigid norms of Aristotle better than Aristotle's own contemporaries. Aristotle becomes a "soothsayer" who had, in fact, Corneille's plays in mind when he defined the 'prefect tragedy' and he does not refer to them only because he did not (could not) read them.

Corneille agrees with Aristotle that those tragedies are the most effective in which the characters involved in the calamities are close family members ("the proximity of blood and the intimacy of love or friendship between the persecutor and the persecuted, the hunting and the hunted"), though this is not to be found, e.g. in Sophocles's *Ajax* or *Philoctetes*.

In a less exciting part, Corneille examines the various combinations Aristotle works out for tragic actions happening between close relatives; the four factors from which the possibilities are worked out are: (1) the one who wishes the death of the other recognises the victim (2) or not; (3) the murderer achieves his goal (4) or not. According to Aristotle, Corneille claims, the best is when the murderer does not recognise his victim in time to save him/her yet he does so later on and he achieves his goal. The worst is when he recognises, murders but achieves nothing.

Corneille, on the other hand argues that the most superior kind of tragedy is when the actual deed (murder) need not be actually done (a curious suggestion: tragedy without death), – although all the *conditions* for the deed are granted – and the goal is still achieved. This is Corneille's doctrine of generosity (*générosite*). And what else would his example be than *The Cid*, where Chiméne does not ruin Rodrigue, though she could, and Rodrigue (through his generosity in spearing Don Sanches's life) is still purged of his guilt (of having killed the Count, Chiméne's father)?

The next question is to what extent the events put on the tragic stage should come from history ('real life') or from 'fable' (the writer's imagination). Here Corneille first – quite rightly – points out that, in the first place, fable and history are so much mixed in classical antiquity that it is impossible to tell which tragic plot comes form which side. Here the safest is to say, he claims, that the event should by all means be *probable* "so that one can say that if this could have been done, it must have been done as the poet describes it". Thus, for example the sudden intervention of the gods (the *deus ex machina*) is no longer credible on stage, so it should not be employed. Since Corneille does not use the category we today label as 'mythology', he has to qualify well-known Greek plots along the lines of history versus imagination. He notes that many of these stories are credible neither as history, nor as products of the imagination.

Practically the same applies to the question to what extent the writer is licensed to 're-write' old stories, to what extent he is allowed to interfere with history. Here Corneille contrasts the Orestes-story (dramatised both by Sophocles and Euripides) with his own *Oreste* (1659): the playwright cannot e.g. say that Clytemnestra killed Orestes, since it happened the other way round; though the story is not 'history proper', it is so deeply rooted in common belief that it would create a scandal to interfere with it to such an extent. Yet the significance

of Clytamnestra's death can be given a twist and thus be shown from a different light. Corneille tells us that he had always disliked the idea that Orestes decides on the killing of his mother when she is begging him on her knees to spare her life, so Corneille made Orestes's design to fall only on Aegisthus, Clytamnestra's lover and made her death a kind of accident. When Orestes wishes to kill Aegisthus, Clytamnestra throws herself between them and thus gets stabbed; this way, Corneille claims, a double effect of tragedy is achieved: Orestes remains innocent, – "leaving her [Clytamnestra] to God", Corneille says – and Clytamnestra still gets punished but she dies heroically, ready to sacrifice herself for her lover.

In the last section, Corneille gives a highly original and interesting treatment of two highly difficult Aristotelian categories: *probability* and *necessity*. His conclusion, on the basis of the *Poetics* is that according to Aristotle, there are occasions when probability is to be preferred to necessity and others when necessity is to be preferred to probability. To clarify this, he introduces two "things" which are to be distinguished in the actions that make up tragedy: the first "consists of these actions in themselves, together with the inseparable circumstances of time and place; the other in the natural relationship which make the one give birth to the other" (this second is, in fact, the unity of action [plot]). In other words, Corneille is examining – in a totally un-Aristotelian way – the relationship between place, time and the plot and says that with respect to place and time, probability is to be preferred; with respect to the plot, necessity.

Here he contrasts tragedy with 'romance' (narrative poem or today's 'novel'). It is clear that for Corneille there are actions and events existing on a neutral, independent plane and it is only when they are put into either of these forms ('genres') that the question of probability and necessity arise. Romances, he says, have no constraints (!), they can jump back and forth in time and may use as large fields and as many scenes as they like, so the authors can easily arrive at probability. But the dramatist, burdened by the constraints of having to present his plot at roughly the same place and within twenty-four or thirty-six hours, has to be careful not to violate probability by forcing too many events into the frame with the prescribed boundaries. The best solution is if the playwright concentrates on the unity of action (which Corneille here calls *liaison* – 'connection, continuity'): one action should be preceded by the other and at least one person of a scene should remain to be character in the next; this way the playwright can establish necessary connections between two probable actions.

Probability is defined by Corneille as: "a thing manifestly possible with propensity and it is neither manifestly true nor manifestly false". This definition will yield four subcategories:
(1) *general* probability is which is possible for a king, a general, a lover – for a human being in a certain *position*
(2) *particular* probability is what is possible for an *individual* (Alexander, Ceasar, etc.). To violate this kind of probability is tantamount to falsifying history (e.g. to say that Ceasar and Antony remained friends after the battle of Actium)
(3) *ordinary* probability is which happens often, or at least as often as its opposite
(4) there is, finally, *extraordinary* probability, which is the most difficult to define. Corneille says that it happens less often than its opposite yet it is still feasible enough not to enter the realm of the miraculous. One of Aristotle's examples for this, Corneille claims, is when a weaker man, with a just cause, defeats a man who is much stronger. The example Corneille gives is, not surprisingly, from *The Cid*: the scene where Rodrigue defeats Chiméne's father.

Necessity is "the need of the poet to arrive at his goal or to make his actors get there". The goals of the actors are diverse: the things they must do in order to bring their ends about constitute necessity; this must be added, according to Corneille, to probability in the *connection* of the events.

The ultimate goal is to please the spectator and thus the playwright can heighten the splendour of certain events and lessen the horror of disastrous ones. Here the violation of particular probability is permitted but not that of general probability. The author can also violate the order of historical events to make the events happen at the same place and time. Corneille confesses that he has always regretted that the King, in *The Cid*, says that Rodrigue should wait *one or two hours* to fight Don Sances; thus he mistakenly called attention to the action taking place in 24 hours. This was unnecessary, since the best method is not to assign a fixed place and time for the action but to allow the audience's imagination to put the action within 24 hours and within a certain location. Today we would say that Corneille allows for the possibility of a 'stylised' treatment of place and time, an almost 'timeless' and 'locationless' unfolding of the events which are only *understood* to take place within twenty-four hours and at the same place (Racine used this technique pretty often – he simply gives no specific indications of time and place).

The essay ends with a few notes on comedy, saying that comedy allows more licenses than tragedy.

10.4. Jean Racine (1639-1699) and *Phaedra*

Racine's favourite motto was – coined by the Abbé dá Aubignac – "begin the play as near as catastrophe as possible". Today, Racine, Corneille's great rival, is considered to be the better poet, although the old Corneille – consciously or unconsciously – learned a great deal from Racine: Corneille, in his later tragedies, introduces some Machiavellian monsters into his plays besides – and even at the expense of – the generous ones and creates increasingly complex and ambiguous characters. He was, in the 60s and the 70s, when Racine was at his height "the great ageing writer", admired by, yet often disappointing for, his audience. He treated political issues more often than amorous ones and the conflicts are made up of tensions stemming from uncertainties and hesitations to which (self-generated) generosity is no longer an easy solution. His tragedies gain in psychological and dramatic value what they lose in optimistic grandeur. Still both the tragedies and the characters of Corneille and Racine are very far from each other and the clique around Corneille did everything to ruin Racine's fame – not without success.

Racine was born in the sleepy provinces, some sixty miles north of Paris and became an orphan at the age of four. His aunt, who was herself a nun at Port Royal, the headquarters of Jansenism, took care of the boy, who was educated at schools all associated with Port Royal. Although Jansenists were a Catholic sect, they believed, like Protestants, that man was fundamentally corrupt and only God's grace is able to save him, for which a *personal* relationship is to be sought with God. Even though they did not subscribe to the doctrine of predestination openly, they were obsessed with it and they were close to the position according to which the human being is damned or saved for all eternity. In their schools education was exemplary: they insisted on logical rigour (mathematics, science), the mastery of French and on instruction in Greek besides Latin, so later Racine could read Sophocles and his most beloved Euripides in the original.

For a time Racine cherished the hope of becoming a lawyer or a priest but he was also attracted by the stage so, from 1658, he entered the colourful literary world of Paris, hanging out mostly with La Fontaine (the future author of the famous tales), and became a prominent member of that reckless group of radicals who wanted to change the literary taste dictated primarily by the Corneilles (Pierre and Thomas). He showed his first tragedies to Moliére, who did not like them but encouraged him and even helped him with plot-outlines. Only Racine's fifth tragedy, *Alexandre* (1665) became a success but fame started a series of tragic

events in Racine's personal life: he secretly brought the play over to the Hôtel the Bourgogne, where Moliére's rivals were playing, betraying their friendship for good. Further, Racine not only forced Thérèsè du Parc, his mistress and a talented actress in Moliére's company, to leave her group but may have been partly responsible for her death. Even further, he started a bitter controversy with the Jansenists, his former masters, who, being Puritanic in their attitude, were naturally opposed to anything in connection with the theatre.

Racine wrote his mature tragedies between 1667 and 1677 and though he was violently opposed by the Corneille-clique, he found favour with the young King, Louis XIV himself through a cousin at court. But he also found favour with the King's mistress, Mme de Montespan, with Henrietta of England (the King's sister-in-law) and the great Colbert (the 'Richelieu' and the 'Mazarin' of the time). Somehow, everybody – except for Corneille and Moliére – loved this man of unscrupulous ambition.

Although later in his life he wrote two Biblical tragedies, his career ended in 1677, when *Phaedra*, probably his best play, failed. The Corneille-clique bought up all the tickets for the first night and nobody turned up, while at exactly the same time a rival *Phaedra* was put on (by Nicholas Pradon). Racine retired from the theatre, he married (for money), settled down, had seven children and accepted the sinecure of 'royal historiographer' – the condition of this post was that he wrote no more plays. He made peace with the Jansenists, wrote a brief history of Port Royal and died as an austere Christian, in his last years out of the King's favour, mostly interested in the education of his children.

Thus, his life was by far more dramatic than the even and uneventful biography of Corneille (whose eulogy, after Corneille's death, was beautifully voiced by Racine at the French Academy, of which he became a member as early as in 1673). With Racine, we enter, indeed a tragic universe which could hardly be darker and more heavily burdened by self-torturing characters suffering from self-consuming and self-destructive passions, which are most violent towards those who are totally engulfed in them. Racine does everything to deconstruct the idea of a paternal and benevolent providence – the good are not rewarded and crime is almost never punished in any other way then self-destruction. In a truly Jansenist (and, to some extent, Cartesian) manner, Racine distrusts *a priori* all propositions which would offer a firm or fixed stand; it is as if he got stuck in the phase of radical doubt René Descartes puts forward in e.g. his First Meditation and at the beginning of the Second in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1642), before he finds the single, metaphysically true statement *I think, (hence) I am..* Generosity, so important for Corneille, is replaced by decisiveness and ruthlessness: for Racine's heroes, politics is a Machiavellian science, not a moral philosophy (Machiavelli won fame in France in the 1660s).

In Racine's tragedies, human beings are once more victims of original sin and of the vicious and arbitrary gods inclining them to crime and then punishing them for it. Sin, like a general contagion, spreads also in the offsprings and even in their fiancées. Love is anything but intimacy and tenderness; when it is kindled, it immediately turns into its opposite (especially because love, in Racine, is almost never reciprocated). Love is a curse which inevitably leads to murder, madness, incest and, finally, suicide. In *Phaedra*, it is Venus who inspires the desire of incest in Phaedra's heart and makes her suffer unbearable pains (most of the play is the expression of this torture, in beautiful poetry). Phaedra is the human being before (or beyond) redemption, without the slightest hope of any grace.

Corneille ultimately believed in the universal goodness of mankind – although human institutions (such as duty and honour) are imperfect (especially if they mingle with passions) the paradoxical knots can be untied through steadfastness, personal sacrifice and generosity, for which the heroes, even if they fall, are rewarded (at least in the sense that they can be sure that their sacrifice 'was not in vain'). For Corneille, the universe is rationally and proportionally furnished and this proportion (almost 'Newtonian' harmony and balance), finds

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expression in (and, thus, becomes an aid to) the formal properties of tragedy, in the unities of place and time. (Time and place, as both *constraints* and *expressions* of a content, somewhat act as the forerunners of *time* and *space*, the forms, the conditions of our sensibility in Immanuel Kant's philosophy.) Racine, on the other hand, embraces the three unities because he can see in them the universal constraints always already jeopardising the human being. In Racine, tension is largely due to his heroes and heroines relentlessly fighting these limits, always in vain. Racine ingeniously discovered the conflict between the perfect rationalism of form and the fundamental irrationality of human feelings.

In the same way, also on the 'microcosmic level', there is always a tension between the hidden feelings of the Racinian characters and the words they actually utter. In Corneille, almost nothing disturbs the harmony between the 'inner' and the 'outer' – we can be sure that his characters 'speak their minds' (as they mind what they speak).

Thus, in Racinian tragedy, we have brutal and elementary conflicts, taking us back to a chaotic mythological past: every action adheres to the Corneillian principle of cause and effect relationships but 'necessity' is brought to such 'perfection' that every deed is absolutely irreversible and irretrievable (Phaedra tries to take back his words to Hyppolytus in vain). In Corneille, tragedy is that the hero never lets the principle of being faithful to a principle slip from his hand: the human being has to choose and conflict arises when the choice to be made is between equally valuable principles. For Racine, tragedy is the human being him/herself: (s)he is no longer in control of any of the principles (s)he knows and they do with him/her whatever they please. The human being finds him/herself, and has to remain, in a claustrophobic, hermetically sealed universe.

10.5. Molière and *Le Malade imaginaire* (1673) (*The Imaginary Invalid*, also known as *The Hypochondriac*)

Molière (1622-1673) is a pen- or stage-name; the actor, director, theatrical entrepreneur and playwright, producing and directing approximately forty comedies, acting in twenty-four, and staging over a hundred was called Jean Baptiste Poquelin. There are several Molières, the public entertainer, thoroughly the man of the theatre and a shameless plagiarist; the defender of middle-class values and of the 'golden mean', a comic scourge of manners and tastes; and the embittered satirist, the dark comedian, who is able to show the tragic side of every exaggerated human characteristic. It is this latter Molière – created mostly by the Romantics – to whom, it seems, it is the most exciting to subscribe.

Molière was born in Paris, where his father was an upholsterer in the service of the king. He had a good education: he attended the Jesuit Collège de Clermont in Paris, studying humanities and around 1640 he went into law. Yet the family lived near the theatres and with his grandfather or father he often admired the "magic world" on stage. It was in 1642 (the year the theatres were closed in England) that Molière encountered a group of actors directed by the Béjart family. In 1643, he signed a contract with Madeline Béjart, founding a company called the Illustre Théâtre (Illustrious Theatre), and in 1644 he re-baptised himself for the stage as Molière (the name probably coming from the name of a village or is taken after a long-forgotten novelist, Molière d'Essartines). Madeline (born in 1618) became his mistress and later Madeleine's sister, Armande Béjart became his wife in 1662, though Armande (born in 1643) could well have been his daughter (as some of Molière's ill-wishers later rumoured, she *was* his daughter). From 1642 till his death, his whole life was a steadfast and often unsuccessful struggle for fame and financial recognition, first and foremost for his company. And for love, which he did not often find. He was medium-sized, heavily-round shouldered

and unhandsome. Sometimes he was impatient and wanted to dominate, yet he was generous, and could forget grudges. He is often represented in – more or less reliable – memoirs of his contemporaries as having a rather melancholic, introspective temper, not really fit for "clowning" but rather for serious roles. At any rate, he was a dutiful son and a good husband, although his personal life was not very successful: his marriage to Armande was soon crumbling, and all their three children died in infancy. Besides, he was suffering from a serious lung-ailment, which eventually caused his death right after the fourth performance of *The Imaginary Invalid* in which, as often in his plays, he played the main role (Argan).

In 1645 the company faced so serious troubles that Molière was even briefly imprisoned for debt and they were forced to leave Paris. Between 1645 and 1658 the Illustre Théâtre was touring the provinces, mainly the Rhone valley and Languedoc. But they did not suffer the hand-to-mouth existence of several other touring companies: they performed in the houses of the nobility and they were well rewarded. By 1655 Molière became the director of the company, and with the support of the nobility (until 1650, the Duke d'Épernon, from 1653 to 1655, the Prince de Conti) slowly started to make a name for himself as a highly talented actor and as a writer of farces and comedies. He became so well-known that the best actors of the other road companies were willing to join his troupe and he did not lose his ties with Paris, either.

In 1658 they found a new patron in Philipe d'Anjou, the king's brother and they tried their luck in Paris again: on October 24, in the guard room of the old Louvre, they performed, for Louis XIV, Pierre Corneille's tragedy (*Nicomède*) and a farce of Molière's own called *The Amorous Doctor* (now lost). Louis liked the farce and he granted the troupe the right to remain in Paris and to play in the Théâtre du Petit Bourbon, which they had to share with a professional Italian company called the Scaramouche, directed by Tiberio Fiorelli. Fiorelli of course kept the best days of the week for performance (Tuesday, Friday and Sunday), yet when the Petit Bourbon was destroyed to make way for the facade of the Louvre, Molière could take over – after three idle months – the Théâtre du Palais-Royal, which he still had to share with the Italians, yet this time it was Molière who kept the best days. The co-existence with the Italians was not without benefit: the *commedia dell'arte* had a deep influence on Molière and he was a great admirer of their body-language, which they developed for the lack of linguistic communication with the audience.

The first real triumph came with *Le Précieuses ridicules* (*The Fashionable Damsels*, 1659), a one-act comedy in prose, about two young girls coming to Paris from the provinces, having read fashionable romances. Yet several members of the fashionable public found the indirect criticism also levelled against them too much. Similarly, in 1662 (when there are permanent theatres in England again) *Le'École des femmes* (*The School for Wives*) caused a scandal and Molière was attacked on aesthetic, moral and even personal grounds. The play – a re-enactment of the old theme of a young man stealing, with cunning and good looks a pure and instinctive girl from a possessive and tyrannical old man – made Molière a morally dangerous writer in the eyes of many. And when, in 1664, the first three acts of *Tartuffe*, levelled against religious hypocrisy, was presented in front of the king, even his majesty intervened; he was entertained but he forbade the play to be shown in public; it was presented in the form we know it now only in 1669. Even further, *Don Juan ou Le Festin de Pierre* (*Don Juan or the Stone Guest,* 1665) was taken to be the play of an incorrigible atheist; a pamphlet even demanded that Molière should be burned. In *Don Juan* the protagonist, who is repulsive and attractive at the same time, abandons his wife, tries to seduce peasant girls (two simultaneously) and humiliates beggars and is led into the flames of hell only at the end of the play by a stone-statue coming to life; it is easy to see that Molière was indeed challenging his audience to an extent which had been unknown before.

1665 was a turning-point in his career: Jean Racine, to whom Molière had acted as a kind of tutor for a long time, even helping him with the writing of his tragedies, forsook him. From that time one, Racine staged his plays in the Hôtel de Bourgogne, later also enticing Mademoiselle du Parc, one of Molière's greatest actress away to the rival theatre. Yet it was in the same year that Molière's troupe became The King's Company, and from that time they were often called upon to present a new comedy at Versailles, or where the court happened to be. Of course, they performed comedies and tragedies by other authors, too, yet Molière's own plays formed the basis of their repertoire. In 1672, however, the king withdrew royal favour from Molière, granting it rather to Jean Baptiste Lully, and Madeleine Béjart died in the same year. Disappointed and exhausted, Molière had convulsions during the performance of *The Imaginary Invalid,* almost dying during the performance, yet heroically hiding his fits of coughing into hysterical laughter and playing, while being very ill, a hypochondriac. It seems that reality and illusion really changed places during the last performance and he died in his home the same night. No Catholic priest was willing to administer him the extreme unction before his death, or to give him a Christian burial. Eventually, at the king's intervention, he was buried at night. Armande relocated the company to the rue Guénigaud, because Lully acquired the Plais Royal as the home of the French opera. In 1680, Louis XIV merged Molière's former company with the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and founded the Comédie Française.

Molière's originality largely lies in moving away from Romanesque comedy (or: comedy of intrigue, using highly complicated plot-lines, lost and found children, pirates, disguises, magic spells, etc.) and making *farce* an accepted genre. Yet he does not only start out with certain fixed masks and does not only create human types by adding them characteristics observed in everyday life. Molière goes beyond "satirical" or "character comedy" in his greatest pieces, such as *Tartuffe, Le Misanthrope* (*The Misanthrope,* 1666), *L'Avare* (*The Miser*, 1668) – although *The Miser* does contain Romanesque elements, when generous Anselme discovers that Mariane and Valère are his children who he once lost in a shipwreck. Molière presents inner forces, tensions and convictions in outward, truly dramatic gestures, yet the passion behind these exaggerated outer features is not only ridiculous but also fatal; in fact, Molière's heroes, dominating or protecting themselves to an unnatural degree, undo themselves just in the way Racine's tragic characters get consumed in their own flames of emotion, and that the result is comic rather than tragic largely has to do with two main reasons. One is that the values the egoistic main heroes create to satisfy their appetites are illusionary (imaginary) ones, the other is that it is precisely through the self-centred protagonists making themselves their own prisoners that some young couples, with the help of some clever servants, are granted the possibility of freedom and of unity in marriage. Yet it is no wonder that Molière's enemies found him dangerous: he showed, time after time, that any human trait can turn into its opposite if it exceeds the normal boundaries and, hence, no characteristic has an *a priori*, pre-given value but is relative to the very person who is its representative. For Molière, the human being is a hopeless egotist, who is able to reduce any impulse to an illusion which will successfully hide his tyrannical nature and thus even the values and interests we consider to be the most sacred may become tools we are able to torture one another with. In most cases, the protagonist is not reformed or cured of his obsession: he falls into madness and it is thus that he withdraws himself form social circulation. Molière's best comedies may be called "comedies of observation", where there is careful study of how a three-dimensional (and never simple) individualised type mixes up common sense and reality with illusion and how he brings about his own ruin..

The Imaginary Invalid is a play in which Molière turns ballets and interludes into an extension of the plot. It starts with the ballet and songs of shepherds and shepherdesses, whose singing the praise of spring will be echoed in the Second Interlude at the end of Act II

(Scene ix), when Béralde, Argan's brother brings "a company of gypsy men and girls in Moorish costume" dancing and singing "Rejoice, rejoice in the spring". The very first scene, announcing love as a kind of sickness of the heart (as the old commonplace goes) will also be partly re-enacted in the "little improvised opera" Cléante and Angélique sing in Act II, Scene v (Cléante pretending to be a replacement for a sick (!) music-master). There are two further musical interpolations: one is the First Interlude, when Punchinello's serenade to his love is interrupted by violins and he is eventually beaten up by some Archers, the other is the final scene, in which Argan is conferred a doctor's degree in a mock-ceremony, using burlesque dog-Latin, mixed with Italian, Spanish and French (in the translation: English) words. Thus, although especially Punchinello's interlude is not an integral part of the play (Toinette says at the end of Act I, Scene viii that she will send out to the old money-lender, Punchinello and that she is "walking out with him" but he never appears in the main plot), the five musical pieces are in relative symmetry.

The main plot is Argan's marriage-plot and, to some extent, Béline's (Argan's second wife's) plot to disinherit Argan's two daughters, Angélique and Louison, and to get all of Argan's money. There is a counter-plot arranged, i.e. directed and played mostly by Toinette and by the lovers (in the opera-scene) and there is a strange, even in part anti-theatrical plot of the intellect, with Béralde, Argan's brother in the main role, who tries to persuade Argan to get rid of his "doctoritis" (his hypochondria) using reasonable arguments at the end of the play. Béralde represent common sense and, to some extent even an implied criticism of the Cartesian system (i.e. that of René Descartes – Molière was rather in contact with Gassendi, who was a sceptical critique of some of Descartes' main ideas.)

The plot is fairly simple: Argan, who believes himself to be very ill and surrounds himself with doctors and apothecaries, wants to marry her elder daughter, Angélique to Thomas Diafoirus, a new doctor of the Faculty of Medicine just because he wishes to have a medical doctor about the house, who would be curing him free of charge. Thus he has two obsessions: one is that he is very sick; the other is that he is the absolute ruler in his house: "I am master in my own house and can do whatever I think fit" (III; iii). He thinks he has the right to send his daughter to a nunnery, if she resists (the commonplace-threat to daughters opposing their fathers), and to beat his younger daughter, Louison, who did not want to report on the secret meeting she witnessed to between Angélique and Cléante. There are two ways in which hypocrites reveal their true natures, i.e. not only that they are *not* what they pretend to be but strictly the *opposite* of their feigned characteristics: one is that they undo themselves by themselves (as Punchinello remarks, "affairs take care of themselves" [First Interlude]), the other is that they go through a little "theatrical purging", i.e. the tricks and show Toinette arranges for them. In the first group we find Thomas Diafoirus, who greets his future father-in-law with an eloquent speech (telling Argan that he is more precious than his "founding father", Monsieur Diafoirus, because his biological father only begot him but Argan has "chosen him") and for a while we may even think he is a nice man. But when his first present to Angélique is an article he wrote against the "Circulationists" (the followers of William Harvey [1578-1657], who in 1628 put forward his thesis about the circulation of the blood), when he promises Angélique to take her to the dissection of a woman, and especially when he falters in his speech which he learned to greet Béline, he makes a true monkey of himself. Yet Béline is a more dangerous hypocrite: she pretends to love and care about Argan and her greed and hatred towards him is only revealed when in the last, climatic scene Argan, at Toilette's suggestion, pretends to be dead and Béline rejoices over it and wants Argan's money immediately (while Angélique truly grieves her father). It is somewhat frightening that one has to bring in death, the metaphor of tragedy, to learn what is truly inside the other and Molière plays a dangerous game with truth in the sense of 'reality' as well: Monsieur Purgon, the doctor who gets offended and leaves Argan tells the hypochondriac that "And I predict

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that within four day you'll be beyond all help" (Molière, playing Argan, died after the *fourth* performance of the play); Toinette, disguised as a doctor, tells Argan that he does not have liver-problems (as the other doctors claimed) but "Your trouble is lungs", when Molière *really* died of "serious pleurisies with inflammation of the lungs" (Act III; Scene x), and Molière even makes Argan ask, before Béline would be put to the test: "I suppose pretending to be dead isn't dangerous?" (III; xi). All this could be merely a back-reading from biographical data but that this back-reading was lurking in Molière's mind is corroborated by the fact that – through a truly meta-theatrical gesture – Béralde, while reasoning with his brother, tells him that he should go and see one of Molière's plays, poking fun "not at doctors but at the absurdities of medicine" (III; iii). The mortally ill Argan-Molière then says about Molière: "When he was ill I'd leave him to die without lifting a finger […] and I'd say to him: 'Die and be damned, that'll teach you to make fun of the Faculty of Medicine!'" (III; iii).

Did Molière, who is now immortal in the theatres of the world, think that he would only die on the stage but would survive in 'reality'? Or did the two, the theatre and 'reality' *really* change places for him and was he happy to die a *real* death (almost) on the stage, "in his boots on", doing the profession he loved most? At any rate, it is symbolic of how he gave his life to the theatre, a theatre in which, as far as I can see, he did not want to settle the question whether Argan is really sick or not, and who believes, in the circle around him, that he is only pretending to be ill. Toinette, as early as Act I, Scene iv says, first in the context of love that "Real love and pretending are very hard to tell apart" but the relationship between reality and pretence is one of the age-old questions of the theatre as well. It is clear that according to Molière, *believing* one to be sick is an ailment in itself but it is also hard to see whether Toinette's theatre-within-theatre (disguising herself as a doctor of ninety) and Béralde's reasoning and his idea that Argan himself should become a medical doctor, will cure the imaginary invalid or not. It is not by accident perhaps that Argan in the first scene is giving an account of his illness in terms of the money he has paid to the apothecary: in Descartes' system quality was given an account in terms of quantity, and numbers, being neutral and universal, were the best language into which qualities could be translated; for example, when Toinette has upset Argan he claims that "It will take eight doses of medicine and a dozen irrigations to set me right again" (I, vi), as if emotions, such as anger could be measured against precise amounts of medicine. Descartes haunts the play at several places anyway: e.g. when Cléante talks about the lover who "tries by every means to catch another glimpse of the vision of which he retains, sleeping and waking; so clear an image" (II; v), he might be echoing Descartes' quest for "clear and distinct" ideas and his argument that the senses cannot be trusted because we may have vivid sensations in our dreams, too. Angélique will refer to general laws (such as "Marriage is a bond which should never be imposed by force", I; vi) when she is arguing for her own rights to choose a husband, yet she will also warn that a daughter's duty "neither in reason, nor in justice can […] be made to apply to every circumstance", indicating that laws of reason have limits, too. But the man who looks at thing the most "philosophically" (III; iii) is Béralde, who starts out with a general thesis: "I don't know anything more ridiculous than the idea that one man should make it his business to cure another", and he will even make reference to "mathematical proof" but he will also point out that medicine breaks down precisely when something has to be *done*: "Most of them [the doctors] […] have learnt the Greek names for all the ailments and can define and classify them. But when it comes to curing them, that's something they know nothing about". Béralde points out the weakness of all deductive systems (and Descartes' philosophy is deductive, too): the general principles can indeed be formulated in a way that they will not contain any logical contradictions and they can be made clear and distinct for pure reason, yet when it comes to the application to particular cases, each different from the other, troubles might easily begin. And, eventually, Béralde stops coming up with arguments: he arranges two shows for his brother to cure him (the one with the gypsies, the other the mock degree-ceremony), he will approve of Toinette's theatre (disguising herself as a medical doctor) and will, as we saw, warmly recommend Molière's theatre, which does not – at least not in the first place – explain and reason, but represents, puts you in the middle of lived experience: it initiates. Sometimes even too much, as perhaps in Molière's case, when he played the role of Argan.

Chapter 11

English Theatre and Drama during the Restoration Period (1660-1700)

11. 1. Theatres and drama regained

1660 started a new era in England and, thus, in the life of the theatre, too. "Restoration drama" is the widely accepted term to refer to plays written between the restoration of Charles II and 1700 (the year of Dryden's death and of the last 'real' "comedy of manners", William Congreve's *The Way of the World*). When Charles returned in the spring of 1660, the theatres, which had been closed by an Act of Parliament in 1642, could reopen. Although during those eighteen years, there were some illegal performances in, and – mostly – outside of London (often disguised as "drolls", i.e. scenes from popular plays arranged as farcical acts, mixed with dance and other entertainment), and though Sir William Davenant offered "entertainments" (e.g. the first "heroic play", *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), disguised as an "opera") for an admission fee in his own residence (Rutland House), that kind of theatre which had enjoyed an unbroken popularity during Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline times was nowhere to be found. The 'playhouses' (the amphitheatre-like wooden buildings housing c/a. 2000 spectators from all layers of society) had been pulled down during the Commonwealth yet the plays by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, etc. were available and many of them were revived. Further, the two theatres which were chartered introduced two very significant technical innovations: painted scenery (which previously could be found only in court masques) and the admission of "real" actresses into the cast.

Charles granted patents to two companies, enjoying a practically total theatrical monopoly until 1682. The first one was called the King's Company, led by Thomas Killigrew: they started acting in the famous Royal Theatre at Drury Lane. The other group was the Duke's Company, under the patronage of the King's brother, the Duke of York, organised by the "pioneer", Sir William Davenant himself. From 1671, they occupied the elegant Dorset Garden Theatre, designed by no lesser an architect than Sir Christopher Wren. In the King's Company there were some "veteran" actors (such as Michael Mohun [who played Ventidius in Dryden's *All for Love*] and Charles Hart [who played Mark Antony in the same play]): they had acted even before 1642. Davenant's group was more enterprising and they boasted of the most distinguished actor of the times, Thomas Betterton. This was the time of female stars as well, e.g. Nell Gwyn, who started as an orange-girl in the theatre and left as the King's mistress, or Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle (making themselves famous especially in Otway's plays). In 1682, mostly because of financial difficulties, the two companies were ordered a merger under the name of United Company, and it was only in 1685 that Betterton could form a new company again.

Both theatres were indoor ones, with a changeable scenery and expensive stage machines. The fore-stage projected into the auditorium from the upstage area; the upstage had the scenery, made of colourful side-wings, which moved in parallel grooves. The fore-stage was divided by the proscenium arch with two or three doors on each side and with windows above the doors. Characters moved through these doors or were 'discovered' between the shutters in the upstage area. The fore-stage still allowed some intimacy with the (invariably seated) audience but action moved more and more towards the 'scene' area at the back, which was almost as deep as the fore-stage. The 'scene' area was the forerunner of the "picture-frame" stage of the later period. The scenery, the ornamented background, was changed right before the audience and it often suggested a remote and marvellous, or even exotic world, while the proscenium was ideal for the more familiar atmosphere of streets and, especially, of

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rooms. One could say that parts of the stage were used according to genre: the heroic play, or tragedy, taking its subject-matter from events in far-away places both in history and geography (such as Egypt, Rome, Spain etc.), favoured the colourful backstage, which did not allow a view from three sides, while comedies, often representing contemporary 'reality', were mostly located on the fore-stage, providing the audience with a more 'three dimensional' perspective. Music – as in Elizabethan times – was an important feature of performances: an orchestra entertained the audience before the play began and between the acts, songs were often interpolated into dramas and music was also used fore atmospheric effects even during the prose-scenes (cf. e.g. *All for Love*, Act I, line 230, when "soft music" underscores Antony's "melancholy").

The two distinctive forms of Restoration drama were a type of tragedy, the so-called *'heroic play'* and the *comedy of manners*. Acting, by our present-day standards, was invariably stylised, though the performance of a comedy is likely to have been more 'natural' for the Restoration audience, since there the aim was to imitate the behaviour of the polite society of the age (as the prologues and epilogues of these comedies themselves inform us). 'Realism', thus, was more bound to comedy, whereas in the heroic mode the actors (in plumes) and the actresses (in trains), declaimed their long speeches in a singing tone (in a manner close to incantation), with sweeping gestures and with the obvious intention of impressing the audience with a 'larger-than-(real)-life' image. The best actors were required to be good in both heroic and in comic roles, for example Charles Hart was not only Mark Antony in *All for Love* (or Almanzor in [Dryden's] *The Conquest of Granada*) but also Horner in Wycherley's *The Country Wife*.

The audience consisted mostly of the court and the higher levels of town society – we look for the 'mixed' audience watching e.g. *King Lear* in vain. The most elegant seats were at the back, and in the boxes on the three sides of the auditorium – these were mostly occupied by ladies, wearing a 'vizard mask' for the occasion. The pit was the place of the fashionable 'gallants', 'fops', 'wits' and 'would-be-wits', whose backless benches, covered with green clothes, were set on a sloping floor. Since these – mostly – young men were allowed to drop in for free if they stayed only for one or two acts, they often used the theatre as a place to socialise, munching oranges and chattering with their neighbours. The galleries (above the boxes) seated the less fashionable spectators, including, by the end of the century, a growing number of upper middle-calls people. The top galleries were reserved for the servants, who accompanied their wealthy masters to the theatre. Performances were held by artificial light (mostly candles) but there was an opening in the building to the sky, too. These theatres could not seat more than 500 people so the audience was, on the whole, an invariably elite one.

11. 2. Playwrights and the Heroic Play

Playwrights fell into two main groups: there were the "gentleman amateurs", e.g. the Earl of Rochester (who never missed the opportunity to launch a satirical attack on Dryden), Sir George Etherege (knighted by Charles II), William Wycherley, or the Duke of Buckingham, who, in his excellent satirical play, *The Rehearsal* (1671), made fun of the heroic play in the following manner:

> VOLSCIUS SITS DOWN TO PULL ON HIS BOOTS...
> <u>VOLSCIUS:</u>
> How has my passion made me Cupid's scoff!
> This hasty boot is on, the other off,
> And sullen lies, with amorous design
> To quit loud fame, and make that beauty mine ...

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My legs, the emblem of my various thought,
Show to what sad distraction I am brought.
Sometimes with stubborn Honour, like this boot,
My mind is guarded, and resolved to do't:
Sometimes again, that very mind, by Love
Disarmed, like this other leg does prove.
Shall I to Honour or to Love give way?
'Go on', cries Honour; tender Love says 'Nay'.
Honour aloud commands 'Pluck both boots on',
But softer Love does whisper 'Put on none'.
What shall I do? What conduct shall I find
To lead me through this twilight of my mind?
For, as bright day with black approach of night
Contending makes a doubtful puzzling light,
So does my Honour and my Love together
Puzzle me so, I can resolve for neither.
GOES OUT HOPPING, WITH ONE BOOT ON AND THE OTHER OFF.

The other group of playwrights included the professionals, who lived by their pen, such as Dryden or Thomas Shadwell. Gentleman amateurs (like the Earl of Oxford) were writing in Shakespeare's time, too (sometimes their plays were acted but they almost always had them printed), but in the Restoration they tended to outweigh the professionals in number. The latter were entitled to the profits of the *third* performance, they themselves (and not the company they wrote for) held the 'copyright' of their plays (they could sell them to a printer) and they often dedicated their pieces to powerful patrons in hope of some donation (money or gifts). It is also in the fashion of the Restoration to write long introductions to plays, militant and learned essays, in which the authors give their sources (more or less) precisely, defend their choice of characters, outline their central themes and their possible moral impact and take a stand especially with respect to two almost unavoidable topics: Shakespeare and the unities demanded by French neo-classicists (e.g. Dryden, in "On Heroic Plays", printed with his *The Conquest of Granada*, expresses his indebtedness to Corneille, too, whose *The Cid* was translated and acted as early as during the reign of Charles I).

The 'heroic play' was an English phenomenon and neither in the Restoration, nor today are critics absolutely consistent in their use of the term: sometimes 'heroic' simply means the presence of the love- and/or marriage-theme (the romance-element) and sometimes it includes the irreversibility of (noble) death, too. The safest is to say that the heroic play is a type of tragedy in the broad sense, and that it is the result of roughly two tendencies, distinctly manifest in the Restoration: one is the legacy of the tragicomedies of Beaumont and Fletcher, the other is French neo-classicism. The native genre, tragicomedy (cf. also Shakespeare's *The Tempest*) is based on tragic tension with a happy (or without an unhappy) ending. Thus, the death-closure is not a pre-requisite of the heroic play: what distinguishes it from other forms is heroic action, illustrious persons as the main characters, inflated diction and, most importantly, a conflict between *love* and *valour*. Some key-words and phrases in the plays are "fury", "ecstasy", "vow", "chain", "being transported" and an "Etna burning within the breast". The hero represents an ideal but not (or not exclusively) in moral terms but in terms of energy, imagination and physical strength. Although there are some absolutely irreproachable heroes (such as the Earl of Orery's Henry in *Henry V* [1664]), the hero of a genuinely tragic story cannot be the vessel of pure angelic goodness because then it would go against poetic justice (an important category of the Restoration) to show him fall – he must have a 'tragic flaw' (*hamartia*) but his virtues must outweigh his bad character traits (although villains, thoroughly 'bad people' also appear in these plays [e.g. Maximin in Dryden's *Tyrannic Love*, 1669] and, of course, fall, but rather in the sub-plots). The French influence comes partly in tragic themes, taken from Medieval or 17th century romances (but Greek,

Roman and baroque heroic patterns [Achilles, Oedipus, Mark Antony, Tasso's Rinaldo, etc.] are often used, too, sometimes through the 'French sieve', and often by going back to the 'original' sources) and partly in the observance of the three unities. The latter, especially because of the irregularities the genius of Shakespeare had licensed, was taken less seriously than in France but most plays show an obvious effort to reduce the number of characters, to concentrate the action into one place (at least to one country), to weave the sub-plot into the main one, and to at least remain silent about the actual time-span the play requires. Compared with France, there were even more liberties concerning the mixing of genres: for example in Dryden's *Marriage á la Mode* (1671) there is heroic romance in one plot and libertine wit in the other. In the dedication of one of his plays (*Aureng-Zebe,* 1675), Dryden brilliantly shows that what is *wit* in the rake of comedy is *imagination* in the hero of tragedy. True greatness is only opposed by dullness and indifference and the comic and the tragic heroes are equally bent on their goals and they both want to avoid the same thing: disgrace.

The first 'real' heroic play – if we disregard Davenant's rather opera-like *The Siege of Rhodes* – was *The General* (1664) by the Earl of Orery, written at the special request of Francophone Charles II, fascinated by the rhyming Alexandrines of French tragedy. This play marks the beginning of the "heroic couplet" in England (two rhyming lines of pentameter). The heroic couplet, however, was by no means a pre-requisite of the heroic play (especially from the 70s): for example Dryden felt it legitimate to return to Shakespearean blank-verse in *All for Love* and many followed in his footsteps. In the "regular" heroic play, there are plenty of pathetic heroes and emotional heroines; the most popular plays were *The Rival Queen or Alexander the Great* (1677, in blank verse, at Drury Lane) by Nathaniel Lee (1648?-1692); *The Orphan* (1680, in blank verse at the Dorset Garden Theatre) and *Venice Preserved* (1682, also in blank verse and at Dorset Garden) by Thomas Otway (1652-1685).

As it was mentioned above, the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline theatre got destroyed but many of the plays remained popular: roughly one-third of the performances were revivals of old plays. From the early sixties to the late seventies, the most popular authors were John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont; in the *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* (1668), Dryden remarks: "These plays [of Beaumont and Fletcher] are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainment of the stage: two of them being acted through the year for one of Shakespeare's or Johnson's [sic!]; the reason is, because there is a certain gaiety in their comedies, and pathos in their more serious plays, which suits generally with all men's humours. Shakespeare's language is likewise a little obsolete and Ben Johnson's [sic!] wit comes short of theirs." But some Marlowe, Chapman, Webster, Middleton, Massinger, Ford and Shirley was performed as well, and Corneille was relatively well received, too. For example, in the season 1675/765, out of 30 plays there were 19 by contemporary playwrights, 10 by older masters (4 by Beaumont and Fletcher, 4 by Shakespeare and 2 by Jonson) and 1 by Corneille. However, by the turn of the century, the "restoration" of Shakespeare also happened and he outclassed the others (though often in a re-shaped version).

However, continuity with the Renaissance had another form, too: Restoration playwrights loved to "borrow" or to adapt plays to contemporary taste. They were convinced – or at least they kept repeating – that they were living in a more "refined" and "polite" age than Shakespeare or Fletcher; so we could even say that they "translated" the old plays into their terms, "correcting" their "mistakes". These included too many liberties with language (Dryden criticised Shakespeare for employing too many metaphors and linguistic innovations, resulting in obscure meaning), the lack of the three unities (especially too complicated plots), too many characters on stage, the lack of motivation for certain actions and the like. Thomas Otway rewrote Romeo and Juliet as a Roman play (*Caisus Marius*, 1679), Nahum Tate gave *King Lear* a happy ending, Dryden's *All for Love* is consciously written "in imitating Shakespeare's style" (cf. the cover page of the play) – it is easier to tell which plays were not

re-written; for example *Hamlet* and *Othello* were left untouched and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in its original version, enjoyed great popularity, though the comedies were by far less popular than the tragedies.

There were playwrights who "forgot" to give an account of their sources, for example Mrs. Aphra Behn (1640-1689) took the story of her *Abdelazer* (1675) from an anonymous play from 1600, *Lust's Dominion*, or her comedy called *The Rover* (1677) goes back to Middleton's *Master Constable* (1601).

There was another popular genre, closely linked with the heroic play: the "English opera", in fact closer to today's "musical", a mixture of spoken and sung drama, in which only the climatic scenes are necessarily musical, the *aria* replacing heroic declamation. Examples include Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (1689) or *King Arthur* (1691), a joint venture by Purcell and Dryden.

11.3. John Dryden (1631-1700) and the theory of tragedy

Dryden was born in Northampshire and educated in Westminster School (providing him with an excellent education in the classics) and in Trinity College, Cambridge. During his relatively long life, he exercised his talent in almost all poetic genres (including comedy and tragedy), besides becoming – as Dr. Johnson put it – "the father of English criticism". His best output is in satirical verse but he was popular as a playwright, too. In 1658 he commemorated Cromwell in "Heroic Stanzas" but in 1660 he already greeted the returning Charles with "Astraea Redux" and became a whole-hearted royalist, monarchist and conservative. In 1668 he was appointed "poet laureate". Through his marriage with Lady Elizabeth Howard, he was constantly on the fringes of court society and in 1670 he became – like Racine, later in his life – "Historiographer Royal". In 1685 he converted to Catholicism (less out of conviction than to please the ascending James II) but after the "glorious revolution" of 1688 (establishing the joint rule of William of Orange [William III] and Mary II) he was deprived of his laureateship and his government post and had to live entirely by his pen, doing mostly translations. He died relatively forgotten.

Concerning tragedy, Dryden, throughout his life, is wavering between the "genius of Shakespeare" (which he readily admitted, adored and tried to imitate) and French classicism (the chief exponent of which in Restoration England was Thomas Rhymer). In his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* (1668) he does recognise what is reasonable and authoritative in French classicist practice. The major topics are the three unities, the mixture of tragedy and comedy and rhyme in French plays. He concludes that the pseudo-classicists are measurably good and to be followed, if possible, but Shakespeare is great without these rules, too. In his middle period (especially in the late 70s) he is more favourable to Shakespeare than ever and it is rather in the last twenty years of his life that he returns to the French principles. When he criticises Shakespeare severely (as, e.g. in the Preface to his *Troilus and Cressida* [1679]), he points out weaknesses in coherence and unity of structure but he praises his excellence in presenting character and passion.

Dryden's most original contribution to the theory of tragedy is in *The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy* (1679). He starts the discussion of the normative principles *with respect to which tragedies may later be judged* by recalling the Aristotelian definition, which he gives in the following form: "it [tragedy] is the imitation of one entire, great, and probable action; not told, but represented; which, by moving in us fear and pity, is conducing to the purging of those passions in our minds. More largely thus: Tragedy describes of paints an action, which action must have all the proportions above named". It is clear that this is a conflation of the Aristotle's various accounts, scattered throughout *The Poetics*. However, to include "the

probable" and to omit "the necessary" is (both by Aristotelian and by Corneillean standards) a licence, and it is interesting that Dryden puts the 'seat' of catharsis into our *minds* (this is, undoubtedly, an influence of rationalism). Then he emphasises the importance of *single action* (i.e. one plot-line); he claims that not only does a comic sub-plot ruin the tragic main plot (which, as he admits here himself, is the case in his own *Marriage á la Mode*) but two different and independent actions distract the attention. The "single-action" requirement, he remarks, condemns all of Shakespeare's *history* plays, which are, thus, rather chronicles than tragedies. He also refers to Terence as someone who of course introduced the *double action* not in tragedy but in comedy.

Then Dryden dutifully goes through all the Aristotelian categories: natural beginning, middle and end; great personalities, probable action, yet admirable and great; historical truth is not absolutely necessary but "likeness of truth" is; "likeness of truth" means that something is more than barely possible (or probable), and "probable" is which happens "oftener than it misses" (this is very close to Corneille's definition of "the probable"). He admits – as Corneille does, too, when he talks about "extraordinary probability" – that the most difficult task, with respect to the construction of the plot is, to invent a probability and make it *wonderful* because "the wonderful" carries the element of greatness and probability includes the element of "the reasonable" (which here means practically 'the credible', i.e. the verisimilitude in French classicism). Then he goes on to define the "general end of all poetry": "to instruct delightfully" (*dulce et utile* – Horace). He contrasts – as Sidney did – poetry with philosophy: the latter instructs but through "precept" (doctrine., principle), which is not delightful. The *particular* instruction belonging to tragedy is "to purge the passions by *example*".

Then Dryden takes a closer look at catharsis: the predominant vices that are to be purged are (on the basis of Aristotle and Rapin, a commentator): "pride and want of commiseration". Corneille emphasises that our fear originates in our similarities with the falling tragic hero, Dryden underscores that fear comes out of our realisation that "no condition is privileged from the turn of fortune" – fall is more unpredictable and *this* is what we fear. Dryden includes *hamartia* (the tragic "flaw" in the character) here but he does not explain it – as Corneille does – as an excess of passion but rather as a fact about the tragic hero, which we should interpret as an example: when we see that even the most virtuous are not exempt of misfortunes, we feel pity. Thus, Dryden, tries to define fear and pity as reactions which are already in the process of being purged from us (thus, from the point of view of the audience); Corneille is more interested in the *hero* and tries to explain *how* in him the tragic flaw gets generated (through an excess of passion, e.g. love). Then Dryden wants to give some *content* to our feelings during *catharsis*: we become "helpful to, and tender over, the distressed", which he classifies as "the most god-like" of moral virtues. Thus, for Dryden, tragedy is a vehicle of moral perfectionism, in which we participate primarily with our minds – Corneille rather describes catharsis as the result of an almost animal-like avoidance of both fear and pity.

Dryden then devotes some space to how much the hero must be virtuous and asks if villains can become tragic heroes (as e.g., Euripides's Phaedra). Dryden would not like to banish villains from the stage altogether but the tragic hero should be basically virtuous, yet he cannot be absolutely perfect, either, because there is no purely angelic creature in Nature; there are "alloys" of frailty allowed to be put into the hero and thus we shall find his punishment to be complying with the principle of poetic justice; however, because of his predominating good virtues, we shall also pity his fall. Thus, there should be room for both punishment and for pity.

Here Dryden refers to two authorities: Bossu says that the great poets are to be imitated in as many ways as possible; and Rapin claims that, as a *general pattern* of tragedy,

the presence, and the intricate relationship between, pity and fear is enough and the rest should be added according to the customs of the age; so – Dryden suggests – Shakespeare and Fletcher are to be imitated to the point they themselves "copied" (imitated, followed) the excellencies of dramatic poetry; we, in a somewhat similar way, copy the *foundations* of the design and not the "superstructure" (religion, custom, idioms of language, etc.) This clearly indicates that Dryden subscribes to a from of essentialism: the culture- and tradition-bound superstructure can be separated from the *underlying* and 'ageless' substance.

Dryden agrees with Aristotle that the *plot* is the most important element of tragedy but right after the plot comes the *moral* of the work, the precept of morality you would like to "insinuate into the people" (e.g. that union preserves the Commonwealth and discord destroys it [this is the 'moral' of *The Conquest of Granada*, Dryden claims], or that no man is to be accounted as happy before his death [exemplified, Dryden says, in Sophocles's *Oedipus*]). The alleged relationship between action and moral is, for Dryden, once more essentialist and hierarchical: moral directs the whole action of the play to one *centre*; the action (fable, plot) is the (particular) example built upon the moral, which, in turn, confirms the truth of it to our experience. So the *logical* order, according to Dryden, is: '(abstract and already existing) moral truth –-> plot as example –-> the this way tested truth of a moral principle'. However, he claims, the *compositional*, actual order is not like this: the persons (dramatic characters) are to be introduced *when* the action (plot) is designed – they should not be 'ready' before we start making the plot (plot –-> moral truth manifested in character –-> tested moral truth).

Here comes the most important part of the treatise with respect to the *basis of critical judgement* to be applied when the quality of a tragedy should be decided. This basis is the *manners of the people* in the drama: manners are inclinations (natural or acquired), which move us to (good or bad) actions; today we would say that manners are 'motives'. Dryden 'translates' the relationship between manners and actions into the "cause-and-effect" pattern: he says that there should be no effect (action) without cause (manner), for example to make somebody more a villain than he has reason to be is to create an effect which is stronger than the cause.

What exactly the manners are is learnt from philosophy, ethics and history; manners are distinguished according to complexion (choleric, phlegmatic, etc.), to differences of age, sex, climate, to the quality of the person, to the character's present (particular) situation, etc. The requirements concerning manners are as follows:
(1) manners should be *apparent* in the dramatic characters: the 'place' to make them manifest is action and discourse.
(2) manners are to be in *harmony* with (major) character-traits, e.g. a person endowed with the dignity of a king must 'discover' in himself majesty, magnanimity, jealousy of power, etc.
(3) *resemblance* is also a requirement for manners: by this Dryden means that if the characters on stage are also known from history or from tradition (which, as opposed to comedy, is the usual state of affairs in tragedy), then the playwright cannot go against at least the most general traits of the figure, e.g. Ulysses cannot be choleric or Achilles patient – Dryden, as opposed to Corneille, does not analyse the extent of possible deviations
(4) manners should be constant and equal: they should be "maintained the same" through the whole design (the requirement of coherence in character-traits)

So, as we can see, Dryden approaches the quality of tragedy primarily from the point of view of the dramatic *characters*, Corneille rather from the unities, *probability* versus *necessity*, etc., so rather from those features which pertain to the *structure* (the design) of the drama.

According to Dryden, a character thus becomes the composition of qualities which are not contrary to one another (one can be liberal *and* valiant but not liberal *and* covetous). Vice

and passion are there in all men yet the tragic hero must have much more virtue than vice (this is Dryden's favourite idea).

The requirement thus set up for manners will be the basis of our critical evaluation of drama: e.g. when we consider the several qualities of manners (whether they are suitable to age, sex, country, climate, etc.), we are able to tell whether the author has really *followed Nature*. Dryden accuses French authors of making their heroes thoroughly French, irrespective of the age and the geographical position (e.g. in Medieval Spain or in ancient Greece everybody is still typically French in the 17th century way). A good example of the required 'realism' is Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. Another of the excellencies of Shakespeare is that in his plays the manners of the persons are *apparent*: this applies to Ben Jonson, too but not to Fletcher. These can be learned by the poet. However, there is a quality he must be *born with*: the ability to describe the *passions* of his characters (anger, hatred, love, ambition, jealousy, revengefulness, etc. – yet not pity and fear: the latter two are in the *audience* and not in the *characters*!). But, besides talent, the poet must also be skilled in moral philosophy ('the philosophy of man', as opposed to the 'philosophy of science'). In describing passions, even Shakespeare is sometimes at fault, yet not in the passions fitting the characters but in the manner of *expressing* them: Shakespeare "often obscures his meaning by his words"; "the fury of his fancy often transported him beyond the bounds of judgement" – he cannot say anything without a metaphor. Thus, the false measure of vehemence is not recommended.

It is obvious that Dryden is not only obsessed with certain norms but he is one of their first creators: norms are established with respect to (moral) philosophy and with respect to Nature and history – a kind of 'realism' is demanded and this will also save the poet from extremes, providing him with the 'golden means'. Criticism is the application of norms to individual pieces of art.

11.4. John Dryden: *All for Love, or the World Well Lost*

Dryden himself gives "tragedy" as the play's genre on the title-page of the 1678-edition, and adds: "Written in the Imitation of Shakespeare's Stile [sic! – "style"]". Indeed, Dryden also consulted other Shakespearean plays than *Antony and Cleopatra*, though *All for Love* is primarily based on that tragedy. There are so many differences between Dryden's and Shakespeare's approach that *All for Love* is undoubtedly an independent play, not only putting the emphases elsewhere but locating the basic conflict (the 'reason' for tragedy) in a by far more straightforward manner and using a by far more limited number of characters, some of them made almost protagonists (cf. Ventidius and Dolabella). One could say that the "imitation" (the 'following') of Shakespeare means that Dryden wished to write the story of Antony and Cleopatra as Shakespeare would write it, not at the beginning, but at the end, of the 17th century, in a more "polite" and "refined" age, observing some important theatrical conventions (especially the three unities). Dryden "translated" Shakespeare into the language, the fundamental categories and the manners of the Restoration. And, by the standards he largely established himself (i.e. by his own standards), he created a masterpiece.

Dryden, the conscientious philologist, also gives his non-Shakespearean sources in the Preface to the play: Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* (1594, revised in 1607, a play dealing with Cleopatra after Antony's death), Sir Charles Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* (performed ten months before Dryden's play, 12 February, 1677), Plutarch's *Life of Antony* (from which Shakespeare took the narrative line as well), Dio's *Roman History* and Appian's *Civil Wars.* In this Preface, he also talks contemptuously about Racine's *Phaedra* (which had been published only 8 months before *All for Love* went to the press), pointing out that especially the misunderstanding, at the end of the play, between Theseus and Hyppolytus is

highly implausible, and so is Hypolitus's death (Poseidon-Neptune swallowing him up). Indeed, Dryden allows more to happen on stage than Corneille or Racine ever could: e.g. Ventidius's and Antony's suicides by the sword happen in front of us, an act of violence French classicism could never afford. Racine does not go beyond Phaedra's death on stage, and even then it is caused by poison (roughly the way Cleo kills herself)

Dryden – although he is never explicit on the actual *time* the action requires (and, indeed, there are two battles squeezed into the plot) – has to locate everything in Alexandria, more precisely into Cleo's palace. He does apologise for this in the Preface, himself being afraid that to bring Octavia and Antony's two little daughters to Egypt is a great 'poetic licence' – but rules demand it. The plot is by far more straightforward than in Shakespeare's play: Dryden starts after the defeat at Actium and in Act II (lines 250-310) he uses the quarrel between Antony and Cleo to recount, as if in 'a nutshell', the previous events (including Fulvia's death, the event Shakespeare uses as a starting-point). Dryden starts with a repentant Antony, piously fasting and praying in the temple until Ventidius comes (who has a very minor role in Shakespeare, as the conqueror of the Parthians) and shakes Antony up and persuades him to be the honourable general again. From this time on, Antony, throughout the play, will be wavering between duty (valour) (represented by Octavia and his two daughters, i.e. family ties – Octavius Ceasar is not even a character in the play and he is only mentioned by Octavia a few times) and his love for Cleopatra, which is, once again, more 'honourable' than erotic. It is primarily the rich, even spicy eroticism, the combination of an almost orgasmic love with the motif of death, which has been exorcised from Shakespeare's play: Shakespeare saw love and death as hopelessly intertwined, death being a *climax* of the erotic experience; Dryden creates the primary tension between love and duty (cf. Antony's exclamation in V, 159-160: "Is there left / A possibility of aid from valour?", when valour is explicitly thematised) and treats death as a kind of *solution*. Interestingly, in Act I, line 220, it is precisely Octavia who is associated with non-being in the sense that Octavia is allowed to hold Antony only after her husband's death, and even then only in the form of his material 'residues', while it is suggested that Cleo's life ends with Antony's and that their *souls* cannot be possessed by anyone: ANTONY: "Some few days hence [...] When thou'rt contracted in thy narrow urn / Shrunk to a few cod ashes. Then Octavia / (For Cleopatra will not live to see it), / Octavia then will bear thee in her widowed hand to Ceasar; / Ceasar will weep, the crocodile will weep, / To see his rival of the universe / Lie still and peaceful then." Love is interpreted in a highly Platonic way (which, in itself, is not without erotic overtones): in Act II, line 253-255 Antony makes a clear reference to Plato's *Symposium*: "If I mix a lie / With any truth, reproach me freely with it; / Else favour me with silence". (In the *Symposium* it is Alcibiades [hero of Plutarch's *Lives*] who, when describing his love for Socrates, pleads: "If I say anything which is not true, you may interrupt me if you will, and say 'that's a lie'" (trans. by B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 4th ed., Oxford, 1953, I, 547-548). The *Symposium* describes three ascending levels of love: the first, physical and romantic, only for a single person; the second is intellectual and is for many people, and the third is spiritual for an object of absolute and of divine value (the '*eidos*'). It seems that in order to justify Antony's neglect of duty, Dryden wishes to imply that the Roman hero's love towards Cleopatra is of the third kind in the Platonic sequence and Octavia only represents – in Dolabella's words – a "mean", i.e. "She's neither too submissive / Nor yet too haughty" (III, lines 269-270), which is not enough for a man who is, even acc. to Aristotle, an example of *megalopsychia* (Lat. *magnamitas*, 'greatness of the soul'). It is in Aristotle's *Niccomachian Ethics* that we find the description of the man who simply *deserves* a great passion, and for that passion, of a divine kind, the partner is only Cleo. Yet this, of course, deprives the quality of the attachment from the directly sensual. Still, Antony is the perfect hero of tragedy for Dryden, since in his character good and bad traits are typically 'mixed'; Ventidius says (Act III, line 49-51) about

Antony: "His virtues are so mingled with his crimes, / As would confound their choice to punish one / And not reward the other", while Antony tells Octavia: "For I can ne'r be conquered but by love / And you [Octavia] do all for duty" (III, 316).

Moreover, in Shakespeare we see the expression of love on both sides, e.g. Cleo's sudden shifts of passion, her humiliation of the messenger (whom she once kicks, once rewards, depending on what he says about Octavia's "complexion"), her desperation, her being full of hot desire, often finding an outlet in powerful metaphors. In Dryden, Cleopatra (as many of the other characters) tends to *analyse* her feelings instead of actually *living* or *performing* them. "My love's a noble madness / Which shows the cause deserved it. Moderate sorrow / Fits vulgar love, and for a vulgar man; / But I have loved with such transcendent passion, / I soared at first quite out of reason's view, / And now I am lost above it". (II, lines 16-22) That the basis of comparison is *reason* is highly characteristic and it is, of course, one thing to *say* that one is mad and to behave like a madwoman. It is generally true that while in Shakespeare metaphors fight (and annihilate each other), in Dryden abstract principles are at war, e.g. VENTIDIUS: "Justice and pity both plead Octavia / For Cleopatra, neither. / One would be ruined with you, but she first / Had ruined you; the other you have ruined, / And yet she would preserve you" (III, 341-346).

Antony's wavering takes the following course: he is persuaded by Ventidius to fight but he cannot be persuaded to leave Cleo: the negotiation between Antony, Cleo and Ventidius in Act II is almost a trial-scene, one of the best of the play – yet in Dryden they negotiate and analyse, while in Shakespeare there is a combat of "super-metaphors". At the beginning of Act III, reconciliation between the two lovers ("Mars and Venus") seems to be perfect, in roughly the geometrical middle of the play. Then Ventidius, who never ceases to try to "save" Antony form the evils of the "whore", brings Dolabella, Antony's "bosom friend" into play (and, thus, into the play, a character Shakespeare first 'uses' in Ceasar's train in Act III, Scene 12, to make him reappear, for not more than "Ceasar, I shall" in V.1 and his longer exchange with Cleo is only in V.2, – he is the one who tells Cleo that Ceasar wishes to abuse her and her children). In *All for Love*, Dolabella introduces, in turn, Octavia and the children: Antony melts and decides to leave Egypt. However, he asks Dolabella (one time also Cleo's admirer) to say "farewell" to the Egyptian Queen 'in his stead' and this 'mission' proves to be too successful: Dolabella gets seduced by Cleo's 'poison' (beauty), while Cleo pretends (in careful calculation) to be falling in love with him. Antony is furious, Octavia gets offended and leaves, Alexas, Cleo's false and lying servant is called as a witness, Dolabella finally leaves, while Antony and Cleopatra are enemies again.

Without any preparation or particular explanation, Antony, at the beginning of Act V, is at war with Ceasar again and this time on sea he loses (this we find in Shakespeare, too). Antony, having lost, decides to defend the city (together with Ventidius) to the last drop of his blood, when Alexas brings the news of Cleopatra's death. This makes everything meaningless for Antony and when the news of Ceasar's approach arrives, he commits suicide, to be attended, very quickly, by Cleo. They make it up and before Ceasar would break in through the door, Cleo takes her famous snakes ("the aspics") in this play, too.

There are some fine metaphors in Dryden, as well, e.g. "Jealousy is like / A polished glass held to the lips when life's in doubt: / If there be breath, 'twill catch the damp, and show it" (IV, lines 71-73) [obviously with some references to *King Lear*]. CLEO.: "There [on my bed] I till death will his unkindness weep, / As harmless infants moan themselves asleep" (III, lines 483-484). But even into the – rather theoretical – discussion of boundless mercy, the ideas of measure and proportion find their way: cf. DOLABELLA: "Heaven has but / Our sorrows for our sins, and then delights / To pardon erring man: sweet mercy seems / Its darling attribute, which limits justice, / As if there were degrees in infinite, / And infinite would rather want perfection / Than punish to extent" (IV, 538-542).

The difference between Shakespeare's and Dryden's respective techniques can be best appreciated if we compare texts where they are both describing the 'same' reality, yet in markedly different terms:

Shakespeare, II, 2, 190-222
ENOBARBUS:
When she first met Mark Antony she pursed up her heart upon the river of Cyndus... [she took possession of his heart on the Cyndus River].
The barge [war-driven ship] she sat in, like a burnished throne
Burned on the water. The poop [upper deck] was beaten gold;
Purple [royal dye] the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were love-sick with them. The oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stoke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As [As if] amorous of their strokes. For [as for] her own person,
It beggared all description. She did lie
In her pavilion – cloth of gold, of tissue [fabric interwoven with gold thread] –
O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature [Outdoing even the picture of Venus in which the artist outdid nature]. On each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-coloured fans whose wind did seem
To glow [make glow] the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did. [...]
Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides [sea nymphs]
So many mermaids, tended her i'the'eyes [under her watchful eyes]
And made their bends adornings [made their curtsies additions to the decoration] At the helm
A seeming mermaid steers. The silken tackle [sails and ropes]
Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands
That yarely frame [artfully carry out] the office. From the barge
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
Of the adjacent wharfs [banks]. The city cast
Her people out upon [toward] her, and Antony,
Enthroned i'th'market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to th'air, which but for vacancy [which if not for the fact that its absence would have left a vacuum] Had [would have] gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature.

Dryden, III, 160-182
ANTONY:
...she came from Egypt
Her galley down the silver Cyndos rowed,
The tackling silk, the streamers waved with gold;
The gentle winds were lodged in purple sails;
Her nymphs, like Nereids, round her couch were placed,
Where she, another sea-born Venus, lay. [...]
She lay, and leant her cheek upon her hand,
And cast a look so languishingly sweet
As if, secure of all beholders' hearts,
Neglecting she could take'em. Boys like Cupids
Stood fanning with their painted wings the winds
That played about her face; but if she smiled,
A darting glory seemed to blaze abroad,
That men's desiring eyes were never wearied,
But hung upon the object. To soft flutes
The silver oars kept time; and while they played,
The hearing gave new pleasure to the sight,
And both to thought. 'Twas Heaven, or somewhat more;
For she so charmed all hearts, that gazing crowds
Stood panting on the shore, and wanted breath
To give their welcome voice.

11.5. Restoration Comedy: William Wycherley (1641-1715): *The Country Wife* **(1675) and** *The Plain Dealer* **(1676)**

Shakespeare's stage was the great arena of the human experiment to create a place for Man – Restoration theatre seeks to *find* the pre-ordered role assigned to the human being, and thus the meaning of the *'ontological'* tends to get reduced to the *social*. The question is how and to what extent (measure) one fits into pre-existing norms, and while in Shakespeare one of the sources of the *comic* is *transformation* (e.g. a well-meaning Weaver, Bottom, turning into, being *translated* into, a creature with an ass-head), in the Restoration, comedy is measured according to the eccentricity of the *misfit*. Thus the hero of tragedy becomes a person torn by two roles or duties (e.g.. a great warrior and great lover) and the typical comedy is the famous 'comedy of manners', concerned with (proper) social behaviour and moral conduct, and morality is often interpreted as the morals of the Court or the upper-middle class.

William Wycherley (1640-1716): was born in Shropshire, into a good family. He learnt his French early because at the age of fifteen he was sent to Paris, where he was introduced to some of the social and literary elite. He returned to England shortly before the restoration of Charles II and he studied at Queen's College, Oxford and at the Inner Temple in London but he was soon attracted by the "court wits" around the King and made friends especially with the Duke of Buckingham and the Earl of Rochester. Under the influence of Molière and Ben Jonson, he stared to write plays as a typical "gentleman amateur" and produced only four comedies, yet they proved to be very effective: *The Country Wife* is one of the best constructed dramas of the period and with *The Plain Dealer* Wycherley won reputation as a satirist. In 1679, he married a rich widow, the Countess of Drogheda, who proved to be a most jealous wife but died in 1681. Wycherley was involved in a lot of lawsuits and had serious financial difficulties: he spent long months in the debtor's prison during the years 1685-86. Finally, James II – succeeding Charles II on the throne – paid all his debts and secured him a pension. A few days before his death he married Elizabeth Jackson. From 1704 he was a close friend and an admirer of Alexander Pope.

The Country Wife (a big success, produced in 1675 in the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane by the King's Men and based largely on Terence's comedy call *The Eunuch*), three closely woven lines of intrigue revolve around a single theme: cuckoldry. From the three plot-lines, only one represents the 'right way' (the final marriage of Alithea and Harcourt); the other two (the Pinchwife-plot and the Horner-plot) are centred around the paradox that the more Pinchwife (the title-heroine's husband) wishes to prevent his cuckoldry, the more closer he will come to it. When he disguises his 'country wife', Margery Pinchwife, as a boy, Horner (the feared monster of the comedy, a danger for all women but fraudulently diagnosed as an eunuch) will flirt with her in public; when Pinchwife bullies Margery into writing a letter to Horner rejecting the scoundrel's attention, she will exchange it for a love-letter, the latter delivered to Horner by Pinchwife himself; when Pinchwife decides to use his sister, Alithea to satisfy Horner's appetite, Margery will disguise herself as Alithea and it will be Pinchwife who will put Margery right into Horner's arms. Disguise (Margery's as much as Horner's) will work both ways, yet only *both* ways and not in *many* ways (as it does in, for example, Shakespeare's *As You Like It*) and form the central themes – cuckoldry and impotency – it is clear that few things are above the belt-line in this play and none higher than the eye-level[165]. Although the play works with the contrast between 'town and country', the latter not fitting

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[165] Cf. Norman N. Holland, *The First Modern Comedies. The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p 75.

into the 'polite' and 'more refined' norms of London, one of the morals to be drawn is that underneath human nature is the same everywhere. There are some genuinely funny episodes, for example the famous 'China-scene' in the Act IV, where *china* means 'sexual appetite', as well as 'virility', 'superficiality', etc., and the play, bringing the characters into the theatre *in the theatre*, shows some genuinely meta-theatrical interest, too. All in all, however, the play does not say more than that a 'happy ending' is only possible in a private world as opposed to the social one: Harcourt and Alithea might be happy precisely as *exceptions*. i.e. external to the norm, with little hope for survival in a world where Horner will be going on with his sexual dalliance as an 'unsexed' man.

The Plain Dealer (1676) was also performed in the Theatre Royal and the name of the protagonist, Manly evokes, to some extent, the figures of Medieval morality plays, such as "Mankind" and "Everyman". Manly is a misanthropic "plain dealer", who is thoroughly disgusted with the insincerity of mankind: he returns from the war only to find out that his fiancée, Olivia, to whom he entrusted a large sum of money as well, has secretly married his friend, Vernish. He employs his page to disguise himself and to humiliate Olivia but the page is no one else but Fidelia, who is already disguised to be with Manly all the time. Olivia falls in love with the page and thus Manly can substitute himself for the "page" and may bring about Olivia's disgrace. Finally he is ready to marry Fidelia, whose fidelity is beyond doubt and whose true identity behind the multiple disguise is revealed as well. In the subplot, Manly's lieutenant, Freeman tricks money out of the wealthy and litigious widow, Widow Blackacre – yet it is this line which carries the satirical elements, since it makes fun of legal forms and jargon. The main plot, with disguises of already disguised characters, plots and counter-plots, *almost* amounts to a Romanesque comedy but it sometimes becomes so bitter that it verges on tragedy.

From the above examples it is clear that, compared with Elizabethan drama, Restoration theatre becomes narrower *socially* as well; it serves basically as *entertainment* for a well-definable social class (first the aristocracy, then the upper-middle-class). It also moves into indoor theatres entirely, with artificial light, and comedies depict almost exclusively contemporary life – the audience want to see their almost photographic 'replica' on the stage. However, this is also the emergence of the great era of actresses: female roles are no longer played by young boys. Scenery becomes realistic, too and the scene is usually a drawing-room, or a coffee (chocolate) house, or a park, and the three unities are closely observed. The appearance of the orchestra-pit symbolically marks the division between stage and audience: while in Shakespeare's Globe the spectators were allowed to stand around the stage.(from three sides) and eat, drink and talk during the performance, getting a 'three-dimensional' view of the action, from now on the theatre will more and more reserve the left and right wings for itself and allow the audience to peep into a well-framed world as if they were staring at a 'movie-screen' or looking in through a key-hole, the result being a basically 'two-dimensional' picture. People talking (chatting) wittily in a drawing-room: this becomes the basic paradigm of the theatre and, with some slight alterations and occasional reforms, this will become its fundamental pattern until Beckett.

Wit, indeed is one of the most important ideals, towards which everyone aspires; wit, in its best versions, involves quickness and liveliness of mind, inventiveness, a readiness to perceive some resemblance between things which are apparently different, and thus wit often enlivens polite discourse with similes (rather than with metaphors) and antitheses: e.g. 'I'd *no more* play with a man that *slighted* his *ill* fortune, *than* I'd *make love* to a woman who *under*valued the loss of her reputation'. This example also shows the theatre's (and the age's) predilection for sententious, proverb-like statements with general subjects ('Man', 'one', 'we', etc.): e.g. 'friendship without freedom is as dull as love without enjoyment'; 'A wit should no more be sincere than a woman constant'). Characters are usually well-known *types*:

the gallant, the wit, the lady of fashion, the aged widow (in want of a husband), the rake, the fop, the social climber, the country bumpkin, the coxcomb, etc.

Restoration comedy has, thus, two main interests: the behaviour of *the polite* and the *pretenders* to politeness, and some aspects of sexual relationships. The problem is not that what we may witness to on the stage is 'immoral' (though in 1698 an Anglican clergyman, Jeremy Collier launched a frontal attack on especially Dryden and Congreve in his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*); by *our* standards Restoration comedy is especially *not* immoral – the problem rather is that its sentimental vulgarity often becomes trivial and dull. It was especially the New Critics, and L. C. Knights in particular ("Restoration Comedy: the Reality and the Myth", 1946) who launched a frontal attack against the "comedy of manners". One of his problems was that sex is 'hook baited', it is a 'thirst quencher', 'a bunch of grapes', a 'dish to feed on', etc., so anything *but* sex. Again, his dissatisfaction with this theatre has to do less with its being representative of a limited culture but rather with the fact that it is indifferent to the best thought of the age, thus becoming a false representation of the age by its own standards: the famous and popular 'photographic mimesis' has a very narrow range. He argued that there cannot be any, by our standards, individual mode of expression since the ideal is precisely to comply with a norm, yet to hear the most expected and – after a while – easily calculable responses all the time might be too much for our ears. The plot is often very intricate, yet as it repeatedly revolves around seduction, intrigue and money and as it can at best represent reformation but not transformation – so nothing changes in essence –, it becomes mechanical, displaying a limited set of possible attitudes.

11.6. Restoration Drama: Sir George Etherege and *The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter*

In his admirable book, *English Drama: Restoration and Eighteenth Century (1660-1798)* (London: Longman, 1996), Richard W. Bevis is less dismissive with respect to Restoration comedy and sums up debates revolving around it with the following six questions:
1. " Was Restoration comedy 'artificial' or a realistic picture of its society?
2. Was 'comedy of manners' the dominant type?
3. Were the comedies moral, immoral, or amoral?
4. Were they trivial or serious, gross or subtle, dull or lively?
5. Do they indicate social and literary health, or sickness?
6. Were they primarily conservative, or rebellious?"
He concludes that "comedies were heightened but roughly realistic pictures of life in a part of London society, not totally artificial;" thus, "'comedy of manners' is a slippery term that does not accurately describe a large number of Restoration comedies" (p. 99). On the other questions there does not seem to be any consensus yet.

It is a significant question indeed if we may apply our aesthetics, mostly trained on 19th century Romanticism and realism, to these plays at all, or we should rather study contemporary aesthetic-poetic treatises (such as Dryden's) and try to evaluate these plays in terms of their "own". Yet, firstly, playwrights seldom actually do what "official" treatises say; secondly, contemporary critics and writers are not unanimous on most of theses questions, either, and, thirdly, we can hardly help looking at these plays through the eyes of our own; after all – besides some obvious historical interest – some features should be found whereby Restoration comedy may have an appeal of its own to the 20th-21st century audience. Perhaps it is precisely for their "realism" that Restoration comedy is so much anchored in its own times; since it is so "typical" of its age, it is not typical enough to arc over several hundreds of

years and shake off – even in cunning modern adaptations – the manners, customs and values of the late 17th century. This "shaking off" might be difficult because what these comedies are concerned with is precisely manners, customs and values.

The heated debates concerning the sources of knowledge in the 1640s (should one accept arguments of authority, or should every single step of reasoning be proven and demonstrated in the Cartesian fashion?), the disappearance of the idea of the "divine monarch", replaced by the theory of "social contract" in a fierce world where everyone is at war with everybody (Hobbes), the bitter quarrels between Parliamentarians ("Whigs", Puritans) and Royalists ("Tories", Catholics) over politics and religion – where Anglicanism was never a satisfactory "third alternative" – are symptoms of a society in need of new values, yet it seems that in the late 17th century the stage was not a suitable arena to settle such questions. With the rise of science and of the anti-sceptical philosophy of Descartes, the boundaries between the various disciplines became more marked than ever, and thus an "aesthetic" response – such as the theatre (or, in general: poetry) is able to provide – sounded less convincing, or even impossible. By comparison, e.g. Marlowe in his *Doctor Faustus* or Shakespeare in *Hamlet* could still represent the crisis around "God-given knowledge", or the popularity of the history-play in the Renaissance (and, to some extent, of the revenge-tragedy) indicates that a play was still an accepted means to respond to a "politics of realism" associated – for better or worse – with the Italian humanist and statesman, Niccolo Machiavelli. If Restoration playwrights touched upon politics of their day at all, they interpreted it as a moral question on the personal level, and we look for "serious thinkers" on the Restoration stage in vain.

Yet the appearance of actresses and especially the frequent staging of the reformed or quasi-reformed "rake-hero" indicate that comedy in the Restoration still felt it had authority over a certain area: marriage, gentility and sexual behaviour. It is especially the figure of Don Juan, the promiscuous cynic (cf. Molière as well) in various incarnations (such as Dorimant) which reflects the anxiety and the aggression surrounding sexuality. And comedy, which has always had the role of releasing anxiety and aggression as one of its functions, was a suitable means to put such questions on display. Indeed, the problem with Restoration comedy is how seriously we should take what we see; the ambiguity arises from the well-known question whether a play is the criticism or the "simple" "realistic" representation of contemporary social life? Should we watch e.g. Dorimant (his character largely based on Etherege's friend, the riotous Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester) as a model which the audience, with some benign forgiveness, should follow, or should we think that he is not more than a "document of his age", representing the rakish and shocking deeds of the contemporary aristocracy and upper middle-class? This question is hard to decide when the audience wishes to see themselves on the stage but it is hard to tell how much they are able to recognise and to take any "tongue-in-cheek" criticism (even in the form of parody), and when the ancient problem of the relationship between "illusion and reality" is centred around *the mask* – worn more in the auditorium than on the stage – as perhaps the most important symbol of the age. Some people may wear their *faces* as masks; some masks are to hide a rich inner life; some masks are there to deceive and some naive people *are* deceived; some masks, in turn, are worn with the others' knowledge that they are *meant* to deceive; sometimes even "plain dealers" (truly honest people) are forced to put on masks to survive, and where is the terminal? Can we ever get down to the "bottom" of truth? To what extent do these playwrights themselves take these questions seriously? The hide and seek might only be turning around itself.

Sir George Etherege was born into a prosperous middle-class family, but neither the date of his birth, nor the time of his death can be given with precision. He was born *around* 1636 (the earliest date is 1634); the grandfather (also George) was a well-to-do vintner and a shareholder in the Virginia and Bermuda Companies; the father (also George) was a captain

and a purveyor to the Queen Henrietta Maria and followed the Queen to France after her escape in 1644. He died there in 1650 and his children (seven all together) were brought up by the grandfather.

Etherege had a reasonable education; it is likely that he attended Lord Williams's Grammar School and he may have studied law because in 1654 we find him apprenticed to an attorney. But we know very little about his life right after and before the Restoration; he may have travelled in Flanders and France as well; at least he had a very good knowledge of French. By 1664, when his first play, *The Comical Revenge* is performed, he already appears as an established court-wit, befriended to famous rakes and courtiers like Sir Charles Sedley, the Earl of Rochester, the Duke of Buckingham and even to the king, Charles II himself. In 1668 his second play, *She Wou'd if She Cou'd* was shown and he was made Gentleman of the Privy Chamber in Ordinary. That year, he was sent, as Sir Daniel Hervey's secretary, to Turkey on a diplomatic mission; he returned to London in 1671. The *Man of Mode*, his third and last play, was produced in 1676 and it seems that Etherege and his friends spent most of their days with merry trouble- making, enjoying the patronage of the King. In the summer of 1676, in Epsom, Etherege was involved in a fight in which Rochester insulted and almost killed a night-watch and in 1677 we find them in a tavern squabble, where a man was wounded under the eye. It is also likely that Etherege was intimate with Mary of Modena, the wife of the future James II (the King's brother). In 1679 he married Mary Sheppard Arnold, who was, according to the contemporaries, an ugly, old but very rich widow; it is true that the surviving letters of Etherege to his wife are mostly about money, also recording how much he lost, for example, at the Duchess of Mazarin's basset-table. Yet he was knighted, perhaps precisely because of his newly acquired wealth. In 1685, when – only for three years – James II followed Charles II on the throne, Etherege was sent on a diplomatic mission again, this time to Ratisbon, and the haste with which he left England seems to indicate that he was escaping from something. He could never return to his beloved London: he neglected his diplomatic duties, he was bored, felt lonely, and spent his time playing cards and when he finally realised that William of Orange was to replace James on the throne and sent warning letters to the Court on this matter, he was not taken seriously. When the exiled James reached Paris in 1689, Etherege joined him and he died in 1691 or 92, converted, at least according to the Benedictine monks at Ratisbon, to Catholicism. Yet these data are obscure – for example for some mysterious reason he is not mentioned in the list of the Court in exile.

As a playwright, Etherege is hailed for no lesser a reason than for bringing "genteel comedy" (as the comedy of manners was then called) to its "first peak" (cf. Bevis, p. 73) especially with *She Wou'd*, which Thomas Shadwell considered to be "the best comedy written since the Restoration" (Bevis, p. 77). It is true that *The Man of Mode* also had a noisy – though short-lived – success; at the premiere even the King was present and the name of the hero of the subplot, Sir Fopling, soon became a byword – it even occurs in a theological dispute. The play was staged in Dorset Gardens Theatre by The Duke's Men, who tried to do their best: Dorimant was played by Thomas Betterton and Mrs Loveit by Mrs Barry, famous for her tragic roles (and for being the current mistress of Rochester).

The plot is rather conventional and mostly episodic: the main story concerns Dorimant, who is introduced in a "private place", his dressing-room, preparing for action in his "theatre-within-the-theatre", i.e. in the Mall and in London's private houses. He wishes to cast his mistress, Mrs Loveit off and start a new *liaison* with Loveit's best friend, Bellinda, who is still to be "initiated" because she has not yet had an affair. As early as the beginning of Act I Dorimant learns form the orange-girl that a beautiful young heiress, Harriet is coming to town and he decides to make marrying her the goal of *his* play (yet perhaps not the goal of *the* play or of his life). Though we also see him sending money to a town-whore, he successfully tricks Mrs Loveit into rejecting him with the help of Bellinda (whom he successfully seduces)

and he does win Harriet's heart, with a promise of marriage, though it is obscure if he would not continue his relationship with both Bellinda and Mrs. Loveit (and/or with other sophisticated and worldly ladies) even after his marriage.

Much of the interpretation of the play depends, indeed, on how we see Dorimant. Is he cultured or rude, a promiscuous cynic, or a man honestly trying to reform in the end? Is he a witty and harmless impostor or a ruthless, narcissistic hypocrite, filled with Hobbisan aggressiveness and appetite? Which is the mask and which is the "real self"? We may try to guide ourselves through contrasts and comparisons; this time, it is Sir Fopling (the hero of the sub-title) who is the "odd-man-out", the "misfit": strictly speaking, the play could be acted without him but he is not outside of the play's meaning at all. Dorimant's sophisticated *style* comes from France but has become distinctly English, whereas Sir Fopling is only aping French values yet for us the comedy he creates is less easy to appreciate because most of the jokes at his expense assumes knowledge of contemporary French gossip, including the names of the fashionable gallants and their valets (!) in Paris. Thus, Sir Fopling's main function is twofold: he creates, in contrast with Dorimant, some space for the latter's machinations, in the form of perhaps encouraging some real admiration for Dorimant's easy-going, fearless and elegant new style of manners; yet Sir Fopling also serves as an example of the man who becomes *identical* with the idiocies of the roles he is playing and with the masks he is putting on to mimic "imperialistic" French culture. The four bullies in Act III, Scene iii, insulting Mrs Loveit and Bellinda are most probably inserted for the sake of contrast as well: they might indicate the difference between openly aggressive manhood and the covert ways in which a "real wit" makes love to fair ladies. Yet whether this makes Dorimant more or less dangerous, or especially whether Dorimant represents just another "mode" of deplorable – though undeniably attractive – social behaviour remains an open question. As it remains an open question whether for him Harriet is a punishment or a reward. Dorimant and Harriet seem to be a perfect match, yet Harriet is not only beautiful, witty and very rich but nasty too: with Young Bellair she is a malicious observer of contemporary manners and she has no scruples when it comes to turning another knife in the beaten Mrs. Loveit (V; ii.). Loveit is the only real loser in the story: she is the only person ejected in the finale because she cannot control her passions, which, in turn, might be "a telling comment on the values of the play's society" (Bevis, p. 89). Perhaps we can say no more that, for better or for worse, Dorimant and Harriet do deserve each other and it is up to them to take this as heaven or hell.

It is remarkable that in the world of the play, the lifestyle of the upper-class wit seems to have a corrupting effect on the lower-classes, too; the Shoemaker, in Act I, does not only complain about apprentices imitating the fashionable gallants but gives the following portrait of his marriage:

'Zbud, there's never a man i' the town lives more like a gentleman with his wife than I do. I never mind her motions; she never inquires into mine. We speak to one another civilly, hate one another heartily, and because 'tis vulgar to lie and soak together, we have each of us our several settle-bed" (I, 255-9).

Does the play blame the "lower classes" for such conduct as well? Or does it wish to demonstrate that there is no exception: the world is corrupt though and through?

In the subplot, however, *The Man of Mode* does allow a very different pair of lovers to come together with the promise of a good marriage: Young Bellair and Emilia are the representatives of true love and they only have to employ an innocent and easily accomplished trick-marriage to fool Old Bellair, the typical "comic old father" and *senex* and to bring about a *real* marriage. Old Bellair's portrait is nicely matched by her sister's, Lady Woodwill's outmoded ideas of gallantry and both of them think that marriage is a purely social and mercenary affair. This is considered to be "unreasonable" by everyone, including

Harriet and Lady Woodwill's laments about her beauty no longer admired and Old Bellair's comic attempt at courting Emilia undermine all their claims to authority.

Yet even Young Bellair and Emilia have to resort to a *trick*, to a *mask*: they are not able to ignore society around them, in which love is constantly demystified: it is portrayed in images of money, sickness, (legal) battle, "business", hunting, a card game, etc., so largely in materialistic and competitive terms. This innocent couple might be carefully placed a long way from the young rakes about town, still they have to realise that in London love is a temporary thing; nothing and nobody may be trusted for ever; the world is governed by interests and not friendships or "real" love, and most relationships are based on a conspiracy *against* somebody rather than on supporting a common goal. Will they survive in the long run? Of course, in a comedy it is impossible to ask what happens after the curtain goes down but it is noteworthy that compared with Harriet and Dorimant, Emilia and Young Bellair – the latter escaping a proposed match precisely with Harriet – are far less vital or perceptive. Innocence and naivete seem to go hand in hand, just like wit and a fair amount of foppishness and we have to wait until Congreve's Mirabell and Millamant to find a couple who are *both* witty and in love at the same time, though their figures will not be devoid of some question-marks, either.

Chapter 12

Drama in the 18th Century

12. 1. Alexander Pope

12.1.1. Pope's life and work (1688-1744)

Alexander Pope was born in 1688, in the year of the "Glorious Revolution", which, however, meant a relatively pleasant period for Protestants rather than for Catholics and Pope was the only son of a Catholic linen merchant. The Act of Toleration in 1689 granted free worship only to Dissenters but not for Catholics: Catholics had to live at least ten miles from the city-centre, they could not attend university (cf. "numerous nullus"), they were not allowed to hold public offices and they had to pay extra taxes. Still, Pope's father was a well-to-do man and Pope lived, all through his life, under comfortable circumstances yet he never lost his "outsider position". He had an excellent education (he made up for what he missed at the university with private tutors) and he got encouragement to try his hand at literature both from his parents and from powerful patrons. His first publications (*The Pastorals*, 1709; *An Essay on Criticism*, 1711; and the first version of *The Rape of the Lock*; 1712) brought him immediate success. He boasted of friends like Jonathan Swift, John Gay (author of *The Beggar's Opera*), Thomas Parnell (a good poet and an excellent scholar of ancient Greek texts) and the Queen's physician, Dr. John Arbuthnot (also interested in literature). Together they formed a "society of man of letters" (which was very much in fashion those days) called the Scriblerus Club (Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* grew out of this circle, too).

Pope's greatest enterprise was the translation of Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (1714-1726). Trough subscriptions, he managed to make his life financially secure and he became one of the first poets who did not have to rely on aristocratic patronage but earned his living entirely "by his pen".

Pope belonged to the circle of "Tory gentleman poets" and was constantly criticised and ridiculed by the more "plebeian Whigs", led by Joseph Addison. Even his physical deformity was made fun of: he was 4 feet and 6 inches tall because of the tuberculosis of the spine. Much play was made with the letters of his name, too: A. P...E. *The Dunciad* (1728) marks Pope entering the satire- and pamphlet-warfare of the age. Among Pope's enemies the bitterest were Thomas Tickell (producing a rival translation of the *Iliad*) and Lewis Theobald (with a rival edition of Shakespeare's plays). Neither the Tories, nor the Whigs did form, by any means, an organised party: these names started to circulate after the Glorious Revolution (when William of Orange and his wife, Mary took the English throne in a kind of "joint rule"); the name "Tory" was associated with the established Anglican Church and with the squirearchy; the name "Whig" mostly meant the Protestant landowners and the Dissenters and the rising middle-class.

Pope never got married; after the death of his father in 1718 he and his mother moved to Twickenham (outside of London yet within easy reach) and after the death of his mother in 1733 he lived there alone until his death in 1744. He devoted his time between reading, writing, gardening and conversing with his friends.

12.1.2. Essay on Criticism (1711)

This is the work of a young man, in the imitation of the famous *Ars Poetica* of the Roman Augustan poet, Horace. When poets write about criticism – and especially in a *poem* – the question primarily is if the poem itself becomes an embodiment of the critical attitude it advocates. Here the answer is in the affirmative: an ideal balance is kept between coolness and fire, involvement and detachment. And this is the standpoint Pope represents in his text: he thinks that the poet should have both *wit* (the creative faculty) and *judgement* (the critical faculty) because the best writer is the best reader as well: one should read a poem with the same wit the author wrote it and the poet is only able to write in good taste if he has the faculty of judgement as well.

To understand Pope's principles, some of the most important background assumptions should be made clear. Things are arranged in cause-and-effect relationships: everything has some reason behind it and everything has a purpose, a goal. Both poetry and criticism serve human ends: the age is not only consciously didactic but perhaps the most important task assigned to the poet is to instruct and please, to teach and delight, at the same time – to make people "better" through pleasant means. The other important assumption concerns the relationship between thought and language. A clear distinction is made – mostly on the basis of Horace – between *res* (subject matter, content) and *verba* (style, form). Language is the *dress* of thought and, thus, language is separable form thought, form is separable form content. It is possible to say *the same thing* in many ways, true expression "dresses" an object but it does not change it:

> But true expression, like the unchanging sun,
> Clears and improved what'er it shines upon,
> It gilds all objects, but it alters none."
> The poet's task is to formulate, in a new way (form, shape, style) general truths:
> "True wit is Nature to advantage dressed;
> What oft was thought , but ne'er so well expressed;
> Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find,
> That gives us back the image of our mind...

The true poet and critic is thus not concerned with particular truths; he should get rid of everything idiosyncratic, he should do away with private envy, prejudice, party interests, pride and self-conceit and represent humankind in its best shape. The good poet and the good critic is "the good man": literary endeavours are fully integrated with the rest of the poet's life. Yet his task is not to represent what *he* feels: he should give voice to what everybody – a "universal" human being – is likely to experience. Thus, the separation between content and form goes hand in hand with essentialism and comprehensiveness: a piece of poetry should be judges by the *whole* of the poem and the parts are considered with respect to the end they should all serve:

> In wit, as Nature, what affects our hearts
> Is not the exactness of peculiar parts;
> 'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,
> But the joint force and full result of all.

This essence is also "historical" (but not bound by time, as we shall see!) in the sense that it comprises the best of the poetic tradition as well: the poet is learned by definition and the "best" is what has remained stable and enduring in the course of changing times.

Nature has been mentioned several times already: the essence, the underlying order is Nature it/herself. The cosmos is given meaning through the order in Nature, which – as Newton proved – are stable, eternal and divine. Thus, in this sense, order is "pan-chronic/a-

historical": the human being stands in the same relation to Nature irrespective of the "accidents" of time, place, culture or society. In 18th century England the poet might feel the same as Horace did in Roman times. The poet does what God did when he created Nature: he imposes form and order on undifferentiated matter and the random chaos of life and thus is able to show the universal in the particular. We are able to respond to the "timeless" universal because, in all times, it is bound up with our essential humanity.

> Those rules [of poetry] of old discovered, not devised [the Ancients did not invent them,
> they found them]
> Are Nature still, but Nature methodized:
> Nature, like liberty, is but restrained
> By the same laws which first herself ordained.

Art brings man into new and renewed awareness of the profoundest truths: the task of art is not to 'invent' new things but to remind us of those truths which have been with us all along. The various poetic forms, shaping reality, are of Nature, too: the rules are given in the nature of things, which are, admittedly, constraints: *"Nature to all things fixed the limits fit"*, yet without these restrictions there would be total chaos. For the poet, we could now say, the critic (with judgement) plays the role of restrictive *form*: one can deviate from the norm (the rule) only under special circumstances and very rarely. But, of course, the poet and the critic (almost: content and form) should be the same person.

So the task is imitation but not of life, not of men, not of truth but of Nature (where *imitation* carries the primary sense of following (something or somebody, cf. "Imitation Christi"):

> First follow Nature, and your judgement frame
> By her just standard, which is still the same:
> Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
> One clear, unchanged, and universal light,
> Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
> At once the source, and end, and test of Art.

It is clear, then, that the key figure of speech (image) in the 18th century will be the simile (and the allegory) and not the metaphor: there will be two systems, running side by side and one will stand for the other – there will be no straightforward identification of incongruous elements (hence the hatred of 'conceits' in Dr. Johnson). One of these two systems will be the realm of *general truths*, the world of abstractions, applicable to everyone, since it contains the essence, the "philosophical" timeless truth of everything. The other system will be the world of *particulars*: particulars are examples and illustrations of the general truths, their 'reference' – in 20th c. terminology – will always be the general truth. Yet the particular (including, in a sense, the rhymes in the couplets, too!), being the instance, the embodiment of the general truth, will also be a kind of 'reference' for this truth: the example, the particular instance is necessarily limited yet it keeps the general truth 'alive' (and offers opportunity for deviation). The procedure is from the general to the particular (and only very seldom *vice versa*) yet in this way the general is the reference of the particular and the particular is the reference of the general: they *mirror* each other and a reciprocal (though not totally symmetrical) relationship is established between them.

12.1.3. Preface to Shakespeare

Shakespeare (and, hence, tragedy) is exiting because Shakespeare needs a special response: he does not fit easily into the system described above.

For Pope, Shakespeare is, first and foremost, *original* (immediately compared to Pope's favourite, Homer): with Shakespeare, poetry is *inspiration*, he is an exception since he was not an imitator but an *instrument* of Nature. Nature speaks through him, his characters are Nature herself. Characters are individuals as those in life itself. Shakespeare has wonderful power over our passions: we cry when we should and we realise only later why we burst into tears. Shakespeare is simply *irresistible*. Sentiments are highly pertinent: they are between penetration and felicity. But Shakespeare also excels in the description of the coolness of reasoning and reflection. He knew the world by *intuition*; he was born to be a poet. He is *irregular* like a majestic piece of Gothic architecture, which is perhaps less comfortable than a modern building, yet it is stronger and more solemn.

12.2. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

12.2.1. Life and work

Johnson was a typical self-made man, somewhat always bitter (sometimes sarcastic), very independent (with firm opinions constantly challenging and puzzling 'ordinary minds'), always in opposition (suffering from inferiority complex), biased (but trying to be fair): one of the greatest critics ("man of letters") in the English language. He was a Tory (and a Jacobite) in political sympathies (yet his few benefactors were almost invariably Whigs, which he was ready to admit); he was extremely poor (so poor that in 1728 he had to withdraw from Oxford for financial reasons) until 1761 (when he was granted a Government pension [from a Whig Prime Minister] of 300 Pounds for the rest of his life, but always called attention to poverty, frustration and resentment), he hated the three thinking of Hume, the relativity of Swift, the pre-romanticism of Gray and Collins, the political radicalism of the American colonists and he had a tendency to sudden and disproportionate violence yet he was an unflinching and steady representative a certain taste and the staunch supporter of a generally accepted norm (cf. his *Dictionary*). He went to London in 1737, earned his living by his pen, contributing to the *Gentleman's Magazine,* later launching periodical essays himself (*The Rambler*, 1750-52; *The Adventurer*, 1753; *The Idler*, 1758-60), a mixture of literary criticism, social and political comments and satirical portrayals of social types. He wrote a novel (*Rasselas*, 1759), poems (*London,* 1738; *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, 1749), the famous *Dictionary of the English Language* (1747-55), edited the plays of Shakespeare (1765), wrote a travel-book (*Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, 1775) and a "literary history" (*The Lives of the Poets*, 1779-81). He was a mixture of *wit* (the free play of the mind) and *morality* (uniting the question of right and wrong with social behaviour). He lived, and fitted into an age witnessing to the commercialisation of literature, when learning became a trade and the "modern" world of publishers, periodicals and editors emerged, all resting on the great anonymous public which paid for what it read (Johnson invented the term: 'the common reader').

12.2.2. Preface to Shakespeare

Johnson not only considers Shakespeare to be a classic but he provides a definition of the term: we measure a classic by his best achievement, when a poet is alive, by his worst. Yet, of course, the term is comparative and marks a gradual process, yet the test is duration and the continuance of esteem. Shakespeare has surely outlived his century (a sign of greatness), he is now happily out of his own times – happily in the sense that we do not have to bother about enemies, political issues, etc.: we read him for instruction and pleasure. What can please the reader? "Nothing can please many and long" – Johnson says – "but the representation of general nature", when the mind reposes in the stability of truth, whereas the pleasure of sudden wonder is soon forgotten.

Shakespeare is a poet of Nature, holding up a faithful mirror of manner and life; characters represent "common humanity", such as observation will always find. Characters are not individuals but a species and instruction is derived from that. His real power is not in the particular passages but in the progress of the fable and the tenor of the dialogue; the language is a language which will never be heard again, such characters will never be seen, yet the dialogue is determined by the incident that produces it, presented with ease and simplicity – it resembles common conversation – it is the common intercourse of life, the language of those who only speak to be understood. In Shakespeare, the universal agent on the stage is not only love but it is only one of the many passions, and a passion can be a cause equally of happiness or calamity.

Shakespeare depicts the probable: the events will not happen in 'real life' but the effects would probably be as he described them and what the characters do is what we would do under similar circumstances; there are scenes from which a hermit may predict the transactions of the world, and a confessor could predict the progress of passions; nature always predominates accident. (In answer to Voltaire's question, "why is Claudius [in *Hamlet*] a drunkard, Johnson replies that kings are also men, they love wine and thus Claudius, the murderer is not only odious but despicable, too.

Then Johnson returns to the age-old problem concerning the legitimacy of mixing tragedy and comedy. He says it is very true that Shakespeare's plays are not either of the two; they are a "composition of a distant kind" and it is also true that no great dramatist before him attempted to write *both* comedy and tragedy. This is, undoubtedly, contrary to the classical rules but there is always an appeal to nature. "Mingled drama" is even closer to life than either of the two genres – Johnson claims – since "all pleasure consist in variety". Besides, in Shakespeare's time tragedy was not a poem of more general dignity and elevation but it required only a "calamitous conclusion". Yet "by nature" Shakespeare is a comedy-writer, in tragedy he is struggling after some occasion to be comic and writes with toil and study; in comedy he is at ease; in tragic scenes there is always something wanting; comedy pleases with thought and language, tragedy by incident and action; tragedy was his skill, comedy his instinct.

So far, Johnson enlisted Shakespeare's merits, now he turns to his faults, which are so great that they "obscure and overwhelm any other merit". First of all, he pleases more than he instructs, he sacrifices virtue for convenience, he writes without any moral purpose, there is no just distribution of good and evil, and the barbarity of his age cannot excuse him since "virtue is independent of time and place". Besides, the plots are loosely formed (especially towards the end of the plays); there is no regard to distinction of time and place, and even the customs of a nation is liberally given to another (e.g. Hector quotes Aristotle). In narration – which is undramatic anyway – Shakespeare is tedious and "the equality of words to things is

very often neglected"; softness and pathos is destroyed by an idle conceit, terror and pity are shaken by sudden frigidity, and a quibble for him is irresistible.

As regards the three unities, the unity of action is all right – Johnson points out that in history plays Shakespeare did not *intend* unity. It is true that Shakespeare has no regard for unity of place and time but this is Corneille's superstition: these will not make the incident more credible, since representation is not reality, the spectator knows that the stage is the stage and an actor is an actor and in contemplation, too, we easily contract the time of real actions. Drama is created with all the credit due to drama, it is "a just picture of a real original", for example evil in tragedy is not real evil but evil we *may be exposed to*; the delight of tragedy proceeds from our *consciousness of fiction* (we all agree that real murder does not please). Thus, imitation is not to be mistaken for reality: imitation *brings realities to mind* and a play read effects the mind like a play acted.

When passing judgement over Shakespeare, we must never forget that his age was an age of barbarity; the mind was not yet analysed; this, precisely, is Shakespeare's merit: he gives the image as he received it and not through the mediation of 'polite' language, not through the intervention of any other mind. In Shakespeare, it is not the language of poets which is spoken (as in Addison's *Cato*) but the language of men. Shakespeare is not a cultivated garden but a forest, a mine of gold and diamond mixed with meaner minerals. We should also bear in mind that in this "barabric age" Shakespeare was not well educated, most probably he read only in English and he did not aim at 'eternal fame'. Finally, Johnson provides a survey of previous Shakespeare-editions: Nicholas Rowe (1709), Alexander Pope (1725); Lewis Theobald (1733); Sir Thomas Hanmer (1743-44 – the "Oxford edition"); William Warburton (later: Bishop of Gloucester, 1747), he enlists their merits and faults and explains his own principles of emendation.

12.3.   English Theatres in the 18th Century

12.3.1. The drama and the theatre of the times

The eighteenth century (roughly the period between Dryden's death [1700] and the "last typical" Restoration comedy, Congreve's *The Way of the World* [1700], and 1790, the beginning of the "Romantic era"), from the 20th-21st century point of view, is not the most attractive period of English drama, yet a clear distinction should be made between the 18th century English *theatre* as a highly popular and often frequented national institution, enjoying an uninterrupted and vigorous life and tremendous popularity, and the *dramatic literature* which was then produced. The latter, though not very intriguing or enjoyable today, has historical significance: especially the genre of sentimental comedy and, interestingly, the tragedy of the times prove to be dramatic events without which the revival of drama and the theatre in the late 19th century would most probably have never come about.

The dramatists of genuine distinction were mostly the writers of comedy and not tragedy, yet the generic distinctions were then so sharply defined that comedy and tragedy led virtually separate lives. Though this is true of the previous, Restoration period as well (cf. however, Dr. Johnson defending Shakespeare from the charges of producing "mingled drama"), and it is also true that, in terms of theatrical conventions, the 18th century is, in the main, a truthful heir to the late 17th, still there are some important changes emerging in what we today call the "Age of Reason". The principal theatre remained the one in Drury Lane; however, from 1714, Lincoln Inn's Fields (moving to Covent Garden in 1734) and, from 1720, the Little Theatre in Haymarket, represented some challenge to the monopoly of Drury Lane. The Stage-Licensing Act in 1737 by Prime Minister Robert Walpole, triggered especially by the anti-Government satires of Gay and Fielding, meant a strict pre-censorship

of plays and the closure of non-patent theatres. It was under these circumstances that new voices started to be heard.

12.3.2. Comedy and tragedy

The first important differences occurred in *comedy*. Eighteenth-century theatre started to reflect the mood, the interests and the sentiments of the middle-class: every-day values and problems began to feature more and more on the stage and Restoration stock-heroes like the gullible country squire, or the foolish citizen were replaced by the figure of the responsible merchant. In 1698, Jeremy Collier attacked the theatre for its immorality (*A Short View of the Immorality and the Profaneness of the English Stage, together with the Sense of Antiquity upon this Argument* – a typical Puritan "philippic"); not much later – perhaps even as a result of the new "theatre-warfare" – more and more "morally intended" comedies were written (e.g. Thomas D'urfey's [1653-1723] *The Modern Prophets,* 1709). George Farquhar, a figure typically between the Restoration 'comedy of manners' and the new, 'comedy of sentiment', started to create characters of *irresistible* goodness; Richard Steele (most famous for the "periodical essays" he wrote, mostly with Joseph Addison [*The Tatler, The Spectator*]) also started to soften the harsher notes of comedy. This change has a lot to do with the philosophical debates at the turn of the century – then a common cause, also 'brought to the street' through 'penny folios', 'periodical essays' and pamphlets – about the basic features of human nature: was the human being inherently evil (as Puritans or, in the middle of the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes claimed in his *Leviathan*) or was it rather Benevolence and the Divine principle which was immanent in each and every individual, to be discovered, directing the senses and the mind along rational principles, for him- or herself? In the 18th century – with the work of John Locke, Shaftesbury and Mandeville – the latter view prevailed: God implanted, in everyone, the instincts of love and charity and, most importantly, a sense to fit harmoniously into a well-ordered, yet dynamic society in which he or she may become a useful member. A new tone of sentimental, yet elegant and delightful moral instruction emerged, without either the moral rigorism or the worldliness of the Restoration. Emphasis was no longer on the 'odd-man-out', on the 'misfit' (like, for example Mr. Pinchwife) but on the one who fits into a morally conducted universe. And, as Steele put it, there was no human institution "so aptly calculated for the forming of free-born people as that of the theatre". Besides bitter satire, good-natured and sympathetic laughter could now also be found: comedy did not so much wish to *reveal* knaves or *expose* fools but wanted to appeal to the human being's 'better' and – according to the conviction of the age – 'truer' self and, thus, reform him/her. The stage invited the audience to *share* the emotional experiences the characters were undergoing: a kind of co-operation was proposed between the stage and the viewers instead of the alienating, sarcastic (or sometimes even cynical) re-enactment of contemporary reality; instead of the objective or exaggerated re-presentation, a world of idealised examples was set upon the stage. Several kinds of comedy were distinguished: Shakespearean comedy, Jonsonian 'comedies of humours', Restoration comedy of manners (e.g. George Farquhar's *The Beaux's Stratagem* is a strange mixture of this and of the new 'sentimental comedy', 1707), plays of intrigue and sentimental comedy (e.g. Colley Cibber's *The Careless Husband,* Steele's *The Conscious Lovers,* 1722), and, of course, there were 'lower' pantomimes, farces, burlettas, and even acrobatics as well. The best sentimental comedies come late in the century with, e. g. Oliver Goldsmith's (~1730-1792) *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's (1751-1816) *The School for Scandal* (1777).

Tragedy also had varied offerings to the theatregoing public: Shakespeare (often in rewritten versions, and some of the tragedies disgraced) was constantly on the stage, then

there were the then less popular tragicomedies of Beaumont and Fletcher; there was John Dryden's heroic drama of the Restoration-period (of the middle- and late 17th century), pathetic tragedies (e. g. by Nicholas Rowe [1674-1718], especially with such 'she-tragedies' as *Jane Shore,* 1714) and Augustan classical tragedies (e.g. the then highly esteemed *Cato*, 1713, the single tragedy by Addison, taking its theme form classical antiquity and very much in conformity with neo-classical decorum). Tragedy changed less with respect to the Restoration: after all, sympathetic response has always been an important pre-requisite of tragedy, though in the 18th century it often aimed at immediate emotional effects, taking the form of exaggerated pathos (melodrama). The spectacle of human suffering was, for the age, in itself sufficient to stir emotions (Dr. Johnson said that the design of tragedy was to "instruct by moving passions"), and the stamp of benevolence, so important for comedy, can hardly be found in the tragedies of the age. Whig taste inclined toward neo-classical tragedy and sentimental comedy; Tories preferred satirical comedy and burlesque, yet all genres were drifting more and more towards 'bourgeoisie' values.

12.4. and George Lillo: *The London Merchant* (1731)

12.4.1. George Lillo and the 'bourgeoisie tragedy in prose'

With respect to the Restoration, the most significant change was the emergence of 'domestic tragedy' or 'bourgeoisie tragedy'. Though Renaissance domestic tragedies were being reworked (such as *A Yorkshire Tragedy,* 1606 or *Arden of Faversham,* 1591?, the latter by Lillo himself), and Otway, Southerne (during the Restoration) or Rowe (at the turn of the 17th-18th century) also experimented with 'private tragedy' (as Lillo himself acknowledges in his Prologue), the audience was also aware that Lillo was breaking new ground.

George Lillo (~1693-1739) was of Flemish and English decent and was a Dissenter (like Daniel Defoe). He was the son of a jeweller and followed his father's trade. His literary career started with the imitation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* in *Silvia, or The Country Burial,* (1730) – this play was not well-received. *The London Merchant, or The History of George Barnwell* (1731), however, was an immense success, both at home and abroad (especially in Germany – see Lessing!). At least Lillo's *aim* is far removed from good-natured benevolism: he wishes to enforce emotionally the consequences of sinfulness; on his stage death is really the 'wages of sin'. His originality is to eliminate the aristocracy and blank verse: his heroes are middle-class people and they speak in (cumbersome and heavy) prose.

What he puts forward as a kind of *'theory' of tragedy* in his *Prologue* to the play is not very original: he refers to Dryden, having said that tragedy is the most "excellent and useful kind of writing". Lillo seems to believe that *catharsis* (the word is not used by him) is the "correcting" of "criminal" passions by exciting them, and a passion can be criminal either by nature or through being present in excess. Lillo thus offers his tragedy with an ordinary subject-matter as a kind of ordinary 'cure' of the senses and moral feelings (he uses the words "remedy and disease") and, defending his practice of putting ordinary characters on the stage instead of princes, he appeals to the common sentiments, present in all of us. He admits that "Tamerlane" (Marlowe's hero: Tamburlain), Bajazet (by Racine) or Cato (by Addison) are useful examples, too but he has "attempted to enlarge the province of the graver kind of poetry" and claims: "Plays founded on moral tales in private life may be of admirable use, by carrying conviction to the mind with such irresistible force as to engage all the faculties and principles". Then he quotes quite a lot from *Hamlet*, mainly passages in which Hamlet talks about catching "the conscience of the King" and about the power of the theatre to stir emotions.

Lillo's source was an old ballad about a naive apprentice seduced by a harlot and driven to steal and murder. Lillo not only revived the Elizabethan tradition of working from a well-known and highly popular story but he set the play in Elizabethan times and he had expert knowledge on Elizabethan literature and dramaturgy as well. The first-night audience came to Drury Lane prepared to laugh: "many gaily-disposed sprits brought the ballad with them, intending to make ludicrous comparisons between the ancient ditty and the modern play. But the play spoke so much to the heart that they were drawn in to drop their ballads, and pull out their handkerchiefs" – a contemporary account recalls [Quoted by David W. Lindsay, "Introduction" In: *The Beggar's Opera and Other Eighteenth-Century Plays*, Introduced by David W. Lindsay, London: Everyman, 1995, p. xxvii].

12.4.2. The play

There are, indeed problems with the protagonist, Barnwell: he is passive and basically uninteresting – more a stupid victim than a tragic hero. There are attempts to parallel his career with Satan's, the "grand apostate" (II;2) but this is not very convincing, either. Thorowgood and Trueman are too good and too true (Thorowgood is *almost* like God Himself, with the exception that he does not want to listen to Barnwell's confession); Maria (a favourite name for a chaste woman in the age) professes affection for Barnwell belatedly. The only powerful figure is the she-villain, Millwood (cunning, beautiful, and destructive) but there is no attempt to show something which would also make her *human*. The play rather resembles a morality-play, with black or white characters fighting for the soul of the protagonist, yet here everyone is ready to give a faithful and detailed description of his or her state of mind. The usual problem occurs: the 'bad person' (though this time a woman, which is more interesting yet, from another point of view, equally stereotypical) starts to dominate the play, remaining the single memorable character (though never willing to 'reform').

The language of the play carries the solemn decorum of the age: it often resorts to stereotypical constructions ("haughty and revengeful Spaniards"; "our happy island", etc., "as...as"-constructions) and the honest and thoroughly good Thorowgood keeps repeating that it is not birth (noble or low) but work and character which make a man, and that we are here to serve the other. Maria – who is in a Miranda-like relationship to Thorowgood – dutifully repeats that "high birth and titles don't recommend the man who own them to my affection". There is an attempt at perfect (and didactic) symmetry in dramatic composition: Millwood, in Scene 3, will draw a parallel between the Spaniards mentioned in Act I, Sc.1, and herself (trying to 'invade' Barnwell); while there is "entertainment" in Thorowgood's house, there is "entertainment" – for Barnwell – at Millwood's, too. The greatest charge brought against Millwood by her maid, Lucy, is that she is 'arbitrary in her principles' (she cannot be calculated) and this is precisely something Barnwell cannot endure: he cannot take uncertainty. There is a constant appeal to general principles (e.g. Millwood: "It is a general maxim among the knowing part of mankind that a woman without virtue, like a man, without honour and honesty, is capable of any action".) From this she concludes that she should seduce inexperienced youths: she has already picked 18-year-old George Barnwell and she asks the following question: "Now, after what manner shall I receive him?" (cf. Congreve!) while – like Richard III – she is ready to deceive Barnwell and "mean the contrary" to what she speaks. When Barnwell decides to leave – to have supper with her, and to 'press her hand' – he knows that he will "lose [his] innocence, peace of mind and hopes of solid happiness". According to Trueman, one of Barnwell's greatest merit was that his life was "regular". Act II starts already with Barnwell confessing his being a thief, he knows that "public shame and ruin must ensue" and that he "speaks a language" which is "foreign" to his "heart". There is some 'metatheatrical interest' ("which part am I reluctant to act?" – Barnwell asks} but when

he is ready to repent, Millwood and Lucy appear in person and present a (false) story of inheritance, money and jealousy. Barnwell turns to the audience: "Now you, who boast your reason all-sufficient, suppose yourselves in my condition". The greatest trouble with what Barnwell is going through seems to be that it is *irrational*, which brings about disorder and disorder "levels" "all distinctions". At the beginning of Act III, Thorowgood talks about merchandise as a "*science*" and claims that its greatest merit is to establish "intercourse between nations" ('internationalising the world'): the merchant's task is to collect the "blessings of each soil". It is only from the conversation between Lucy and Blunt (Millwood's servants) that we learn that Barnwell was persuaded to kill his rich uncle (this is "chaos" in itself). The Uncle has some premonitions about death knocking on his door (a Gothic element); Barnwell tries to borrow from Macbeth's vocabulary but he soon relapses into general terms: "This earth, the air and water seem concerned even that's not strange: the world is punished and Nature feels the shock, when Providence permits a good man's fall". In Act IV, Lucy tells Thorowgood everything but it is too late; Millwood is ready to give Barnwell up for murder (since he brought no money with him); Barnwell tries to keep up the image of the 'woman in love' in vain (Blunt remarks that the Devil "seduces to sin and then betrays to punishment"); and Barnwell knows that he will be "suspended between heaven and earth" (i.e. will be hanged). Thorowgood has an 'interview' with Millwood and surely, for poor Barnwell temptation was great since even Thorowgood admits that she fires the blood "that age had frozen long since". There is a strong anti-Hobbsian attitude; Millwood says that "All actions are alike and indifferent to man and beast, who devour and are devoured as they meet with others weaker or stronger than themselves". She blames priesthood for her destruction and Thorowgood partly agrees (!) but tries to distinguish between religion and superstition. Millwood does talk about women being slaves and gives a speech about corrupt judges (in a vocabulary somewhat reminiscent of King Lear's). Act V is in itself a sermon: according to Thorowgood, Millwood's example should "learn us diffidence, humanity and circumspection". Millwood is unable to repent (she is given over to the Devil); Barnwell does repent, he is visited by the good Master (Thorowgood), the true friend (Trueman, who will lie down on the ground with him: "you propose an intercourse of woe – pour all your griefs into my bosom") and Maria (who now confesses her love to Barnwell). Barnwell says: "I now am what I've made myself" – it is up to man to decide about his future, it is not Fate who brought him destruction but his own bad decision.

12.4. Oliver Goldsmith: She Stoops to Conquer

It may sound surprising but Oliver Goldsmith's (1730 or 31-1774) reputation as a playwright is solely based on the two comedies he wrote: *The Good Nature'd Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer, or the Mistakes of a Night* (1773, the second half of the title was the original one, the first half was added only a few days before the performance). Goldsmith turned to drama when he already was an established essayist, novelist and poet and even historian because he started his career by writing such popular books as the *History of England* or *History of the Earth*. He excelled in all genres; the essay-series called *Chinese Letters* (1760, later reprinted under the title *The Citizen of the World*) established him as a professional writer; his poems *The Traveller* (1764), and especially *The Deserted Village* (1770) secured him a place among the finest poets of the time, and his novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) made him one of the best known men of letters. It was only his premature death (because of a chronic kidney-disease) which prevented him from becoming even greater but he is more than a chapter in literary history: he is still performed and read; he is still alive.

Goldsmith came from Ireland and kept his "Irish brogue" all through his life; his parents were Anglo-Irish on both sides; his father, a clergyman (a vicar) of the Established

Church served the Anglican parish in Lissay, Westmeath, where Goldsmith grew up. He received his BA degree from Trinity College Dublin in 1750, then he studied medicine, first at the University of in Edinburgh and later at various continental universities (among them at Leiden) but it is doubtful if he ever took a medical degree (this did not prevent him form practising as a physician for a while and calling himself *Dr.* Goldsmith). He travelled widely in Europe (in the Netherlands, France, Switzerland and Italy) but soon became penniless, so in 1756 he became a Grub street hack-writer in London and this is when his literary career started. Although he became an active playwright in the last phase of his life, he had had a lively interest in the theatre from the start; in *Chinese Letters*, for example, he attributes great importance to the English theatre as a national institution, yet he complains about the poor taste of the public and thinks that actor-managers of the time are given too much importance. He wrote *Essay on the Theatre* shortly before *She Stoops...* and there he draws a comparison between what he called "the weeping sentimental comedy" and "laughing and even low comedy".

Sentimental comedy, in Goldsmith's term, is "a species of bastard tragedy", i.e. a mixture of tragic and comic elements in the sense that here the audience has to commiserate with the characters and emphasis is on harmony restored after a great turmoil, whereas in the laughing comedy, i.e. in "true comedy as defined by Aristotle", we may laugh at our own absurdities. Goldsmith's sentimental comedy corresponds to the traditional romance-comedy (such as *The Tempest*) and laughing comedy is a mixture of the satirical comedy and farce. Interestingly, *The Good Natur'd Man* does contain sentimental traits, since the hero is reformed from senseless benevolism to common sense, which, of course, might be taken ironically as well and the play might be read as precisely the parody of sentimental comedy. *She Stoops to Conquer* is not only a better play but is also full of farcical elements (discoveries, deceits, errors, misunderstandings, eavesdropping, etc.) and finally not only the "real" Kate Hardcastle is discovered but the hero finds his "true self" as well.

She Stoops... is often compared to Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem,* where two fashionable gentlemen tour the provinces to find wives and fortune and one of them, who disguises himself as the other's footman, thinks he has seduced Cherry, the barmaid. In Goldsmith's play, two gentlemen go down to the country to meet ladies honourably and one of the thinks he has seduced Kate, the barmaid: in Act 3, Sc., lines 231-33 there is even a direct reference to Cherry and, thus, to Farquhar's play. This is also an important scene because it is here that Miss Kate Hardcastle really "stoops to conquer", i.e. she 'lowers herself to the level of the barmaid' to win Marlow's heart (the phrase occurs eventually in Act 4, Sc. 1 line 245, when Miss Hardcastle decides to keep the "character" [the barmaid's role] in which "she stooped to conquer" but will tell her "papa" that poor Marlow was deceived into thinking that he was at an inn.

In this comedy, indeed, the wheel turns upon *place*: where the characters think themselves to be and whether thy think themselves to be *in* place, or to be *out* of place. After all, it turns out that when they think themselves to be *in place* (they think they are right, in a right position) then they are *out of place* (they are the odd men or women out) and vice versa. The play even thematises the *in*-s and *out*-s: Mrs. Hardcastle remarks that Tony Lumpkin, his son (whom she mistakenly believes to be in love with Miss Neville, her niece) "fall in and out ten times a day" (Act II, Sc. 1, line 550); Hastings, still under the impression that Mr. Hardcastle is the inn-keeper, tells him "So what with eating above stairs, and drinking below, with receiving your friends without, and amusing them within, you lead a good pleasant bustling of it" (Act II, Sc. 1, 213-215) and, quite remarkably, in the Prologue to the play (written by David Garrick, the greatest actor of the age and the manager of the *rival* theatre at

Drury Lane)[166] mock-mourning the "death" of the laughing comedy, we hear in the very first lines: "Excuse me sirs, I pray – I can't yet speak – / I'm crying now – and I have been all the week! / *'Tis not along this mourning suit*, good masters; *I've that within* – for which there are no plasters!" (Prologue, lines 1-4). *I've that within* is a direct reference to *Hamlet*: " 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother [...] I have that within which passeth show" (*Hamlet,* I, 2, line 75 and 85), which points towards the well-known question as to the relationship between pretence, illusion, and irony; whether the outside already informs (or should inform) one of the inside or whether the outside is (only) there to *conceal* the inside. And even the very word *inn* might be a pun on the preposition *in,* and from the *inn*, at one point, Mr. Hardcastle wants to throw Marlow *out*, when Marlow thinks himself to be most *in.*

       In terms of movement, the one who gives an impetus to practically all the characters is Tony Lumpkin, Mrs. Hardcastle's son from her first marriage, the typical country booby, a stock-character in the comedies of the age. Tony, playing tricks on his obsessive mother and still her favourite, "comes of age" (and also into his inheritance) at the end of the play, yet he is the only person to be left without a partner when the curtain falls: he is the only *real* odd-man-out. It is Tony who makes Marlow and Hastings believe that Mr Hardcastle's old manor house is an inn (and it is pointed out by Mr. Hardcastle himself that it does "look like" an inn), it is Tony who sets his mother and Miss Neville (Kate Hardcastle's cousin and Hastings' fiancé) on a "round trip" in Act IV, i.e. the ladies believe they have made forty miles while they are in fact in the Hardcastle-house again. But there is even a further circular movement involving Tony: he steals Miss Neville's jewels (her inheritance) from Mrs. Hardcastle (who keeps it for the day when Tony marries Miss Neville), yet when Hastings entrusts the jewels to Marlow, Marlow, believing that they are most secure in the hands of the "innkeeper's wife", sends them back by a servant to Mrs. Hardcastle. Finally, of course, they will be given to Miss Neville when all the mistakes are cleared up; Tony disclaims her, and she may marry Hastings. Thus, place serves as a *mask* here *in the first place*, as a place of harmless deception, where people are able to unmask themselves and to be who they really are and to find whom they really love.

       This already takes us from the *horizontal* movements of the play (*in* and *out*, moving *around*) to its *vertical* movements: Marlow and Hastings go *down* to the old-fashioned house deep in the English countryside from London and they appear to be fashionable "Frenchmen" for the servants; the very title suggests that *stooping* is necessary to overcome the hypocrisy and the sentimental, pre-set values of upper-middle social relations in order to be happy, since it should not be forgotten that in both the main- and the sub-plot there is a pre-arranged marriage: Marlow's and Kate's was arranged by Mr. Hardcastle and Sir Charles, Marlow's father and Toby's and Miss Constance Neville's is *almost* arranged by Mrs. Hardcastle. It is all the more ironic that Marlow and Kate fall in love *while being, after all, obedient to the patriarchal fathers*; they ultimately do what they are expected to do socially, yet they can only establish the impeccable social match *personally:* Marlow can only fall in love with Kate Hardcastle (because of his upbringing, because of his natural bashfulness) when he believes that she is the barmaid of the house, i.e. that she is a kind of "available" country girl, and Kate still has to say she is "poor relation" in order to transform Marlow from a seducer to a potential suitor. Marlow' thinks there is a Kate and there is a Miss Hardcastle and he has to marry the latter while he has fallen in love with the former and his tremendous luck is that in the end it turns out that they are the *same* person. That the inn is a "better place" than, or at least is a rival of, the respectable middle-class manor house is further thematised in the play by showing us, in Act I, a *real* inn, where, again, Tony is the cheer-leader. If the manor-house stoops to being an inn, all is well: this is what Goldsmith implies, thus making fun of

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[166] *She Stoops...* was performed in the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden.

sentimental etiquette and formal middle-class social relations, and still providing a relatively sentimental ending to his farcical well-made play in allowing "Jack to marry Jill".

12.6. Sheridan's School for Scandal (1777)

"If you want to bring *The School for Scandal* up to date, you must make Charles a woman, and Joseph a perfectly sincere moralist. Then you will be in the atmosphere of Ibsen and of *The Greatest of These* – at once. And it is because there is no sort of hint of this now familiar atmosphere – because Joseph's virtue is a pretence instead of reality, and because the women in the play are set apart and regarded as absolutely outside the region of free judgement in which the men act, that the play, as aforesaid, 'dates' [i.e. 'it is dated, old, no longer so topical']" – G. B. Shaw himself wrote about Sheridan's comedy. There are almost 150 years between Shaw's *Saint Joan* and Sheridan's play, yet there are quite a number of similarities between them, as well as between the respective authors. Both Shaw and Sheridan were Irishmen who went to make a career in England and though they never denied their Irish identities, they were moralists more on an international scale, and the traditional Irish-English conflict is little reflected in their work. Both wanted to produce 'well-made-plays' and both wished to entertain and to teach at the same time: Sheridan puts a 'school' on the stage to laugh people out of their follies and to show that *behind* the '*surface*' you can have scoundrels (Joseph Surface), just as much as people who have an ultimately honest and good heart (Charles Surface), yet he basically uses a Restoration dramaturgy, having learnt a great deal from playwrights like Wycherley and especially William Congreve, cf., e.g. *The Way of the World*, where the main aim is entertainment for the (upper) middle-class. The difference is that while Restoration drama wished to present things *as they are*, i.e., insisted on a 'photographic mimesis' without any scruples about being moral, immoral or amoral, the moralising and 'pedagogical' aim in Sheridan is obvious: he wishes to show things more as they *should* be rather than as they *really* happen to be. 'Wit', the most important characteristic for a hero or heroine in Restoration drama is replaced by 'sentiment' (feeling, sense for the other, the ability of making sense) in Sheridan but he uses the most well-known structure and the most widely used stock-scenes and characters of the by his time so-called *sentimental comedy* (having developed from the Restoration '*comedy of manners*'): (a) two plot-lines (the intrigue initiated by Lady Sneerwell and Snake, against Charles and Maria, in the interest of Joseph and Lady Teazle, mostly concerned with *sex*, and the plot-line of inheritance, perpetuated by a miraculously appearing uncle from India, Sir Oliver Surface – much better written than the first one and mostly concerned with the other grand topic of comedies: *money*), (b) the topic of the elderly, jealous husband marrying a younger *country* girl (Sir Peter Teazle and country-wife Lady Teazle, the latter, we should believe, getting 'reformed' at the end of the play), (c) the hypocrite ('a Tartuffe', Joseph Surface), (d) the 'honest Jew' (Moses, the only real gentleman in the comedy, according to G. B. Shaw), (e) the 'two-brothers-in-rivalry'-theme (cf. Shakespeare's *As You Like It* or *The Tempest*), etc. The play starts typically in a drawing-room and will not move out of it very much; it will take its characters from small scheming to character-reform, to punishment and to reward in an ultimately grand final scene, where everyone is present (cf. the structure of the novel *Tom Jones*, where Henry Fielding, also an eminent comedy-writer of his own time, uses the same comic structure), but it will never venture to show *transformation* (cf. Shakespeare's Bottom again, for instance). This age, still believes, at least on the stage, in stable individuals, whom one can thoroughly get to know – one may find out about their *true* selves. The literal *unmasking* of the characters take place several times (e.g. Lady Teazle discovered behind

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Joseph's screen or Sir Oliver finding out about Joseph's and Charles's true selves typically in disguise – *revelation in/through disguise*, the only paradox this kind of comedy allows).

12. 7. German Drama in the 18th Century

12.7.1. German drama up to the 18th century

The history of drama in the German language started in a way very similar to other European countries (e.g. England or France): there were Latin miracle, morality and passion plays, first in Latin, then in German translation; later German lines crept even into the 'original', and, finally, the texts became entirely German. What seems to be specific to the German tradition is that in Germany more was kept from the Greco-Roman tradition: Hrotsvitha (or Roswitha) of Gandersheim (c. 935-c. 1001), a Benedictine nun wrote, around 955, six 'polemical' Christian moral comedies (e.g. *Abraham, Calimachus*) to eliminate the six frivolous comedies of the pagan Terence from the Church-readings. Though Hrotsvitha's achievement stands alone, it indicates a more direct acquaintance with the Classical tradition than in other countries. Further, in the German-speaking area special attention was given to Easter plays (*Osterspiele*) than elsewhere.

The first peculiarly German, secular dramatic genre was the *Fastnachtspiel*, the "carnival play", also called "Shrovetide play" because these pieces were performed on Shrove Tuesday ['húshagyókedd', the day before Ash Wednesday]. The centre of the *Fastnachtspiel* became Nuremberg (Bavaria) but the first anonymous authors (wandering scholars, clergy and players), brought their plays down to Southern Germany and Switzerland, too. One of the first plays of this kind called *Spiel von Rumpold und Maret* ("Play of Rumpold and Maret") dates back to the 14th century. A popular *Fastnachtspiel* was the *Tellspiel* ('Play of Wilhelm Tell'), performed in Uri, Switzerland in 1511 (cf. Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell,* 1804) . Authors of later carnival-plays are already known by name; perhaps the most outstanding early representative is Hans Foltz (c. 1450-1515) with e.g. *Ein hübsch Vastnachtspiel* ("A Pretty Carnival Play"). The peculiarity of these plays were that they dealt with everyday situations: they were often set in a peasant environment and there were family-scenes, courtroom-trials, etc. They served as 'introductions' to the subsequent carnival dancing and merriment, constantly 'in dialogue' with the audience, in the sense that at the beginning of the plays the characters were introduced within the framework of a procession, the changes of scenes were announced rather than presented, and they ended with a plea to the audience, inviting them to enjoy the festivities. They were written in *Knittelvers* (irregular four-beat verse lines), spoken in a declamatory fashion by three to six stock-characters (types). The most important topic was the portrayal of human folly, mostly of the lower classes. The most prolific writer of the Fastnachtspiel was Hans Sachs (1494-1576), a shoemaker and a poet in Nuremberg, a devoted Lutheran, writing 85 carnival plays but besides lots of tragedies and other pieces. One of the best (and most frivolous) is *Das heiss Eisen* ("The hot iron"), in which a jealous husband carries a hot iron with wooden holders to force his wife into the confession of her infidelities.

With the Renaissance and Humanist learning, Terence and Seneca were rediscovered – they even became part of the curriculum at the University of Heidelberg in 1450. Drama moved out of the universities much slower than in, e.g., England and it remained, to some extent, "bookish", "scholarly" and "learned" throughout: then university professors – such as Nicodemus Frischlin (1547-1590) of Tübingen, who was even imprisoned for his satirical classicism and died trying to escape – wrote plays mostly in Latin, predominantly for didactic purposes. It was only at the end of the 16th century that there was some shift towards a more

spectacular and professional theatre, but even then from Italian and English 'import': from Italy, the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, form England, professional groups of players were brought in and even employed: the English players (first performing in English, later in translation) presented, in crude and inaccurate versions, George Peele, Robert Greene, Marlowe, Kyd and Shakespeare. Both the Duke Heinrich Julius in Braunschweig and Landgrave Moritz von Hessen brought in English players to their courts and maintained a theatre, also writing plays themselves. The Counter-Reformation revived the Latin school-drama: they were written, mostly by Jesuits, for didactic purposes and contained intellectual debates, dramatising a strictly Catholic message.

The 17th century and the first half of the 18th did not produce great drama, either. Martin Opitz (1597-1639) from Silesia, a convinced Humanist, educated in Heidelberg and in Holland, translated Seneca and Sophocles's *Antigone* and wrote plays himself but his real influence was felt as a scholar, trying to formulate poetic rules for the German language in his *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey* ("Book of German Poetics", 1624) practically for the first time. He invariably advocates the French patterns; for him, drama serves straightforward moral purposes with an idealised example of behaviour; only kings and the most noble persons are worthy of tragedy; comedy is to be about people of low birth and their activities, not going beyond weddings, games, lies and deception. Opitz provides a narrow, dogmatic and highly simplified interpretation of Aristotle, on the basis of the Italian-French Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558) and the Dutch Daniel Heinsius (1580-1655). Corneille dominated German tragedy practically until Lessing. The most formidable talents of the 17th century, for example Andreas Gryphius (Andreas Greif, 1616-1664) or Christian Weise (1642-1702), and of the first half of the 18th century (Johann Christoph Gottshed [1700-1766], or Johann Elias Schlegel [1719-1749]), in spite of attempts at including the middle-class into their dramas, basically wrote tragedies in the dress of the French classicism of Corneille and Racine.

The situation was literally *dramatically* changed when Lessing made his appearance, with his tolerant scepticism and less and less conviction in the stability of Enlightenment values. He already paved the way for the *Sturm und Drang* ('Storm and Stress") movement (roughly between 1760 and 1785), combined with *Empfindsamkeit* ('sentimentalism"), the latter term coined by Lessing himself, when he came across Richardson's *Pamela* and Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*. The former expression (*Sturm und Drang*) was suggested by the strange Swissman, Christoph Kaufmann. Interestingly, the Sturm und Drang proved to be a prelude to the classicism of Schiller and Goethe, rather than to German romanticism. The Sturm und Drang corresponds to (and was partly influenced by) the "Gothic-movement" (e.g. Sir Horace Walpole) in England; it was a strange mixture of the Baroque, the neo-mysticism of the Pietists, of Edward Young's "grave-yard poetry", of Macpherson's *Ossian*, the ideas of the East-Prussian "prophet", Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788), the anticulturalism and confessionalism of Jean Jacques Rousseau and of the "traditional, inexplicable genii": Homer, Marlowe and Shakespeare. The whole movement was genuinely and inherently *dramatic*: the heroes were titanic supermen and great rebels, like Satan, Prometheus, Faust, Helen of Troy and unwed mothers murdering their children. The authors stressed emotion, imagination, exclamation and suspense but they also dealt with social topics in strong, realistic language and conventional settings, then employing more classical forms.

The movement was marked by the 'rediscovery' of poetry as "the mother-tongue of the human race" (an aphorism coined by Hamann in his *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* ("Socratic Memorabilia"). But the real "catalyst" of the movement was Hamann's more lucid follower, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who went to the University of Strasbourg in 1770 on a visit, and formed a group of like-minded spirits, advocating the cult of folk songs, folk epic, legends, the arts of primitive peoples, Gothic art and Shakespeare. The key-words

were simplicity, origin and originality: everything 'natural' was highly approved of. The greatest Shakespeare-fanatic of the Strasbourg-group was Jakob Michael Reinhold Lentz (1751-1792), who thought that Shakespeare created a universe equal to that made of God and started the cult of the genius, claiming that once one gets rid of his inhibitions and lets his imagination go as freely as did Shakespeare, he will be able to write plays which are on the same level. Later, he went literally mad, but he was convinced that young Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, also a member of the Strasbourg-group, was such a genius. From the 70s to the 90s lots of tragedies were written – comedy was considered to be a genre of entertainment both by the Sturm und Drang and by German classicism.

12.7.2. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781): Life and Significance

Lessing was one of the first German writers who tried to support himself – sometimes successfully, sometimes not – with his pen, no longer relying on sinecure positions or a guaranteed income. It is true that, especially in his plays, he was no longer addressing a courtly audience but primarily a middle-class one, which, in many cases, was willing to support him. Sometimes he is called the 'founder of modern German literature' and the 'father of German criticism'; he was, first and foremost, an eminent playwright, with an excellent sense – and a scholarly background – for dramaturgy. But he was a typical Enlightenment man, interested in lots of things besides criticism and the writing of plays, including philosophy and theology. He marks the beginning of the modern era in German drama: the Continent (including Schiller and Goethe) owes the (re-)discovery of Shakespeare largely to him.

He was born in Kamentz (Saxony); his father was an eminent theologian and young Lessing went to Leipzig to study theology, too. But the theatrical world of the town – with Caroline Neuber, and the outstanding critic, Johann Christoph Gottshed, the latter severely criticised by Lessing later on for his adherence to the French model – swallowed him up. He did study (he had good Latin, Greek and Hebrew already from secondary school) but he started writing comedies, too, with relative success. However, the theatre in Leipzig went bankrupt and, since Lessing stood surety for several people associated with the theatre, he had to flee to Berlin to avoid being arrested for debt. In Berlin he wrote for the *Vossiche Zeitung* but in 1751-52 he took a degree in medicine at the University of Wittenberg, too. His first theoretical work on the theatre came in 1750: "Contributions to the History and the Reception of the German Theatre". He started to advocate Shakespeare and attack adherence to the French model (especially by Gottsched) in his series "Letters Concerning the Most Recent Literature" (1759-1764). In his highly original treatise on aesthetics (written in Breslau, where he was the secretary to the General of Breslau), *Laokoon, or on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766) he argues that painting is bound to observe spatial proximity and must select the seminal and the most expressive moment in a chain of events, whereas poetry has the task of depicting an event originally in its temporal sequence, so poetry's task is not description but the representation of the transitory, of *movement*. His most important critical work on drama is the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* ("Hamburg Dramaturgy", cf. 2.4.).

His significant plays started in the mid-50s, for example *Miss Sara Sampson* (1755) was a big success – this piece is heavily indebted to Lillo's *The London Merchant*. Though the unity of time and place is carefully observed, virtue and vice are no longer as unconditional opposites: it is passion which plays the main role, and it is shown to be destructive primarily to the *social* order. This tragedy, in a middle-class environment, yet full of dignity, marks the beginning of the new German genre called the *Trauerspiel* ('szomorújáték') or *Schauspiel*. In *Minna von Barnheim* (1767), he created a new form of comedy. Here the characters no longer

suffer from stereotypical malicious servants or from folly but from their own individuality. The last major play, *Nathan the Wise* (1779) is a philosophical dramatic poem in iambic pentameter. It paves the way, in its philosophical elements, for Goethe's plays and, in its poetic from, for the plays of Schiller. There is great sensitivity to the bizarre and the exotic (cf. the later *Sturm und Drang*-period) but it tackles the problem of prejudice and becomes an example of enlightened tolerance. The central question is about a ring, which features in the parable of Nathan, a wealthy Jewish trader, whose adopted daughter, Recha, is saved by a German knight from fire during the Third Crusade in Jerusalem. The German knight does not accept Nathan's thanks but still the wise man makes a great impression on him. The ring starts to feature when Saladin, the Mohammedan leader of the Saracens (who captured the German knight) asks Nathan which is the true religion: Jewish, Mohammedan or Christian. Nathan replies that once a wealthy Father had three sons but only one ring with magic power, and his dilemma was which of his sons should inherit it. Finally, he made two replicas and gave a ring to each: now the 'original' can no longer be identified but since the love of the Father was equal to all the three, the value of each ring is the same, too. Then it turns out that the German knight is Saladin's nephew and Recha is the knight's sister and thus the unity of the three religions is further emphasised.

In 1776 Lessing married Eva König, the widow of a Hamburg merchant. But she died in 1778, leaving him with two children from her first marriage and a child of their own. He could hardly support them and, at the age of 52, he died of s stroke and was buried in a pauper's grave at public expense.

12.7.3. Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805)

Schiller is the most *romantic* great poet of German classicism – although he was deeply influenced by the more "sober" Goethe (who outlived him by almost 30 years), he always kept something of the Sturm und Drang period, unable – or refusing – to meet the classical ideal formulated by the art critic and historian Johann Joahim Winckelmann: "Noble simplicity and quiet grandeur". He was born in Marbach, Würtemberg on 10 Nov., 1759; he was the son of an army-officer, who was in the service of Duke Karl Eugen. Young Schiller, against his will, had to attend Karl Eugen's newly founded Military Academy (the famous *Karlsschule*) in Stuttgart. Luckily, his tutors were excellent and he soon got acquainted with the ideas of Herder, Lessing, and Rousseau and with Shakespeare's plays. After his graduation in 1780, he served as a Regimental Surgeon near the Court – which he hated – for two years (much of that experience went into *Kabale und Liebe*) but secretly he was already working on plays. *Die Räuber* ("The Robbers") was the first one (1772) and though it is a typical Sturm und Drang melodrama, it was a big success in Mannheim. The Duke forbade Schiller to write further plays but he fled to Mannheim and became a "Theatre Poet" of the National Theatre under the direction of Count von Dalberg. His second play, *Fiesco* may be forgotten but the third one, *Luise Miller* (later on renamed by an actor of the National Theatre as *Kabale und Liebe*) proved to be an unqualified success. Although the scene in which an old Servant complains to Lady Millford about his sons taken to America was omitted, Duke Karl Eugen was outraged: he immediately recognised not only himself in the lecherous Duke (who never appears in the play) but his whole court (his own *Präsident* [Chancellor] did murder his predecessor). Schiller fled to Bauerbach and lived in the home of Frau von Wolzogen, the mother of a former class-mate. He also founded a magazine called *Rheinische Thalia* and made an unsuccessful attempt at establishing himself in the court of Darmstadt. In 1785 he went to Leipzig, the "little Paris of Germany", where he finished one of his best plays, *Don Carlos* (1787). The play is set in Spain, at the time of the revolution in the Netherlands and

the central character is an unhistorical figure, Marquis Posa, who says to the King, Philip of Spain: "Sir, give us freedom of thought". The play is the tragic defeat of idealism by intrigue (Schiller's favourite theme) but not only the assassinated Posa is a tragic figure but Philip and Carlos (Philip's son), too: Carlos has to meet his death at the end of the play because he wanted to take up the cause of Posa (murdered by the order of Philip) and loved the woman who became his father's wife, while Philip has to hand his only son over to the blind Grand Inquisitor, the most threatening character of the play, who can still *see* – and knows about – everything.

1787 was a turning-point in Schiller's life: he went to Weimar, the centre of German artistic and intellectual life, where Goethe had been court-minister from 1775. He also met Herder there. In 1789, Schiller became a professor of history at the University of Jena and married Charlotte von Lengefeld.

Between 1787 and 1797 he devoted his time to studying history and aesthetics. He became more moderate under the influence of Kantian ethics and witnessing to the effects of the French revolution. On the basis of his historical studies he concluded that violent political upheavals are admissible only as a last resort. He wrote the history of the Thirty Years War (1791-93), *The Revolt of the Netherlands* (1788, cf. *Don Carlos*) and one of the most significant aesthetic documents of the times: *Über Naive und Sentimentale Dichtung* ("On Naive and Sentimental Poetry", 1795) and many other things (philosophical poems, such as the famous *Das Lied von der Glocke* ["The Song of the Bell"], and ballads, such as *Der Taucher* [The Diver"]). After 1794, his friendship with Goethe deepened and he encouraged the Weimar-master to finish *Faust*. At the same time, a serious illness of the lungs began to afflict him and he started to work feverishly, returning to drama, and writing such great historical tableaux like the *Wallenstein*-trilogy (1797), a historical tragedies like *Mary Stuart* (1800, where the 'positive' character is the martyred Queen of Scots and not Elizabeth) and *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* ("The Maiden of Orleans", 1802, on Jean D'Arc). His last finished play, *Wilhelm Tell* (1804) is a typical *Schauspiel*, a serious festive play with a happy ending, in which he comes closest to the balance between classicism and the previous Sturm und Drang. He also translated Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1800) and Racine's *Phaedra* (1805). He died on 9 May, 1805.

12.7.4. Schiller: *Love and Intrigue* (1784)

Schiller called the play a "bourgeois tragedy" – it is in the tradition of Lillo's *The London Merchant,* Lessing's *Miss Sara Sampson* and – interestingly – of French classicism: the tightness of the plot, the linear ordering of the events, the strict cause-and-effect relationships point back to Corneille (whom Schiller liked), while the cult of passion, growing above the characters shows the influence of Racine (whom Schiller later even translated – see above). Although Schiller did share the enthusiasm of the age for Shakespeare, he never really tried to imitate Shakespeare's open-ended, "spiral" tragedies. *Love and Intrigue* is an almost 'realistic' representation of ruthless absolute power (cf. the end of Act II, Sc. II, where the Chancellor wants to arrest everybody); the story was found by Schiller in a newspaper and it was not difficult for him to add the details he learned about Karl Eugen: young men were really sold to fight against Americans as cannon fodders and wives and daughters were really the "common property" of the Court.

The conflict is simple (it stems from love) and the plot is masterfully woven (in fact by intrigue, from the beginning of Act III, when the play, to a certain extent, "starts again"). Miller and his wife are worried about their daughter's love towards Ferdinand, the Chancellor's son when Worm, the Chancellor's Secretary appears, mentioning vaguely some

contract and claiming Luise's hand. Miller bluntly tells him that his daughter cannot be bought and that he is reluctant to force her into a marriage. Wurm leaves with threatening words; then Ferdinand appears and assures Luise that everything will be all right. Next we see the Chancellor informing Wurm that, since the Duke is getting married, he has decided to marry the Duke's former concubine, Lady Milford to his son, in order to keep his influence at court. He asks the ridiculous, really puppet-like Lord Chamberlain (Kalb) to spread the news of the marriage. However, Ferdinand refuses to obey ('my honour is more important than my life') but he is willing to visit Lady Milford, planning to give her a lesson. Lady Milford is not the monster Ferdinand believes her to be: she has compassion for the poor, for the soldiers taken to America; she tells Ferdinand about her miserable childhood but the complication is that she is *really* in love with Ferdinand. Ferdinand rushed to Luise, where suddenly the Chancellor appears, thundering the prospect of jail and pillory, and is only dissuaded to carry out his plans by Ferdinand's threat that he would expose his father and Wurm to the whole town, informing everyone about how they gained power (there are also references to a murder-case). The Chancellor feels defeated but Worm comes up with the 'masterplot': they arrest Miler for having offended the Chancellor and will blackmail Luise into writing a letter to the Lord Chamberlain 'confessing her love'. Kalb is easily persuaded into the role of the amorous lover, who 'accidentally' drops the letter in front of Ferdinand. In the meantime, Ferdinand tries to persuade Luise to elope with him in vain: Ferdinand leaves already suspicious of another man. Worm appears in the Miller-house and persuades Luise to write the fatal letter. Ferdinand goes to the Chamberlain, threatening him with a pistol, who confesses that he has never seen Luise. In the meantime Lady Milford summons Luise, offering her a lady-in-waiting position. This is the only time when Luise speaks up for herself: "What gave you the right to offer me my fortune, before you knew I'd accept it from you?". She runs out, threatening the Lady with suicide yet Lady Milford no longer claims Ferdinand but decides to elope to England (her farewell letter to the Duke is brought by the Chamberlain). Miller is released and goes home – she finds Luise there, full of suicidal thoughts. For a moment, they think of escaping and even of writing and acting out their own ballad. Ferdinand arrives, but Luise cannot tell him that she wrote the letter under pressure. Ferdinand asks for a glass of lemonade, gives his gold to Miller, then puts poison into his glass and drinks it, and murders Luise by offering her a sip, too. It is only in her agony that she confesses everything about the fatal letter. The Chancellor arrives to receive Ferdinand's horrible rebuke, and he has to witness to his son's death. Worm is lead away by officers and the Chancellor, deeply moved, gives himself up, too.

The conflict is between the elemental human feeling and right to love somebody, and the rigidity of social order. The plot is the product of the clever court itself, which, as an *institution*, is corrupt by definition: no wonder that Ferdinand, at the end of the play, makes a reference to puppets: "the calculation shows a master mind; pity though, that angered love was not obedient to the wires as are your [his father's, the Chancellor's] wooden puppets!". On the level of the plot (intrigue), the characters act like puppets indeed; on the level of conflict (love), we find the theatre of extreme passion, of melodrama. Yet in the 'halo' of the theatre of passion, we also find the tragedy of the "little man", of Miller, the music-teacher: he is half-way between the poor devil dazzled by money, who very well knows that with money *everything* can be bought, including a good name or nobility (cf. the last scene, where Ferdinand gives him gold), and the already conscientious, independent middle-class citizen, who thinks that if he can earn his living with his fiddle and if he pays his taxes, he is allowed to tell the Chancellor: "your excellency is master of the land. But this is my house! Your most obedient servant when I can wait on you with a petition – but if a guest does not mind his manners here [the Chancellor called Luise a strumpet] I'll throw him out! – if't please your honour" (Act II, Sc. II).

Ferdinand is the typical revolutionary Sturm und Drang character: he thinks that the chains of social order can be broken, if not by love, then in death. There are a lot of references in the play (both by him and Luise) to the day of the Last Judgement, the Eternal Judge, who does not look at our rank or nobility but our personality: 'up there' everybody is everybody's equal: Luise: "But has not father often said, that at the second coming, titles and riches all be valueless"; Ferdinand: "True I'm of noble birth, – but let us see if that weighs heavier than the eternal bonds which have embraced the universe" (a truly enlightenment idea). Luise, on the other hand, never believes that the class-differences can be overcome; she is happy about the 'dream of three months' and cannot free herself from her love but she is torn between her love and her duty towards a worthy father. Luise's weak point is duty (a favourite theme of French and English classicism), Ferdinand's – who can easily leave a thoroughly corrupt father and milieu – is mad jealousy. These points are found by Wurm (who is even more loathsome than the Chancellor because he comes from the middle-class) and the Chancellor; these weak points set – directly – intrigue (the plot) into motion. Thus conflict and plot are *not* in conflict: the plot envelopes it, lifts it, heightens, intensifies and, finally, extinguishes it. Yet – like King Philip – the Chancellor (who would give his consent to an illegitimate relationship between Ferdinand and Luise) is also a tragic figure, beginning to imitate Miller's fate: he also loses a child and falls into his own trap.

The tragic hero doe not stem to be the maker of his own tragedy any longer. The decision in Lillo's play still depended on Barnwell; in *Love and Intrigue* the external confines (class-difference, duty) are so strong that – especially in the case of Luisa – the central, tragic figure is denied the opportunity of action from the start. The conflict does not stem form a great deed which subsequently buries the hero(in); the 'deed' is rather a *state*: being in love without a future. Everybody is *cornered* and tragedy starts to stem not from the deed but from the *lack of deed*, from a missed opportunity (e.g. elopement) or from the sheer lack of opportunity itself.

12.7.5. Schiller and Goethe compared

In his "On Tragic Art" (1792), Schiller points out that Kant is wrong in the *Critique of Pure Reason* when he claims that it is impossible that two, equally valid moral codes should be in operation. The tragic, for Schiller, grows out precisely from a conflict between two, equally valid duties and not from a conflict between duty and "bad" passions. Disaster is not in opposition with morality but it is dictated, precisely, by morality – and here Schiller's positive example is Corneille's *The Cid*, where both Chimene and Rodrigue act to preserve the good reputation of their respective fathers, so tragedy arises from the duty they feel towards their 'origin'. (To which we may add: if they did not love each other [passion!], the conflict would not exist – or by all means, to a lesser extent). This clearly shows that Schiller was, basically, a moralist: he knew that the freedom of conscience (cf. the Marquis of Posa: [to King Philip] "Sir, give us freedom of thought!") is a product of conflict, yet he thought that true freedom could conquer destiny but not God and the search for God provides the human being with intellectual and moral edification. The search for God (not through the Church, though) grants Man a life of brotherhood, beauty, dignity, freedom and sublimity (the latter four are key-words in classicism, romanticism and in the philosophies of Kant, Schelling and Hegel, in various interpretations, of course).

Though Schiller and Goethe were great friends, influencing each other to a large extent, there are lots of differences between them. Goethe believed in unceasing, constant personal development, for him the key word was *growth* (in Nature and, on an intellectual, spiritual, emotional and ethical level, in the human being as well); for Goethe the traditional

concept of tragedy hardly exists. Gretchen (Margareta), at the end of *Faust I*, murders her child (from Faust), his brother and mother die, she goes mad in prison and, it seems, she is to die as well, but a Voice "from above" will assure us: "[she] is redeemed on high", and at the end of *Faust II*, "the immortal parts" of Faust are similarly saved because Faust was always striving towards something and – the Angels declare – "For he whose strivings never cease / Is ours for his redeeming". Goethe clearly sees the conflict between obligation and fulfilment but – as he points out in the *second* essay he wrote (between 1813-16) on Shakespeare ("Shakespeare und kein Ende"–"Shakespeare Without End"), the conflict is rather between obligation and the *wish* to fulfil, yet, for Goethe – and this is a key point – this conflict is not violent or destructive – at least not for ever – but conflict is the *very essence of life, the chief motive to go on, and even further: striving is life itself.* Faust is saved through a vast range of experience, which is valued most highly in Heaven, where "everything perishing is but a parable", a Parable of life itself. For Goethe, then, there is no 'real' conflict either between passion or duty, or between duty and duty because duty is nothing more (or less) than to *live our conflicts*, which will constantly bring us to a higher and higher plains. Goethe is 'Aristotelian' (believing in a hierarchy which carries the possibility of elevation), Schiller is more 'Platonic' (believing in an 'ontological gap', overcome, perhaps, by right moral conduct).

12.7.6. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1833): *Faust*

Goethe was born in Frankfurt-am-Main; he was the son of a severe and rich lawyer and a very cheerful woman, full of fun. (cf. Goethe's famous 'confession: "Form Father came life's earnest poise / A bearing strict and stable; / From Mother dear, my sense of joys / And will to spin a fable") He first went to Leipzig ("The little Paris" of Germany, as he ironically says in *Faust I* (in the section called "In Auerbach's cellar in Leipzig") to study law and then to Strasbourg (1771), where he met Herder, then he returned to Frankfurt to establish legal practice, yet he started to write very early and a history play in 1773 (*Goetz von Berlichingen*) and *Young Werther* (1776) brought him fame when he was still in his twenties. Both in Strasbourg and in Frankfurt, his home was a meeting-place for young intellectuals and it was to them that he read his first essay on Shakespeare (a eulogy, heaping praise upon the Bard uncritically), "Rede zum Shakespeare-Tag" – "Memorial on Shakespeare's Birthday" (1771). 1775 was a turning-point in his life: he was invited, by the Duke Karl August, to the Court of Weimar – where he practically spent the rest of his life – to become a Court Minister. Till 1786, he administered finances, mining, the military establishment, then he went, for two years, to Italy and from 1788, he lived in Weimar again, now in semi-retirement, yet still directing the theatre between 1791 and 1817. He devoted his time to poetry and science, he even tried to reconstruct the 'Ur-Plant', that specimen of plants which still had all the characteristics of later specimens. There was something genuinely 'Olympian' about the old Goethe – he died at the age of eighty-two.

If, according to Goethe, life is conflict and growth, the very work of art he was growing himself, and he was trying to grow into, was *Faust*. He first became interested in the Faust-theme at the age of 24 and a substantial part of *Faust I* was done between 1773-75. When he became minister, he put it aside and – at Schiller's urging – he finished it by 1801 (when he was 51). On *Faust II*, he worked, almost literally till the end of his life: he finished it seven months before his death and the manuscript was found in a sealed envelope, as if 'containing his soul', his "immortal parts". He made a serious effort to write the second part with constantly an eye on the first, to make the two 'coherent'. Although Part I is – roughly – about love and lust and Part II is – basically – about gaining wisdom, there are some 'answers' in

the second part to the questions raised in the first. The most typical example is that, in the *Witch's Kitchen*-scene (Part I), Mephistopheles already mentions, as a recipe for a long life and 'eternal youth', the following alternative:

> Here's Nature's recipe
> Without a doctor, gold, or sorcery:
> Begin at once a life of open air,
> To dig and trench and cultivate the ground,
> Content yourself within the common ground
> And for your dinner have the homeliest fare.
> Live with the beasts, on equal terms; be sure
> That, where your reap, your hands must spread the dung.
> And there, my friend, you have the certain cure,
> By which at eighty years you still are young.

To which Faust replies:

> All that to me is foreign: I am afraid
> I lack ability to ply the spade,
> I've nothing with the simple life akin.

Now, according to the original pact with Mephistopheles, Mephistopheles can have Faust's soul under the following circumstances:

> If I be quieted with a bed of ease,
> Then let the moment be the end of me!
> If ever flattering lies of yours [of Mephistopheles] can please
> And soothe my soul to self-sufficiency,
> And make me one of pleasure's devotees,
> Then take my soul, for I desire to die:
> And that's a wager!
> ...
> If to the fleeting hour I say
> 'Remain, so fair thou art. remain!'
> Then bind me with your fatal chain,
> For I will perish in that day.

Faust, at the end of *Faust II* (Act V. in the Scene *The Great Outer-court of the Palace*), finds his *almost* perfect (somewhat future-oriented) satisfaction in the community of those people who, with *spades* in hand, try to win ground from the sea. Then Faust says:

> Such busy, teeming throngs I long to see,
> Standing on freedom's soil, a people free.
> Then to the moment could I say:
> Linger you now, you are so fair!

Originally, Goethe wrote: *Then to the moment* can *I say,* and then corrected it to the subjunctive *dürft' ich*, meaning, roughly: 'then could I find [in my heart] to say, then would I wish to say, then would I allow myself to say'. So, Part II, with respect to Part I, does and does not contain fulfilment, as Part II *itself* – with its more and more fantastical creatures of all sorts of 'levels' and 'plains' and padded with so much thought – is and is not a fulfilment of Part I.

The first so-called *Faust-Buch* is from 1587, a version Goethe did not know – he worked from a later one. But it seems that Christopher Marlowe (cf. 6.7.) did know the oldest edition and quickly adapted it to the stage, most probably even before its translation into

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English. Now as English players came to Germany (cf. 10.4.1.), Marlowe's play became famous and highly popular and it found its way to 'popular culture' as well: Goethe first saw in fact Marlowe's play, but in the form of a *marionette-show* in a fair and that grasped the young poet's imagination and made him interested in the Faust-legend. He first encountered the German myth through English transmission (as Shakespeare was re-discovered in England partly due to the German enthusiasm around Shakespeare). There are two legendary Faust-figures from which the tale of 1587 is woven: one Faust was a man of experiment, who lost his life in a demonstration of flying – this figure harks back to the Sorcerer Simon in *Acts,* Chapter 8 in the *New Testament.* The other Faust (i.e. the legendary and/or 'real-life' character behind the Faust in the fist *Faust-Buch* we know) was a practising magician, who took the name Faust and, it seems, died in 1537. In the figure of Faust, the Renaissance, the unfulfilled longing of the Sturm und Drang, and the classic form into which the legend is moulded (a dramatic poem), all shake hands.

Goethe became interested in the versatility, the many-sidedness of Faust – his Faust is not Marlowe's, who is sentenced to eternal damnation but a kind of Everyman with enormous potential, who can be seen in all the roles Goethe thought man is able to play. For Goethe Faust, like the alchemists' *substantia mirabilis,* can take all sorts of shapes, forms and even substances; yet, in the figure of Mephistopheles., Goethe takes a step back from Faust and, with his ever-present irony, will ask, which is the *real* one. On the basis of Part II, one may say that the Faust who, in Part I, translated the first sentence in *John's Gospel* : "In the beginning was the Word" not as "in the beginning was the Thought" or "in the beginning was the Power" but: *"In the beginning was the Deed" (Am anfang war die Tat)*, finds his true self in action, in doing things together with others. But this conclusion would not be genuine without the *rest* of his experience, including the tragic ones; as The Lord says at the beginning: "For man must strive, and striving he must err". Thereby, though the *deed* has truly a special significance, the many adventures Faust goes through blur the straightforward answer to the question of his true identity: the real Faust may be claimed to remain a 'Ding an Sich', a 'Thing in Itself' (Kant), which exists and is real but will never be gotten to know; or we may also say that Goethe, in singling out *deed* and *process* (development, growth) as the chief features of man, gives, at the end of his life, a Hegelian answer to his Kantian, young self.

Part I is more 'alive' than Part II, it is simpler, more 'sober'; there the chief problem for Faust is his lack of direct, personal experience, and his egotism. As Mephistopheles points out, Faust has forgotten he has a *body*, too, though this body will not experience in an empirical, philosophical sense but will try to get to know another *body, a female one, in love and lust.* An this lust will destroy innocence, as a kind of primordial Fall: the simple and pure Gretchen (modelled after Friederike Brion, a poor village-parson's daughter in Sesenheim, near Strasbourg), standing for the simplicity both the Sturm und Drang and Romanticism valued so highly, is totally destroyed. Faust's 'second wife' in Part II, Helen of Troy, is an allegory, the pure spirit of Hellenism – in this 'union', Goethe weds German art to the much-adored Greek one.

In *Faust,* Satan is less a destroyer than a man, a human being himself; one has the feeling that man is above Satan (though Goethe wrote to Schiller: "The devil I am conjuring up takes on alarmingly"), Mephistopheles is let into Faust's chamber in the shape of a dog and he is not *invited or conjured up* (as in Marlowe's play) but comes on his own account. The blood-contract is done but this is more for politeness' sake; Mephistopheles is more like a cynical, slightly bored, yet clever and witty self-made man than a real *diabolos*, a 'mud-slinger'. Faust complains, at the beginning of the play, of his isolation and suffers from the emptiness of what he teaches, leading his students "by the nose". His body, his cell, his surrounding are all a prison to him; the sign of Macrocosm will teach him about Nature, but it

is still only a "pageant"; then he conjures up the Spirit of the Earth, and, with It, Infinity, yet the Spirit will say, in a truly Kantian fashion: "You match the spirit that you comprehend / Not me", i.e. comprehension, the mind of man, sets a limit to infinity, too. Ironically, Wagner, the 'best' and incurably bookish student (later on 'forgotten') enters thinking that Faust was reciting a Greek *tragedy*. Faust will give him lofty phrases – an instance when he leads one by the nose – and then wishes to commit suicide (cf. Werther!) but the Easter Sunday angels will save him form a destructive act. Faust cannot be (and, will never be) a believer in the religious sense; his God is rather Nature, his God is a pantheistic one and Faust strives to the same, higher plane, from whence everything can be seen from above.

> What no man knows, alone could make us wise
> And what we know, we well could do without.

There are two souls in Faust – as he describes them himself –: one wishes to see the entire surface of the earth, the other longs for "pastures high above".

In *Faust*, every kind of diction can be found: prose, Knittelvers, classical hexameter, blank-verse. free-forms, and even in regular beats the characters switch from pair-rhyme (aa, bb) to alternating rhyme (abab), and all these will have a special function, almost taking the role of denoting various 'speech-acts', e.g. in the Prologue, when the Director, the Poet and the Comedian speak, pair- rhyme will be used to explain one's theory; for quarrel, alternating rhymes, both in lines of 10 to 11 syllables; instruction (by the Director) will be given in lines of 9 and 8 syllables, with alternating rhyme, etc.

APPENDIX

Chapter 13

Drama in the 19th Century

13.1. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and the Theory of Tragedy

13.1.1. Schelling's Life and Significance

F. W. J. Schelling was born in Leonberg, Würtemberg, near Stuttgart in 1775. His father was a pious Protestant minister and young Schelling was supposed to follow in his father's footsteps, too: he studied theology and philosophy in Tübingen, where he made friends with Hegel and Hölderlin, sharing one room with them in the college. Influenced by Schiller on poetry, by Rousseau and the French revolution, they composed, most probably in 1796 or 1797, what later became known as *Das älteste Systemprogram des deutschen Idealismus* [*The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*, found among Hegel's manuscripts and published in 1917 by Fr. Rosenkrantz]. In this – in a condensed and highly poetic manner – practically all the important ideas of the later and respective philosophises can be found, with special emphasis on the significance of arts and history. Schelling (who was Hegel's and Hölderlin's junior by five years) was, in 1793, questioned – during a school-visit – about his revolutionary sympathies by Prince Karl-Eugen himself, and for a time he was on the list of dangerous 'atheists'. After his graduation in 1795, Schelling was a private tutor, then, also with the recommendation of Goethe, he became, at the age of 23, *professor extraordinarius* ("extraordinary professor") of philosophy in Jena in 1798.

His professional career is seemingly unbroken; in 1800 (at the age of 25!), he publishes his perhaps most important work, *The System of Transcendental Idealism*, and becomes Fichte's successor in Jena as full professor (1800-1803); he teaches in Würtzburg between 1803-06; he is a professor in München at the Academy of Arts (1806-20), in Erlangen (1820-26), and at the new University of München (1827-47); he is elected the member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1834, and, in 1841, he becomes member of the Prussian Academy and is invited to Berlin as Hegel's successor (who died of cholera in 1831) to give lectures *against* Hegel's "pantheism" (Kierkegaard travelled from Copenhagen to Berlin to attend these lectures). However, Schelling felt "dried out" as early as 1809, when his beloved wife, Carolina Michaelist (who was A. W. Schlegel's divorced wife) died after a happy marriage of six years. Schelling was, in fact, "forgotten" when Hegel's star started to rise, especially after Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* (1807). Schelling was least himself in the Berlin-lectures (Kierkegaard was disappointed, too), and Schelling soon retired, dying in Ragaz, Switzerland in 1854. For a long time, he was talked about as one of those who "prepared the way for Hegel", as an "episode" in the "development" of German idealism, and neither Hegel's indebtedness to Schelling, nor Schelling's originality was much talked about. His aesthetic philosophy was revived and was given a new reading when the question as to the relationship between philosophy and arts was reopened from the 1970s.

13.1.2. Schelling views on the relationship between philosophy and arts

Schelling devotes the sixth part of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* already to the question of arts and, later, in his lectures on aesthetics, he returns to the problem of the relationship between philosophy and arts (including, literature, drama and tragedy as well) again and again. For Schelling – as for Hegel, the Schlegel-brothers and for many of the German intellectuals of the day – one of the most important questions was human *freedom* and Schelling forcefully argued, throughout his life, against the mechanical conception of nature and the pre-deterministic cause-and-effect relationships which were supposed to exist, both in nature and in society, by the French philosophers of the Enlightenment. For Schelling, nature is not a mechanism but an *organism*, and he thinks that the human being should restore – mostly with the help of a "new mythology", based on art – his or her 'naive one-ness' with nature. The task is to make man realise the difference and the still existing sameness of the *subject* (man's intelligence, man's self-consciousness) and the *object* (first *nature*, later *history*, the realm of man's social and, to a great extent, artificial and self-made reality). The relationship between subject and object is therefore central for Schelling, and he is the first one to analyse this relation as a genuinely *dialectical* one. This means that he works out an extremely complex theory, the 'gist' of which may be outlined as follows.

Schelling first calls for a radical change of perspective: to achieve this, a new system of knowledge is required, this is the *system of transcendental idealism*, which is nothing but the description of the way man is able to acquire knowledge (transcendental idealism is the system of getting to know *knowledge* itself; it is the 'knowledge of knowledge'). All knowledge depends on the agreement between the *notions* (the concepts, the ideas) of the "I", the intelligence of the *self* (the subject), and the *phenomena* (things, objects) we meet in 'first order reality' (nature) and 'second order reality' (history): notions (in our intelligence) should agree with objects, and objects should comply with our notions. But if this is so, how can we know whether we can grasp reality at all, how do we know that we observe, we comprehend something existing independently of us, how do we know that we are not simply encountering our own notions, our 'preconceptions' when dealing with 'reality'? The question itself makes us realise that we cannot get 'between' our notions and the phenomena of reality; the question itself prompts us to look for the one-ness of subject and object. But there is a further paradox: the subject, to reach self-consciousness, self-awareness (to be aware of itself), has to look at itself objectively, too: the subject has to look at itself as an object precisely to learn that it is a subject.. Thus, a kind of hide-and-seek starts between subject and object: in order that we may get to the object, we have to make it subjective (because the object, when we comprehend it, will dwell in us, in our intelligence), while the subject, in turn, has to be made an object, if we want to reflect on it, if we wish to get to know it. Subject and object are entangled with each other from the start: each gets 'attributes' of the other. In contemporary terms we could say that Schelling's question was how I learn the meaning of 'subjective' and 'objective', when it is always already a *subject* ("I") who makes the enquiry; a subject. which cannot get to know itself in any other way than making itself an object. How can I learn the meaning of 'subjective' and 'objective' when the object, which seems to be *external* to me ('outside' of me), becomes internal (a part of my 'inside'), and thus, subjective, in my comprehension? How can I tell where I end and where the world (reality) begins? It is my very standpoint which seems to make the question unanswerable.

Thus, nothing in principle prompts us whether we should start with ourselves (with the subject), or with the world (reality). Philosophy consciously acknowledges, in this desperate situation, the divorce between subject and object, but it looks at this divorce as a process, which is lived and, to some extent, is overcome through three grades, stages (*Potenz*es). In the

course of this process (which upholds and bridges the separation of the subject and the object at the same time), the intellect (the subject) interacts first with nature (theoretical philosophy), then with history (practical philosophy, this is the point when the individual is no longer a 'naive' member of a community but an independent person, knowing about his own rights, which, to some extent, are in opposition with the community; this moment for Schelling is the appearance of personal law in the history of the Roman Empire), and, finally, the intellect comes back to itself, knowing about both the above interaction (about the 'story' of this interaction) and about the separation in a more profound, self-conscious way – with a kind of wisdom or experience. However, philosophy – since it starts with self-awareness, with the 'birth' of consciousness, with the subject becoming its own object – will remain fundamentally subjective.

There is a place, however, where *pure* objectivity can be 'encountered' and this is in the realm of arts. In artistic creation and in the appreciation of art our direction is not an *inward* one (as in philosophy) but we our bound *outwards*: in art it is not our intelligence but our *imagination* which comes into play. Imagination is the initial, the genuine organ of the human being; in fact, even philosophy should use imagination instead of the intellect, since the intellect only involves part of the human being, while imagination the whole. But without the intellect we could not discover imagination, either; we need the intellect to *identify* imagination as something *separate* from the intellect, as something through which we do not reflect on something from the outside but become, in a genuine sense, *one* with ourselves. To become one with ourselves means that the initial opposition between 'subjective' and 'objective' vanishes: we need the intellect to *realise* this but the feeling of this one-ness is due to our imagination. Thus the philosophy which involves the intellect is an obstacle to, yet at the same time a pre-requisite of, genuine ('real') philosophy and genuine philosophy is (would be) identical with art (both with its production and its appreciation). We can discover pure objectivity in art because in artistic creation (and in the appreciation of this creation) the self is able to go beyond itself and the 'proof' of our overcoming our boundaries is that the artist *is not conscious* of many of the 'things' (s)he creates, yet, at the same time, those who appreciate the art-work (including, later, the artist him or herself) can observe and comprehend this 'plus', this 'extra' as an object, as it is being embodied, even materialised in the art-work. In the comprehension of the art-work (standing with it 'face-to-face') the human being is able to encounter what is un-reflexively, unknowingly in him- or herself in an objective form. Of course, there is a part of artistic creation which can be learned, which the artist is conscious of, which he or she can talk about etc. Yet in the case of the genius (and only there!), something else happens as well in artistic creation, which is neither the product of the intellect, nor of the will: it is, precisely something which is there but the self *cannot be* conscious of it (were the self conscious of it, art would fully happen in the realm of reflexivity, in the realm of intelligence, in philosophy), yet this unconscious, un-reflected 'something' does not remain hidden from us as it becomes manifested in the work, the object of art. Thus, artistic creation starts from a feeling of absolute contradiction: the subject, in a way, works against itself, but art is a compulsive act and the initial pain and contradiction ends in infinite harmony: after the production the human being is able to comprehend something which *was* in him/her but was not, strictly speaking, in him/her in the sense that (s)he was not aware of it. Yet this awareness is not born in the intellect, in reflexivity but in the art-work, which is external (objective) to the self: this is the maximum of objectivity the human being can achieve. Thus, the realisation of this human organ (the realisation of imagination, of genius) comes – in the objectivity of the art-work – to the human being as a gift; (s)he cannot do anything for it but (s)he can appreciate it. The genius for aesthetic creation is the same as the intellect is for philosophy. In the art-work (when it is the product of the genius) we encounter our unconscious infinity: the synthesis of nature and freedom. Art,

therefore, does not 'imitate' nature; in fact it does not imitate anything – it is the expression of the genius, of the imagination in the human being. When we see a flower (a 'thing' of nature) and we say it is beautiful, we know what beautiful is from our imagination, from the realm of the aesthetic and *then* we might say that something in nature is beautiful. The objects of nature contain still in synthesis what the artistic production represents as harmony yet art starts to operate *after* the separation of subject and object has been acknowledged, reflected on and overcome in artistic production. The insight the philosophy of the intellect brings is the infinite tension, the everlasting opposition between subject and object, which can only be fully overcome in art. Art is, thus, not sensual pleasure, it is not useful, it does not have to do anything even with our ethical considerations and it is not science, either: art has no aim outside of itself but it involves our selves as wholes. Art fully involves our being: it reveals who we *are* – this is a genuinely ontological conception of art. In art, our knowledge coincides with our being: art is not a past-time or a hobby besides science but the profoundest and most fundamental way of getting to know; art is the highest human form of understanding. Philosophy is much closer to science but philosophy should 'go to school' to art:

"[The power of art] is the same whereby art also achieves the impossible, namely to resolve an infinite opposition in a finite product (p. 229)."
[A]rt is at once the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which ever and again continues to speak to us of what philosophy cannot depict in external form, namely the unconscious element in acting and producing, and its original identity with the conscious. Art is paramount to the philosopher, precisely because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart" (p.231).
"But now if it is art alone which can succeed in objectifying with universal validity what the philosopher is able to present in a merely subjective fashion, there is one more conclusion yet to be drawn. Philosophy was born and nourished by poetry in the infancy of knowledge, and with it all those sciences it has guided toward perfection; we may thus expect them, in completion, to flow back to like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which they took their source. Nor is it in general difficult to say what the medium for this return of science to poetry will be; for in mythology such a medium existed, before the occurrence of a breach now seemingly beyond repair" (p. 232).
"The one field to which absolute objectivity is granted, is art. Take away objectivity from art, one might say, and it ceases to be what it is and becomes philosophy; grant objectivity to philosophy, and it ceases to be philosophy, and becomes art. – Philosophy attains, indeed, to the highest, but it brings to this summit only, so to say, the fraction of a man. Art brings *the whole man*, as he is, to that point, namely to a knowledge of the highest, and this is what underlies the eternal difference and the marvel of art" (p. 233).
(*The System of Transcendental Idealism,* Trans. by Peter Heath, Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1981)

Schelling here calls for a new mythology, in which poetry and philosophy are, once again, one.

13.1.3. Schelling on drama

In 1802-03 Schelling gave lecture on the philosophy of arts (on aesthetics) in Jena and in 1804-05 he more or less repeated these lectures in Würtzburg. These lectures circulated, at the beginning of the 19th century, in the notes of Schelling's students and it was only in 1859 that Schelling's son (K. F. A. Schelling) edited a series from Schelling's papers. Today, the two series cannot be separated since almost all the original Schelling-manuscripts were consumed in the flames when the library at the University of Munich caught fire in 1944.

For Schelling, the philosophy of art is nothing but the construction of the whole *universe* in the form of art; aesthetics is the science of *everything* in the shape (*Potentz)* of art. (Music, for example, is the archetypal rhythm of nature and of the universe itself, which makes way for itself in the realm of the reflective world with the help of something we call the *art of music*).

The three genres of literature correspond to three forms of representations which are, at the same time, *Anschaungen*, three ways (basic attitudes, points of view) in which (from which) the world can be comprehended. Lyrical poetry is the representation of the infinite in the finite (the infinite is transformed into the finite); lyrical poetry is the *particular*, the *peculiar*. Epic poetry is the 'subsumation' (representation) of the finite in the infinite; it is the *general*. Drama is the synthesis of the two: the synthesis of the particular and the general.

A longer passage on the tragic first occurs when Schelling wishes to differentiate between the sublime ('a fenséges') and the beautiful ('a szép'). Sublimity and beauty are not in opposition and they are on the same level; the difference between them is rather in quantity than in quality and they contain each other: what is sublime without being beautiful is only monstrous or bizarre and absolute beauty is inconceivable without fear, which is carried, primarily, by the sublime. The sublime, in its 'raw' form, is when we feel a mixture of fear and beauty standing, say, on the edge of a precipice or looking at the 'infinity' of the ocean. We feel our smallness, our insignificance but we are also elevated. But elevation does not come form nature itself but from our imagination: we peep into infinity through natural objects which only remind us of the ideal of infinity; the ocean or the precipice is only an *apropos* to feel the infinity precisely through something which is only seemingly so (the ocean, in reality, is not infinite). We feel the real sublime when we unveil something that only *pretended* to be infinite but it is precisely then that we peep into ideal sublimity (the infinite, which is 'more real' than the material world, more real than nature – it is the 'real' reality, in the Platonic sense). The tragic hero has moral sublimity: he is enough for himself because he represents unconditional and absolute freedom; he is sure in his intentions which time neither fulfils, nor destroys completely. The tragic hero is a symbol of infinity which is above all suffering, while he is given over to all possible forms of suffering – it is precisely suffering, the absolute form of human limitation and the absolute opposite of freedom, which will be able to show up, to unveil human freedom.

Tragedy fascinated Schelling as early as 1795 (when Hölderlin was working on the translation of *Oedipus Rex* and of *Antigone*), in his first significant philosophical work entitled *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus* published in the *Philosophischen Journal*. There, in the 10th Letter, he connects tragedy with human freedom; the *fact* of tragedy for Schelling is the proof of human freedom: the tragic is working against the hero as an *objective* power, ready to destroy his freedom. It is fate which forces the hero to sin, yet he fights against his fate and, finally, has to pay for the sin which has its origin in fate. The tragic hero becomes the victim of necessity but he is defeated not without fight: the first proof of human freedom is in the fact that the hero was allowed to fight. The second proof of human freedom is in defeat itself, which Schelling takes to be the negative imprint of

freedom: the hero's freedom consists in *voluntarily* undertaking the role of the sufferer while suffering for something he committed involuntarily, for a sin which was dictated by fate. His suffering, and especially his *voluntary undertaking of this suffering* 'objectifies' the freedom which otherwise we would not be able to identify, since things can only be fully identified, comprehended and understood through their absolute opposites.

In the lectures of the early 1800s, Schelling returns to these ideas. Poetry's general form is the representation of the ideas in speech and in language. Language is the most appropriate symbol of absolute understanding. Language is a material born in the process of the infinite getting represented in the finite. This material is nothing else than the word of God, which penetrates into the finite. A lyrical poem is the representation of the general infinite in the particular, the representation of the general in the particular. It starts, directly, from the subject and thus it is the most free of all the genres. Here one may deviate from all accepted trains of thoughts because the lyrical poem does not refer to an objective connection external to it but it is the connection between the emotions of the poet's and of the audience – a lyrical poem (like music) is series of differences and there is no continuity (as there is continuity in epic works). Passions are characteristic of the finite, of the particular, with respect to the general. Epic poetry, in turn, bears the task of showing history as it exist in itself, i.e. in the absolute, since action taken in an absolute or objective sense is nothing but history. Action taken in an objective (historical) sense makes its appearance as pure identity, without the opposition of the finite and the infinite. In lyrical poetry we find the very antagonism of (the very feud between) finite and infinite, the dissonance of freedom and necessity, which only gets a subjective (and never an objective) relief, so, properly speaking, there is never any relief at all. In tragedy antagonism (feud, conflict) and fate appear always together. Tragedy is the synthesis of lyrical and epic poetry, since the sameness which is dominant in epic poetry changes, in tragedy, into fate. In epic poetry, there is no rebellion against the infinite and there is no fate, either. In the form of the epic poem we find tranquillity; activity and the development of the events are in the subject-matter, while tranquillity is in the way, the form of representation. Thus, the epic poem – while its events are full of life, of actions happening in time – is, from the perspective of its form, is indifferent to time. In the epic poem, necessity and freedom coincide, they are in the same tune: necessity (or good fortune) comes to the aid of freedom. In lyrical poetry, there is conflict and feud but this is purely subjective: it has no chance to encounter necessity in an objective fashion.

In drama, however, there is an open and objective conflict between freedom and necessity, in a way that both freedom and necessity are present *as such* and in complete balance (in fact we learn, for other genres what freedom and necessity means from drama). Balance means that neither necessity can defeat freedom, nor freedom is able to destroy necessity. So both get out of the conflict as a winner and as a looser at the same time. Now all art depends on the conflict, the antagonism of freedom and necessity and the highest form of art will be the one which is able to represent this conflict on the highest degree. This form of art is drama. Drama represents human nature in the most perfect way. Human freedom can only make itself manifest if necessity carries the triumph of evil fate, yet freedom, getting above this evil, takes *evil upon itself voluntarily* and thereby gets to the same level as necessity. The subject-matter in drama is as objective as in the epic poem, yet the subject (the author and the audience) is as passionate as in the lyrical poem. In drama the plot is not narrated but it is represented in itself and in reality. In drama what is subjective gets represented in an objective form. In epic poetry, the narrator concentrates on the results, the outcome; he so to speak proceeds the audience and in his indifference takes the role of necessity itself. Drama, in turn, becomes deed and action if we identify ourselves with the characters: it is only then that we are able to participate in the action. Now the characters

perform deeds as a result of subjective considerations, yet they are represented objectively because we are able to watch, from the outside, from a distance the subjects in which these considerations take place. Drama, in its primordial form, is tragedy – comedy is only the inverse of tragedy.

13.2. Hegel and Tragedy

13.2.1. Hegel's life and significance

With Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) the key-terms are *dialectic, history* and *development.* He is one of the most well-known representatives of what we today like to call German idealism. Though he is often called difficult because of his abstractions (such as "the Absolute Spirit"), it is equally often overlooked that his philosophy is precisely about abstractions becoming concrete (through the inherent tension between the abstract and the concrete). Though it is true that for Hegel experience can only exist if it is meditated by reflection or understanding, he also taught that we cannot situate our subjectivity without reflecting on our life as it is embodied in a social way. He is among those who took *negation* really seriously (and, in this respect, e. g. Freud would completely agree): for Hegel it is always *in the face of* something which is *not* that another thing ('thing' taken here in a very general sense) is able to assert and maintain itself. Hegel is not simply a philosopher who 'rediscovered' the *dialectical method* (present in the works of many before him, from Heraclitus to Schelling), since he made very subtle distinctions between difference, opposition and contradiction. Rather, Hegel insisted that man is a *historical* being through and through, which not only means that phenomena (including us) are embedded into history but that the very position from which we make our inquiries is always already developing historically as well. Besides, as a thinker contemporaneous with the German romantic movement, he did a lot to 'deconstruct' the Enlightenment idea of God and maintained that death, finitude and negation in general, are all integral parts of divine life itself.

Hegel was born in Stuttgart, on 27 August, 1770, as the first child of a financial official of the Duke of Würtemberg. Hegel was already well-read as a child and from 1788 he became a student of the University of Tübingen, where he shared the same room with Hölderlin and Schelling as a student of theology. Whereas Schelling (four and a half years Hegel's junior) had a rocketing career in his young years, Hegel had more detours. Between 1793 and 1797 he was a house-tutor in Bern, Switzerland, where he felt miserable, and spent most of his time studying Kant. In 1797 he moved to Frankfurt-am-Main, taking up house-tutoring again, but there he also had a spiritual companion in the person of Hölderlin, whom he met regularly. Under Hölderlin's influence, he turned away from Kant and started developing a system of his own, first dealing largely with theological issues (cf. *The Fragments of a System,* 1800, the relationship between love and life, the latter already described as "the union of union and non-union", etc.). In 1801 he joined the circle of Romantics in Jena, centred around Friedrich Schlegel as the cheer-leader. In 1801 he published a highly important essay on the difference between Fichte's and Schelling's respective systems, still one of the best works written on Hegel's two great contemporaries. Hegel favoured Schelling and it was under his influence that he wrote his first mature work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), though radically departing (especially in the interpretation of history) both from Schelling and Fichte. In the meantime he kept lecturing in Jena – though it was only in 1805 that he eventually became an extraordinary professor.

1807 also saw the birth of Hegel's illegitimate son, Ludwig Fischer, to Christina Burkhardt, the wife of Hegel's landlord in Jena. Hegel left Jena and for a while he was the editor of a newspaper in Bamberg, then he became the rector of the Aegidiengymnasium in Nürnberg. Those years proved to be very productive: he wrote the *Science of Logic* and taught speculative logic (though not his own theory) to young boys. In 1811 he married Marie von Tucher; they had a daughter who died after a month, and two sons, Karl and Immanuel.

Between 1816 and 1818 Hegel was a professor in Heidelberg, where he lectured on aesthetics for the first time, and published his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences.* Yet he reached the height of his fame in Berlin, where he was professor from 1818 until his death in 1831. Not only did he give his most famous series of lectures there, but he published the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and an official organ of Hegelianism was launched, too, the *Yearbooks for Scientific Criticism.* In 1829 he became the rector of the University of Berlin, receiving, in 1831, an award from the king of Prussia as well. When he died (of cholera), he was the most well-known philosopher both inside and outside Germany.

13.2. 2. The nature of thinking: Hegel encounters Kant

As for Fichte or Schelling (and to a great extent under their influence), for Hegel, too, the starting point was the "critical" philosophy of Immanuel Kant. What Hegel thought should be revised in Kant's philosophy was the famous claim that things *in themselves* cannot be known (the problem of the "Ding an sich", the 'thing in itself'). Kant argued that metaphysics should justify (and, thus, should not take for granted) that an inquiring subject is able to capture the '*true nature*' of things. Kant claimed that the concepts of our understanding (our categories, into which we put things, and with the help of which we recognise them) are able to grasp things only under certain conditions. For Kant, we can only justify that concepts tell us about things if we can show that things by *necessity* have to conform to those concepts. But things will *have to* conform to concepts only if we make the concepts themselves the very conditions of the things: if it is the concepts which make – at least to *some* extent – objects possible, then objects cannot but conform to them. However, this has a price: since it will be *our* concepts, our categories which will, to some extent, 'create' the object, we cannot make claims about the 'true nature' of things as they are in themselves (in their 'true reality'); we can only claim that they are *so and so* as *we* perceive (experience) them. So our concepts only tell us about *how we perceive* the object and not about how they are 'in reality', or what they are, in themselves (we only know the *how*, not the *what*).

However, the experience we gather of things do not come already unified but there are concepts (certain categories) responsible for synthesising this experience. The specific categories which allow us to think of experience as unified are *unity*, *plurality* and *totality*. These are so-called *a priori* categories, since they do not depend upon experience (as *a posteriori* concepts do). Kant also maintains that in order to experience something as an event, I must understand the successions of my perception as *irreversible*, as entering my understanding in a definite order. This means that I can only understand something as an objective event if I understand that what I perceive is governed by *causality*. Thus, it follows that everything I perceive must be quantifiable and must have a cause. But this metaphysical judgement is not based on a privileged side-door to real being but purely on the analysis (the 'critique') of the conditions of human experience. And this is all metaphysics is capable of.

Hegel accepts that the objectivity of our cognition depends on the analysis of our concepts of understanding. Hegel claims that Kant turned metaphysics into logic, since with Kant metaphysics becomes the analysis of the structure of thought itself. Yet, according to Hegel, Kant made a mistake: he identified understanding exclusively as *judging*; what Kant

said is true of judgements but understanding is more than that. We have to be even more critical than Kant and instead of making such assumptions as the one that understanding is judgement, we have to start from the simple, indeterminate *being* of thought itself. One should not reduce metaphysics to logic but rather logic should become ontological (metaphysical): it should be proved that what is there in the categories are not just the objective structure of *our* world but the objective structure of *being* itself. The Kantian categories do not allow us to know the true being of things: they just enable us to conceive of the *appearance* of things in space and time (quantity and succession) as constituting a world which appears to be objective only *for us*. The reality of the thing (put by Kant as the 'thing in itself') remains not only hidden but it is itself an abstraction, which makes everything, on a certain level, 'look' the same ('In darkness, all cows are black'). Thus, the 'thing in itself' is not an index of modesty or humbleness on Kant's part but is totally empty. Appearance, for Hegel, is rather something which *manifest*s what the thing is *in itself*, and points towards what there truly *is*. Thoughts are not merely our thoughts but they are at the same time the *In-itself* of things themselves: they are *objective reality*.

Kantian categories, for Hegel, appear to be so stale and reductive if we suppose that they are only about one thing. In Hegel's system, each category is dialectical: each category turns, *in itself* and *by itself*, into its opposite. The thought of *being* turns into the thought of *nothing*, the thought of *something* into the thought of the *other*, the thought of *finitude* into the idea of the *infinite*. And the members of these pairs do not exclude but rather include each other, respectively: the idea of *being* is always already given in the idea of *nothingness* and vice versa, etc. This is real unity, which our thoughts of phenomena disclose and 'perform' by themselves; unity is not our feat (as Kant supposed) when we bring two things, under certain conditions, together in judgement but rather we should *discover* the inseparability of opposing forces as they are given in the world. For Kant, everything was, *a priori*, affirmative. Negation, and, with that, limitation, the delineation of one thing from the other (difference) had to be *introduced* into the system. For Hegel – who paradoxically criticises Kant for not having been critical *enough* – thought is dialectical (that is, it cannot but immediately 'state' its opposite) in itself and it not only exists in its own opposite but it coincides with thinking (and, thus, with the philosophical method) itself. To think is to be dialectical and thus it is to philosophise. So we may learn what, say, being is if we follow, in thought (reflection), the *process* of how being turns into nothingness and nothingness into being, etc., cf. some of the introductory sentences of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward. […] … the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms… […]. It is the whole which, having traversed in content in time and space, has returned to itself, and is the resultant *simple Notion* of the whole. But the actuality of this simple whole consists in those various shapes and forms which have become its moments, and which will now develop and take shape afresh…

13.2.3. Hegelian aesthetics

For Hegel, the problem of aesthetics comes in, in general, via the study of the forms of the Absolute Spirit (see above) and, in particular, via some moral considerations, namely the problem of human freedom. Hegel distinguishes between finite and absolute freedom: the freedom which is granted to us by historical action is concrete and objective, yet it is limited because it is achieved through *particular aims:* doing our jobs well, building family-life with some definite persons, etc. Absolute freedom can only be attained if we bring to mind what is

in itself absolute: the absolute character of the *truth of being*. This truth is attained in the process of the spirit getting to know itself in three forms: art, religion and philosophy. Hegel in the 1820s delivered lectures on all these three forms.

In art, Hegel claims, some material (wood, paint, sound etc.) is worked into the audible and visible expression of human freedom and into the differentiated unity of *being* itself. The sensuously rendered form of freedom can be called *beauty*. For Hegel there are three forms of art: symbolic art (where the Idea still only *seeks* expression, and freedom and beauty are not yet present), classical art (spirit and body here are united in perfect harmony and beauty) and romantic art (which achieves inward beauty but also makes space for the sheer externality of nature). The 'modern' artist may choose, according to Hegel, any content, provided that it does not contradict the law that the form should be beautiful. Yet, for Hegel, both the religious and the philosophical forms of the movement of the Spirit are higher forms of self-recognition than the artistic. Art 'dies' with respect to philosophy but only in the truly Hegelian sense: art does create its own genuine realm of meaning and it does ground itself in its own imaginative self-creation. When philosophy (and religion, too, but this is a difficult issue), as a higher from of self-realisation and self-understanding, overrules (*by* and *in* the Spirit) art (and thus art 'dies'), art is negated in the way that it is turned into affirmation *within* the understanding of the truth philosophy provides.

13.2.4. Hegel on tragedy and drama

Epic poetry is the most universal and objective; lyrical poetry is centred around the inner life of the person who more tightly or loosely relates to the subject matter he chooses; and drama makes central the collision between characters, their *aims*, and the "*necessary resolution of this battle*". Every true action is constituted by what is in *substance* good and great (the Divine actualised in this world) and the *subject*, the individual in his freedom. Drama (as action on the stage) is effective in its absolute truth but this can take various forms: tragedy, comedy and 'drama' (drama "occupying a middle position" between tragedy and comedy).

From the point of view of the *aim* of the tragic characters, the true content of the tragic action for Hegel is provided by the "substantive and independently justified powers of the human will": family life (love between husband and wife, between parents and children, brothers and sisters, etc.), political life (patriotism, the will of the ruler, etc.) and religious life (as an active grasp of actual interests and not as divine judgement in man's heart). The second source of the tragic is the *characters* themselves: they are constituted and maintained not by separate or independent qualities as in epic genres but they are simply of the *one* power dominating their own specific character, since they have identified themselves with one of the aspects of human life enlisted above (family life, political life, etc.). Thus, in the tragic hero the accidents of the individual's purely personal life disappears and he stands like a statue, like a god, and is rather abstract in himself.

Thus the proper theme of the original type of tragedy is the Divine, yet not as the object of religious consciousness but as it enters the world and individual action: the sphere where the concrete will is to accomplish itself is the concrete ethical order [das Sittliche]. Since it is in concrete action that tragedy actualises its essence, it is the motive for truly human action which should be behind the deeds of the tragic hero; therefore, the basis of the tragic cannot be abstract morality [das formell Moralische] but rather "the Divine made real in the world".

However, the very fact that ethical powers come not in abstraction but in particularisation (in action) means that these ethical powers will get differentiated and thus they lose their initial harmony and will appear in opposition to one another in reciprocal

interdependence. For Hegel, the tragic arises from the very fact that in dramatic genres the ethical must come to the scene as something concrete (as *action*), and thus it is inevitably isolated because it is totally determined (as something concrete). However, this actuality will be in necessary conflict, in the first place, with a kind of *ideality*. This ideality is the human awareness of the right ethical stand *in general*, but this awareness is an abstraction. Thus for Hegel, the conflict which is responsible, in the first place, for the tragic effect is between the abstract and the concrete (the "theory" and the "practice", the awareness of something that is 'generally good' and the effort made at its actual realisation, which will, however 'great' the deed may be, remain inevitably, necessarily, i.e. *by its nature*, particular and isolated because it is still a single action). The "original essence" of tragedy will thus consist, for Hegel, in the fact that within the conflict of the abstract and the concrete, both opposing sides are *equally justifiable,* "while each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only denying and infringing the equally justified power of the other". In other words: the substance of ethical life is initially a unity but it remains undisturbed and in harmony only in a pure and abstract ideality: this is what the gods enjoy on the Olympus. When this ideality has to enter actualisation in reality (when it enters the mundane world), the elements, which were only *different* on the ideal level, will start to collide and oppose each other, because it is concrete individuals who try to grasp and realise them. So, though both the ideally ethical and its the actual realisation are equally justifiable (one knows what is *good* but he also has *to do* something), both will be involved in *guilt.*

So the ideally ethical does appear in the real world, yet only in the form of particular (and, thus, as inevitably limited) action, so the ethical ideal cannot maintain itself and its proper aim is satisfied only when it is annulled as a contradiction. The first factor, thus, is the justifiable great character, the second is the tragic collision between the ideal and the concrete (within the very deed of the character) but there should be a third factor, too, to complete the tragic effect: tragic resolution. Resolution means that, on the one hand, the unity and the ideality of ethical life gets restored but, on the other hand, the individual, who disturbed the peace of this unity, harmony and ideality, will have to fall down. Because particular deeds are always in reality, in 'the concrete', they will inevitably be *one-sided* and this one-sidedness will meet eternal justice in the sense that one-sidedness is only overcome at the price of the total destruction of the tragic hero or at least in his having to abandon (resign) his specific aim.

Here Hegel refers to Aristotle who said that "the true effect of tragedy should be to arose pity and fear and accomplish the catharsis of these emotions". Emotions, according to Hegel, do not mean here "my feelings", my subjective sense of something agreeable or not, attractive or repulsive, etc; in Aristotle, too, we must concentrate on the subject-matter which by its artistic appearance is to purify these feelings. A man may be frightened by something finite and external to him but also by the Absolute. In true tragedy, man is frightened by this, the Absolute: "what man really has to fear … is the might of the ethical order which is one determinant of his own free reason and it is at the same time the eternal and inviolable something which he summons up against himself if once he turns against it". Similarly, pity is not simply with someone's misfortune (that is something for "provincial females", as Hegel puts it); if this were so, true tragic pity could be sympathising with beggars and rascals. No, true pity is sympathy with the sufferer's "ethical justification", since the hero is a "man of worth and goodness himself". Tragic pity is not aroused by a sad story, or even by an accident which befell on the hero as a result of external accidents (which he cannot help); "truly tragic suffering … is only inflicted on the individual agents as a consequence of their own deed which is both legitimate and, owing to the resulting collision, blameworthy, and for which their whole self is answerable". However, for Hegel, tragic reconciliation stands above

both tragic fear and tragic pity. In reconciliation, the relative justification of one-sided aims is overcome and we get a glimpse of eternal justice.

13.2.5. Hegel on the difference between tragedy and comedy

In tragedy the eternal substance of things appear victorious in a reconciling way because the conflict strips away from the tragic hero his false (but inevitable) one-sidedness and shows up the positive elements as ones which are to be retained. "In tragedy the individuals destroy themselves through the one-sidedness of their otherwise solid will and character, or they must resignedly accept what they had opposed even in a serious way". In comedy characters dissolve everything in laughter and thus reaffirm their own subjective personality, which persists in a self-assured way. In comedy, man has made himself a master of everything, but this is only possible if the world is represented as unsubstantial. In comedy it is the insubstantiality of the world from which self-destruction comes. But not all unsubstantial actions are comical; they are laughable but not comical. Every contrast between something substantive and its appearance, e.g. between ends and means, may be laughable: "this is a contradiction in which the appearance cancels itself and the realisation of an end is at the same time the end's own destruction". The vices of mankind, follies, senselessness, silliness are also just laughable (since we are clever enough to recognise the contrast in each of them). The truly comical involves light-heartedness and confidence felt by someone raised above his inner contradiction; in true comedy, man experiences the bliss and the ease of being able to bear the frustration of his aims and achievements, and he does not feel either bitter or miserable.

There are three types of comedy:

When the characters and their aims are totally without substance and thus they cannot achieve anything. Petty and futile aims are brought about with seriousness and elaborate preparation yet since the aim was initially trivial, the disaster that follows is cheerfully surmounted. Yet it is already not comical when an individual seriously identifies himself with a false human trait, e.g. avarice.

Characters wish to achieve something substantial but it is precisely their characters which are not substantial enough to do so. Example: *Ecclesiazusae* by Aristophanes where women wish to establish a new political construction yet they retain their whims and passions as women.

The third type is based on the use of external contingencies. Here characters, aims and accomplishments mutually annul one another.

In comedy, reconciliation is even more important than in tragedy. Comedy must also affirm the rational, it must vote for human freedom, so it does not make fun of true religious feelings, true philosophy or art but precisely of its perverted forms (as Aristophanes did). So the individual always emerges as free and as a master of the world from comedy, yet from the comic world the objective presence of fundamental principles have been removed. In comedy that which has no substance in itself destroys the show of its own existence by itself. "The individual makes himself master of this dissolution and remains undisturbed in himself and at ease."

13.2.6. Hegel on 'drama', i.e. on the genre between tragedy and comedy

This genre tries to reconcile the difference between tragedy and comedy; Greek and Roman satyric dramas and tragicomedies belong here. The main action remains serious but

the chorus of satyrs is treated comically. In the *Amphitruo* by Plautus, the prologue describes the possibilities of tragicomedy.

In tragicomedy, the individual acts in seriousness but their tragic fixity of the will has been weakened, so by the end a harmonious unification of individuals and their aims becomes possible. In certain Greek dramas, the tragic individual is not sacrificed but saved: e.g. in Aeschylus's *Eumenides,* both Apollo and the Furies are granted the right to be worshipped; in Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, Philoctetes and Neopltolemus are reconciled by Heracles. Modern examples (where divine intervention is no longer possible) include Goethe's *Tasso* or *Iphigenia.* Yet modern 'drama' runs the risk of abandoning anything fearful to the characters externally, and rather concentrate on the inner lives of the characters and on the customs of the period. These plays have no claim to poetry and only have theatrical effect.

13.2.7. Some of Hegel's insights concerning ancient and modern drama

Hegel does not wish to give a complete history of dramatic art. His starting point is that tragedy will present what is *substantial* in the character (his aims, his conflicts) and in comedy the central thing is the character's *inner* life and his *personality.*

In the East (in the Mohammedan world) no great tragedy could develop since tragedy presupposes individual freedom of action or at least the individual's determination and willingness to accept freely the responsibility for his own act and its consequences, and the personality should probe his own depths. If will is totally subjected to the will of God, not even drama can emerge.

In Greece the free individual is given, so what counts in Greek drama is the universal and essential element in the aim which the characters are realising; in tragedy the ethical justification of the agent's consciousness with respect to a specific action makes itself manifest. Thus, Greek tragedy is never concerned with personal matters (with particular intrigues, or the various descriptions of the human heart) but with the battle between the essential powers that rule human life and between the gods. Comedy exposes the general corruption into which public life has fallen.

In 'modern' (romantic) dramatic poetry, the principal topic is the individual's passion; the pursuit has a purely subjective end and the fate of a single individual is in the centre. Here poetic interest lies in the greatness of the character; his elevation over his situation is a real possibility and he finds reconciliation in the very greatness of his nature. So our interest is directed not at ethical justification but on the individual person and his affairs. The main themes are thus love, ambition, etc. There is more space, for particular details; instead of the simple conflicts of Greek drama, we find extraordinary and always newly involved complications, labyrinths, accidental occurrences, everything which is no longer conditioned by the substantive character of an essential subject-matter.

13.2.8. Hegel on the actual development of drama: selections of some of his insights

Hegel mainly considers, at the outset, the art of Aeschylus and Sophocles, claiming that Roman (Latin) dramatic art is just a pale reflection of the Greek one. Hegel concentrates on the consciousness which becomes capable of reflecting on its situation and finds the tragic possibilities, step by step, in it. The general background which is necessary for the Greek type of tragedy is what he calls the 'heroic age', when universal ethical powers have not yet been explicitly fixed. Then two different ethical orders start developing: first, the naive consciousness wills the substantial order as a whole. Here consciousness remains blameless

and neutral, since it is only aware of the higher powers that act above it but does not dare to do anything against it. Thus, it remains inactive, fearing the horror of the schism which is implicitly there between this consciousness and the higher order. Secondly, however an individual 'pathos' develops, moving dramatis personae who act with ethical justification and thus get involved in conflicts. These 'dramatis personae' are not characters in the modern sense of the word but they are not mere abstractions, either. They consist in the determinative drive, in the 'pathos' solely and exclusively, so the essence of tragedy is constituted only in the opposition of such individuals, justified in their actions. The space now occupied by the tragic hero is genuinely the actual human life. However, the force with which these powers enter into conflict is always divine.

The necessity of the chorus in Greek drama has been hotly debated. For Hegel, the chorus is a "substantial groundwork", it is a higher consciousness but not a disengaged moralist, or a spectator simply reflecting on the events. The chorus is the actual substance of the ethical life and action of the heroes themselves; the chorus is the "fruitful soil" out of which the heroes themselves grew. What the chorus says preserves the epic character of substantial universality, but it is also lyrical, encroaching upon the dramatic action in the sense that it pronounces judgement contemplatively, appeals to divine law, it warns and sympathises. The chorus is like the temple surrounding the gods; it provides the environment for the heroes.

The conflict, as it was said, is brought about by the ethical justification of a specific act and not by evil will, by a crime, or by infamy, or by misfortune, or blindness, or the like. "For evil" – Hegel says – "in the abstract has no truth in itself and is of no interest". Yet the ethical traits are not assigned to the individuals merely by *intention*, for the justification of these ethical traits must be shown to lie in the heroes *essentially*. Rather, two *equally* justifiable ethical spheres come into conflict – there is no place for private interests, for the individual's thirst for power, for good-for-nothing or morally noble criminals. Thus, the subject-matter of Greek tragedy is relatively limited: the state (ethical life in its spiritual universality) and the family (natural ethical life). E. g. in *Antigone*, Antigone honours the bond of kinship, the gods of the underworld, while Creon honours Zeus alone, the dominating power over public life and social welfare.

A less concrete collision is portrayed, according to Hegel, in *Oedipus Rex*. Here what is at issue, for Hegel, is the justification of what a man has self-consciously willed and knowingly done, as contrasted with what he was fated to do by the gods and what he did unknowingly. Today, Hegel thinks, we would say that since Oedipus did not do the crimes willingly, they are not his; but Oedipus, "with his plasticity of consciousness" takes responsibility for what he has done individually, and does not cut his subjective self-consciousness apart from what is objectively the case.

Considering tragic conflicts, Hegel insists that they have nothing to do with guilt or innocence. On the presupposition that a man is only guilty if alternatives are open to him, the Greek tragic heroes are always innocent: they act out of *this* character of theirs, out of *this* pathos, because this character and this pathos is exactly what they *are*: their act is preceded by neither hesitation, nor by choice. It is the strength of their great character that they remain what they are throughout: they *are* what they will, and what they accomplish. If they have to perform guilty acts, they do not claim to be innocent but culpability also belongs to the greatness of the character. Hegel wishes to emphasise that in Greek drama the problem of guilt is not exposed on the individual level but on the level of ethical spheres, therefore guilt involves an ethical order and not the individual's guiltiness, or the innocence of the particular man. "Here there is no question at all of an introverted personality's subjective reflection and its good and evil, but, when the collision was complete, of the vision of an affirmative reconciliation and the equal validity of both the powers that were in conflict." The Greek

heroes no not *wish* to arose pity and fear; it is only Euripides who slipped into expressing pity directly.

Conflict is not produced by blind fate or by the guilt of the individual but by the one-sidedness of the pathos that is in the individual. The individual (this *one* life) gets shattered and is sacrificed but the pathos prevails. For Hegel, the "most magnificent and satisfying work of art of this kind" is *Antigone.* There Antigone lives under the political authority of Creon, she is the daughter of Oedipus and the fiancée of Haemon (Creon's son). So, she should be obedient but Creon, too, as father and husband, ought to have respected the sacred tie of blood and should have allowed Antigone to bury her brothers. Both Creon and Antigone are gripped and shattered by something intrinsic to their own actual being. Antigone suffers death but Creon is punished too, by the voluntary death of his son and wife, both incurred indirectly by Creon himself: Haimon committed suicide upon Antigone's death, Creon's wife upon Haimon's death. In the third part of the cycle, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, we find inner reconciliation.

Hegel then goes on to analyse Aristophanes's comedies and then turns to 'modern' drama. For Hegel, *Faust* is a philosophical tragedy, presenting the tragic quest for harmony between the Absolute in its essence and appearance, and the individual's knowledge and will. Yet modern tragic characters do not act for the sake of the substantial nature of their end but press for the subjectivity of their hearts and mind and the privacy of their own character. Take Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In Greek tragedy, the death of old Hamlet would have an ethical justification, in Shakespeare's play it is simply an atrocious crime and Hamlet's mother is guiltless of it (according to Hegel). Consequently, the son turns revengefully only on the King (Claudius), "in whom he sees nothing really worthy of respect". The collision turns not on a son's pursuing an ethically justified revenge and being forced in the process to violate the ethical order but on Hamlet's personal character. "His noble soul is not made for this kind of energetic activity" and he eventually perishes because of his own hesitation and a complication of external circumstances. Inner vacillation is an important feature of modern drama in general.

Shakespeare "stands at an almost unapproachable height": even if some single passion, like ambition in Macbeth, or jealousy in Othello, becomes the entire pathos of the tragic heroes, they still remain complete men and do not turn into abstractions. Shakespeare gives his heroes spirit and imagination whereby they can see themselves objectively, as works of art, and they reveal themselves in many different ways and in a rhetoric which stems from the very nature of their characters.

In *King Lear*, the change in Lear's inner condition appears to be a logical consequence of his own peculiarities, so what develops is something that was implicit in his character from the start. Lear's original folly is intensified into madness in his old age, as Gloucester's mental blindness is changed into actual physical blindness, and it is only then that his eyes are opened to the true nature of their sons. As opposed to vacillating characters divided against themselves, we get, in *Lear,* examples of firm and consistent characters, who come to ruin simply because of this decisive adherence to themselves and their aims. According to Hegel, these characters, without ethical justification, yet upheld by the formal inevitability of their personality, allow themselves to be lured to their deed by external circumstances, or by the strength of their will, even if what they now do is from the necessity of maintaining themselves against others, or because they have reached the point that they *have* reached.

Hegel talks about many other things (including modern comedy, tragic denouement in modern tragedy) and gives further, brief examples from Shakespeare (including *Romeo and Juliet*), Goethe, Schiller, French and Spanish tragedy (Calderon), etc.

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**English Theatre and Comedy in the 19ᵗʰ Century and
George Henry Lewes' *The Game of Speculation***

In discussions of English drama in the 19ᵗʰ century the most frequently encountered words are "barren", "weak" and "unproductive", yet this does not mean that there was no theatrical activity in the age. On the contrary; the theatre was very popular and one can find a well identifiable transition from the verse drama of 1800 to the serious "problem plays" of the "new drama" of the 1890s. In between, there are all sorts of genres: melodrama, burletta, farce, burlesque, the comedy of manners and satirical comedy.

Idolising Shakespeare was one of the most significant features of the early 19ᵗʰ century; there was not only a "rediscovery" of Shakespeare on the critical and theoretical level (with Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Coleridge, etc.) but practically all the great Romantic poets tried their hand at writing a "Shakespearean" verse-drama. Yet it is significant that what they primarily saw in Shakespeare was the great (Romantic) poet; while they were trying to imitate especially his romances and tragedies, they lacked his knowledge of dramaturgy and his sense of the theatre. This, naturally, also hindered the development of prose drama to a considerable extent. Wordsworth's *The Borderers* (published in 1842), Coleridge's *Remorse* (1813); Lord George Gordon Byron's *Marino Falerio* (1821), *Cain* (1821), *Werner* (1830), *Manfred* (1834), Shelley's *The Cenci* (1819, produced in 1886), but even later Browning's *Strafford* (1837) and *Blot in the 'Scutcheon* (1843), Tennyson's *Queen Mary* (published in 1875), *Harold* (published in 1877) and *Becket* (published in 1879, performed, with great success, in 1893) bear witness to these authors' ambition to become a "second Shakespeare" (as through imitating Milton many of them tried to produce an epic poem on the level of *Paradise Lost*). Byron with his satiric vein and Browning with his psychological insights do display dramatic potential and Shelley's portrayal of Count Cenci, a typical villain is powerful indeed, yet even they produced typically "literary" (and not theatrical) dramas: their plays abound in melodramatic situations and characters, they are verbose, they know little about the tricks which make a play effective on stage, and the occasional greatness of poetic language cannot compensate for the lack of dramatic coherence and of that kind of dramatic "objectivity" which pushes the author's subjective convictions and biases to the background and allows the characters to speak up, as it were, for themselves. "Truth" and "being in the right" is too much reserved for the positive characters (who thus become spokespersons for the authors) and one feels that the negative characters are condemned always already by their authors as well. The other playwrights of the first half of the 19ᵗʰ century (such as James Sheridan Knowles [1784-1862] or Edward Bulwer-Lytton [1803-1873]) were well-known in their own time (Knowles' *Virginius* was a big hit in Covent Garden in 1820 and Bulwer-Lytton, writing under the influence of Victor Hugo and Alexander Dumas père, produced the quite successful *The Lady of Lyons* [1838]), yet sentimental morality is too strong in these plays and today they are only of historical interest. For example, in a heightened love scene we read in *The Lady of Lyons*:

> Oh, as the bee upon the flower, I hang
> Upon the honey of thy eloquent tongue!
>
> We are like the insects, caught
> By the poor glittering of a garish flame;
> But, oh, the wings once scorch'd, the
> brightest star
> Lures us no more; and by the fatal light
> We cling till death![167]

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[167] John Gassner and Edward Quinn (eds.) *The Reader's Encyclopedia of World Drama*, London: Methuen, 1975, p. 232.

There is very little genuine comedy in the century and this is made up for by burlesques and farces, with very obvious actions and a lot of broad humour. The two masters of the age were Henry J. Byron (1834-1884) (not to be confused with Lord George Gordon Byron) and James Robinson Planché (1796-1880). Planché wrote burlesques (e.g. *King of Little Britain* [1818], *Olympic Revels* [1831], *The Golden Fleece* [1845], etc.) in the vein of Fielding and John Gay, but lacked their biting quality and used puns as the main source of the comic. H. J. Byron, with plays such as *La! Sonnambula! or, the Supper, the Sleeper and the Merry Swiss Boy* (1865) or *Lucia of Lammermoor; or, The Laird, the Lady and the Lover* (1865) excels in ridicule for its own sake and in yoking the high and the low together. It is this burlesque "extravaganza" – defined by Planché himself as "the whimsical treatment of a poetical subject"[168] – and it is this farce which Wilde and Shaw, especially through adding some irony to their perspective and under the influence of the French well-made-play, will make a respectable genre.

Another significant genre of the times is melodrama, re-borne under the French and German influence but its subject-matter and spirit – especially in its "domestic" type – are undoubtedly English. The most notable names and plays are Douglas Jerold (1803-1857) with *Black-Ey'd Susan* (1829), Dion Boucicault (1820-1890) with *The Corsican Brothers* and *The Vampire* (both in 1852), Tom Taylor with *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863), and Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929) with *The Silver King* (1882) and *The Middleman* (1889), yet of course there are many other authors and plays. It is relatively easy to give an inventory of the most significant features of melodrama: the avoidance of controversial subjects and preference for a simple story; easily recognisable "good" and "bad" stock characters, superficially portrayed; sentiments which are easy to understand; busy and complicated, sometimes weakly constructed, sometimes tightly knit plot-structures; exciting turns but never intolerable tension; frequent occurrence of coincidences; the triumph of good over evil through last-minute intervention, and musical accompaniment. Both in melodrama and in comedy, the contemporary audience wanted to be, first and foremost, entertained and did not care much for subtlety.

"New" drama made its debut with the realism of Thomas William Robertson (1829-1871) in the mid-sixties. Robertson came from a theatrical family and was an experienced actor, too and in many ways he was the initiator of "modern drama". He started with comedies (the play *David Garrick*, about the famous 18th century actor, was a big success) but his *Society* (1865), *Ours* (1866), *Caste* (1867), *Play* (1868) and *M. P.* (1870), etc. display realism in both setting (e.g. realistic props) and theme: he was not afraid of serious or even controversial subjects (such as the tension between marriage and social rank, or working-class daily life), and he insisted on natural action and tried to write natural dialogues. Robertson emphasises the hollowness of the values of Victorian society, especially of money itself, which he refuses to treat in an anecdotal or farcical way. Robertson paves the way for Arthur W. Pinero (1855-1934), who was also an actor first and wrote comic pieces as well, but, with plays like *The Profligate* (1889) and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895), written under the (mixed) influence of Robertson, Scribe and Ibsen, he became a realist "problem-.play" writer. He lacks the philosophical depth of, for example Shaw, and, ultimately, he never analyses his central themes satisfactorily but he is undoubtedly a master of dramaturgical technique. Robertson encouraged and helped Sir William Schwenk Gilbert (1836-1911) personally. Though today Gilbert is only remembered for the comic operas he wrote in collaboration with Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan (1842-1900) – such as *H. M. S. Pinafore* (1878), *The Mikado* (1885) or *The Gondoliers* (1889) – Gilbert produced some serious plays as well, such as

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[168] op. cit., p. 233.

Sweethearts (1874) and *Engaged* (1877), in which he exposes Victorian greed, folly, cheating, lying, smugness, prudery and complacency. The surface is often comic and he loves to play with language but beneath the verbal wit there is already satire and irony and a merciless logic with which he shows the inevitable consequences of corrupt and hypocritical social patterns and behaviour. The next in line will be Wilde and Shaw.

Over the 19th century, also the status of the theatre changed considerably, especially in London.. The city's population rose to 3 million by 1850 and to 6,5 million by 1900. In 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, there were already about 20 theatres and 2 operas and in 1900 61 theatres – of which 38 were in the West-End – and 31 music-halls. By comparison, around 1800 there were only two theatres of significance: one in Drury Lane, the other in Covent Garden. Though religion and politics were strictly kept out off the stage till the end of the 19th century – the Lord Chamberlain exercised his right to censorship through his officer, the Examiner of Plays – in 1832 a Parliamentary Committee was set up to look into the matters of the theatre and to promote the production of plays. In 1833 the Dramatic Copyright Act was passed (this came in the United States only in 1891, though the International Copyright Convention in Berne was in 1886), which made the author the sole proprietor over a performed (and not only over a published) play; in 1843 the Theatre Regulation Bill was accepted which, more or less, allowed to theatres to play what they liked. Cheap mass-transportation by rail made it possible even for the working-class to seek entertainment in the theatres and – especially when the theatre building-boom started in 1866 – a lot of the playhouses tailored their respective styles and repertoire to the social composition of their neighbourhood, as well as to the class-status and to the tastes of their audience. This is the period when the Surrey side of the Thames (East-End London) and the fringes of the West-End become famous for theatrical activity. The main body of the audience was provided, of course, by the middle-calls and, interestingly, it was the urban and wealthy society which was now drawing the higher classes back to the theatre, to such an extent that aristocratic patronage became a fashion again. Queen Victoria herself frequented the theatres diligently, and from the 1880s even the clergy stared to attend. The West End theatres, especially the Prince of Wales Theatre paraded with the more serious plays; good old Drury Lane became the place for upper-calls pastime and entertainment, while the East End playhouses – especially the Adelphi and the Marylebone – were preferred by workmen, peasants and sailors.

By the 1880s, writing a successful play was big business and the theatre was prospering financially. The traditional repertory stock companies broke down in many places – there were a lot of moving actors instead, who were often hired for only one play at a time and were dismissed after its run. Thus, authors, actors and theatres were all interested in the long run of a single piece; for example Tom Taylor's *Our American Cousin* (1861) saw 396 performances; Brandon Thomas's well-known *Charlie's Aunt* ran for 1 466 times in the 1890s. In 1866, the 25 theatres in London had about 15 000 spectators in a month and with the music-halls this number raises to 40 000. The audience became more and more disciplined and socialised as well (which was not necessarily to the benefit of the "living theatre"): there were occasional outbursts from the galleries if a play was weak but, on the whole, the spectators arrived at 8 p.m. and left at 11 p.m.; there was little popping in and out, so characteristic of the 18th century, and there were seldom any scandals.

The stage witnessed to major technological advancement as well. This is he time when the total darkening of the auditorium becomes possible because gas-light is introduced on the stage in 1817 and limelight (burning lime, i.e. calcium oxide in an oxy-hydrogen flame), illuminating the actors who are in the "centre of attention" comes in 1850. In 1881, some truly elegant theatres, like the Savoy, start to use electricity as well. The proscenium-doors (used especially in comedies for a long time) slowly disappear, and, thus, the fore-stage retreats to

the back; the wings and back-shutters, i.e. the movable scenery, changed in grooves as the major technological advancement of the 18th century, gave way to built-up (stable) scenery: solid, three-dimensional and highly real-to-life scenic structures are created. Most theatres start to employ their resident scene-painters and their own carpenters who, often with ship-board experience, do not only build the wooden scenery but create an intricate maze of bridges, traps, pulleys and ropes beneath the stage. The curtain, to hide scene-changes, becomes the standard. Musical accompaniment is still very popular; most theatres hire a permanent orchestra and music is more and more woven into the very fabric of stage-production (as today music heightens the effect of movie-scenes, e.g. somebody searching for an enemy in a dark room, etc.). By our standards the acting – is, mostly, still intensely emotional and highly exaggerated in gesture, movement, facial expression and rhetorical speeches. Actresses had been on the stage since 1660 yet more and more plays are written where the success of the whole rests on the role of the heroine – *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and many other Shaw-plays are, under the influence of Ibsen, the outcome of this tendency. The stage wishes to communicate physical excitement to the audience as well; "sensationalism", materialising in elaborately staged ship-wrecks, train-smashes, avalanches, earthquakes, battles, etc. is very much in vogue. They employ explosives and fire in Gothic and nautical plays, treadmills "in operation" in country-scenes; the interior of drawing-rooms, criminal courts, and other scenes, whether of contemporary life or of a well-identifiable historical period, have to match, with meticulous exactness, the age in furniture, costumes and decoration,. For example, in Boucicault's *The Corsican Brothers* (first performed on 24 February, 1852 in the Princess's Theatre) there was a heavily laden supper-table, with real food, knives, forks, etc., and the "snow" of the last duel-scene (on which red "blood" had to be very visible) was provided by hundredweights of finely grained salt. Another major change occurred in the relationship between the so-called actor-managers and the actors: by the end of the century, the controlling directorial hand was fully accepted in the theatres; Boucicault himself exercised firm authority over rehearsals and performances.

George Henry Lewes (1817-1878) is best known for his lifelong union (though not marriage), from 1851, with Mary Ann Evans ("George Eliot") and he is famous for writing popular, as well as serious, works in philosophy, physiology, psychology, and editing such important – though short-lived – journals as the Leader and The Fortnightly Review. His *Biographical History of Philosophy* (1845-1846), *Life of Goethe* (1855) *Physiology of Common Life* (1859), *Studies of Animal Life* (1862) and especially *Problems of Life and Mind* (1873-1878) make him an important thinker of the age – with a lot of influence on Mary Evans, herself philosophically minded as well – and he was outstanding as a literary critic as well. For him writing plays – under the pseudonym Slingsby Lawrence – was a past-time and though he has about a dozen plays (mostly farces and comedies but *The Noble Heart*, from 1850, is a tragedy), his really big hit was *The Game of Speculation* (1851), a comedy performed in the Lyceum in London. It is an adaptation of Balzac's and Dennery's play called *Marcade* but it took Lewes only 13 hours to write. The actors had only two full rehearsals before the first night but the main role, Hawk was played by one of the leading comedians of the age, Charles Matthews excelling especially in light (and not in low, farcical) comedies and the play witnessed to 92 performances in the first season.

The Game of Speculation is typical of mid-century Victorian comedy in many ways. It is an adaptation of a French piece (with tongue-in-cheek references to France, "It's only in France that women have two husbands" Act I, Sc. 1, line 46; "Why, you are like the old French soldiers, who still live in hope of Napoleon's returning to them"; Act I, Sc. 1, line 435-436), it is a characteristically "well-made play", with a relatively complicated plot-structure, requiring, especially on Hawk's part the charm (and power) of impressing his partners and his family from the beginning to the end. Dramaturgically, it revolves around him – the scenes

where he is not present are preparatory ones – while thematically it turns around two evergreen subjects of comedy: money and romance (the latter provided by Julia, Hawk's beautiful daughter and Mr. Noble, Hawk's clerk). Early in the play Mr Hawk says:

> The spectators who enriched themselves quietly under the shadow of my former successes, are now the toys and puppets with which I divert my leisure and dispel my melancholy. When I am dull I pull the strings, (*imitates the action of pulling the strings of a puppet*) and they dance till I am merry again. The game of speculation, which I formerly played for love, I now play for money, that's all (Act I, Sc. 1; lines 192-198).

We never see Mr. Hawk speculating for love – though, admittedly, his marriage with Mrs. Hawk seems to be a stable and happy one, and one of the last twists of the play is that his wife is even cleverer than he is –, yet the confession above may safely be read as his creed (and perhaps as the creed of the playwright, concerning the theatre, as well). There is – as, for example, Thackeray's Preface to *Vanity Fair*, from 1849, also indicates – a lot from the puppet theatre in the age and also in the theatre as well, yet Lewes' comedy, on the whole little goes beyond entertainment; Hawk's creditors (business-partners), Earthworm, Prospectus, Grossmark and Hardcore are, indeed, empty-headed and, through their greed, easily gullible puppets, with whom Hawk, in a Volpone-like manner, is able to play as he pleases. However, Hawk is – as his first name, "Amiable" also suggests – ultimately a good man, yet he does not only lack Volpone's wickedness but his magnitude as well. With the puppet-metaphor above and with some references to play-acting within the play (e.g. in Act I, where Dimity, one of the maids says that "One has to become quite an actress" [line 12], or in Act III Lester, Julia's false suitor says that "melodramatic situations in real life are no longer taken in good part", line 120-121) one may track down some metatheatrical interest on Lewes part, yet the play rather *performs* its own theatricality instead of reflecting on it. Especially in the (best) first act, there is even a tendency to indicate that the terrain of business enters, or even penetrates and engulfs one's personal life, maybe even his or her existence and this is achieved through the ambiguous use of some words which may refer both to the mercantile, monetary world and to human relationships. Such a word is *interest*; Hawk – ironically, of course – compares a "miserably incomplete being" "who owes nothing" and nobody "cares about him" and himself, who is " … an object of intense and incessant interest to all [his] creditors" (Act I, Sc. 1, lines 210-213), yet he also indicates that their *interest* in him has to do with the *interest* they hope to get for having lent him their money. Hawk also say that "The marriage of [his] daughter is our last hope, our last *resource*" (Act I, Sc. 1, line 230); he quotes Bacon: " 'The man who has a wife and children has given hostages to fortune'" which he translates as "In other words, [that man] has *pawned* his whole existence" (Act I, Sc. 1, lines 412-414), he tells – with deliberate irony – to one of his creditors, Hardcore: "I looked upon your *fortune* as my own" (Act I, Sc. 1, line 312); he characterises his relationship with Prospectus, another creditor with the words: "Prospectus and I like each other very well. He *owes* me gratitude, and I *owe* him money" (Act I, Sc. 1, 512). Even further, Hawk insists that "intellect is our *mint*" (Act III, Sc. 1, line 99), that "truth is a sacred *debt*" (Act I, Sc. 1, lines 535-536), and that life itself "is an enormous *loan*" (Act I, Sc. 1, line 205) and he even reflects on the relationship between money and feelings by claiming that "we men of business do not all place our hearts in our banker's book – our sentiments are not always reckoned up by *double entry*" (Act III, Sc. 1, lines 460-463), yet Lewes is not consistent enough to pursue this possibility much further and with satisfactory consistency. Instead, the play – in the manner also of the comedy of the 17th and 18th century – is full of proverbial statements and aphorisms (e.g. "If all affairs brought profit, all the world would be speculators", Act I, Sc., 1, 263-264; "there is no happiness possible in poverty", Act I, Sc. 1, line 486, "There is no man

more easily duped than he who is always duping", Act II, Sc. 1, lines 215-216, etc.), and this will be highly characteristic of Wilde as well.

"In a well ordered disorder you are at your ease" Hawk says in Act II (line 91-92) and this – also foreshadowing Wilde's famous paradoxes – can be applied to the plot of the comedy as well. At the beginning of the play, the servants complain that the even the shopkeepers (the "tradespeople") refuse to give them anything because they have not been paid for a long time and it turns out that Hawk owes "seventeen thousand pounds and odd shillings" (Act II, Sc. 1, 102) to his business-partners. His "game of speculation" is partly to tie these people to himself by making them – including the servants – creditors (which servant would leave you when you owe him money?), and partly to accumulate wealth through borrowing, promises of repayment and paying small debts with borrowed money, while hoping for the best fall and rise of the "papers" at the stock-exchange. Lewes powerfully shows how "real", actual money disappears and how it becomes "hypothetical"; wealth turns into its own opposite, into *nothing*; money is given out in promises, taken in credit and exchanged in the trust that *one day* it will all be there. Lester in Act III says that "we animate the circulation of money" (lines 94-95), yet this is done, first and foremost, by cunningly chosen words and personal charm. That the whole, beautifully decorated facade, the painted scenery, the "image" a person created of himself may only hide emptiness is a central concern of the play and in the last scene Mr. Hawk *almost* ends up in the debtor's prison. But miraculous intervention – in both the comic and in the melodramatic vein – arrives just in time. Hawk tries everything to keep up appearances and to gain some time; first he sends his creditors away and even borrows from them more and more money with the promise that a rich man, Lester, who has land and a salt-mine near Dublin, is going to marry his daughter. Julia, in turn is in love with the seemingly penniless Mr. Noble, who does not stop loving Julia even when Hawk tells him that he has nothing but debts but Hawk agrees to the marriage only when he realises that Lester, under two names, is a hoax and his "salt mines" are nothing but the sea and when it turns out that Nobel has 2000 pounds savings, with which Hawk can start speculating. Hawk tries to gain even more time by persuading Lester to disguise himself as Sparrow, Hawk's pervious clerk, who eight years before disappeared with almost all his funds to India, yet clever Mrs. Hawk decides to put an end to the game of speculation and sends Lester away before he could start "play-acting". Then it is reported to Mr. Hawk that "Sparrow has come back", yet he of course believes that it is Lester and praises his wife for wonderful play-acting, while it is in fact the *real* Sparrow – whom we never see in person – who has arrived, bringing a lot of money from India. Hawk is in his element again. "After all, it appears that I am better than I thought I was" (Act III, Sc. 1, lines 200-201), Hawk declares, and in the last lines he warns the audience to "eschew the game of speculation". But it is doubtful if he can really give up his element, which is the void of money and the world of charming, enticing words.

Chapter 14

Drama in the 20th Century

14.1. The Irish Dramatic Revival and John Millington Synge: *The Playboy of the Western World*

Synge was born in a suburb of Dublin called Rathfarnham; his father was a barrister and died when Synge was one and he was brought up in the rigours of his mother's Anglo-Irish Protestant conviction. Synge found his mother's evangelical Calvinism so oppressive that he renounced Christianity all together at he age of sixteen. He was a delicate and sickly child, so he was educated at home by private tutors and in private schools in Dublin and Bray. In his teenage years he took an ardent interest in bird-watching and often hiked around Dublin, especially in the picturesque Wicklow mountains. In 1888 he started studying Hebrew and Gaelic at Trinity College, Dublin and took a degree in these languages, as well as winning various prizes. He also became a virtuoso violin-player and he played for a while in professional concert groups. After leaving Trinity, he travelled widely in Germany, Italy and France and he finally settled in Paris, studying French, Italian and Gaelic at the Sorbonne.

In 1896 William Butler Yeats visited Synge, persuading him to give up Paris, go to the Aran Islands and to study "real" Irish people there, living among them and – as Yeats is reported to have said – to "express a life that has never found expression". It took Synge two years to give up his literary career as a "French" playwright or literary critic and from 1898 to 1902 he spent each summer on the Aran Islands, about thirty miles from Galway off the west coast of Ireland. He did real "field work" there, living among the peasants, studying their idiom and collecting material for his future plays. With his notebook and violin he became a popular and trusted member in the community of the islanders.

Song's career took a new turn when in 1899 Yeats and Lady Gregory, with the help of Edward Marten and George Moore, founded the Irish Literary Theatre, whose prospectus said:

> we hope to find in Ireland, an uncorrupted and imaginative audience, trained to listen by its passion for oratory […]; we will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism.[169]

By "ancient idealism" the representatives of the "Celtic Renaissance" meant several things: a revolt against the contemporary English theatre, especially against the shallow drawing-room comedies and the melodramas, as well as against stage-realism. They favoured the mystical and highly poetic themes that were typically Irish. On 8 May, 1899 the society rented a hall where they presented two plays: Edward Marten's *The Heather Field* and Yeats' *The Countess Cathleen*. The latter was severely attacked by the press for being both anti-Catholic and anti-Irish, yet the performance was a considerable success. With further help from the actors, Frank and Wily Fay, the Irish Literary Theatre became the Irish National Theatre Society in 1902, setting up a first-rate all Irish acting-company. On 2 April. 1902 the new company performed *Deirdre* by "A. E." (George Russell) and *Cathleen In Hooligan* by Yeats. The fund-raising now was no longer confined to wealthy friends in Dublin but the company gave two

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[169] Quoted on Stephen Unwin and Carole Woodis, *A Pocket Guide to 20th Century Drama* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 23.

special performances in London in 1903, too, and at one of these Miss A. E. F. Horseman was also present, offering to build a permanent building for the company. This was the Abbey Theatre in Abbey Street in Dublin; on the opening night on 27 December, 1904, four short plays were presented: Yeats' *Cathleen In Hooligan* and *On Bail's Strand*, *Spreading the News* by Lady Augusta Gregory and Song's first play, *In the Shadow of the Glen.*

Interestingly, but perhaps not untypical, the Abbey was met with more resistance in Dublin than in England. The first problem was that the leading figures (Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge and Miss Horseman) were not Catholics but Anglo-Irish Protestants; the other problem was that the authors refused to mix direct political messages with their plays and were more interested in "dramatic truth" than with the portraying of the struggle for Irish independence. The distrust and the suspicion of the "average Dublin" erupted into a full-scale riot in 1907, during the first night of Song's *The Playboy of the Western World*. First one could hear voices suggesting – in Gaelic – the "hanging of the author" and then there was a loud protest against "a libel on the Irish race". The rioting in the theatre had to be quelled by the police but Yeats and Lady Gregory decided not to yield to public pressure and the play ran for a whole week. (Interestingly, the riotous scene repeated itself in 1911 in the United States, when the company, after a highly successful tour in England, performed Song's *Playboy* in Philadelphia and Irish-American organisations started a new series of violent protest, which culminated in the technical arrest of the players, for their own safety, by the local authorities). The *Playboy* was even denounced by William Boyle (1853-1923), who otherwise was an ardent supporter of the Abbey Theatre with several satirical comedies on rural Irish life. Synge shared the general fate of Yeats: his artistic genius far exceeded the narrow limits of "national drama" and within the genuinely Irish texture he was able to build a mythology in which several cultures can still recognise themselves and he could give voice to something "generally human". With Synge, comedy reached the heights of Molière for a moment.

The contrast between Yeats, Synge and the others became even more apparent when the Abbey started to attract other dramatists: Padraic Colum, George Fitzmaurice, T. C. Murray and Lennox Robinson. In 1909, the Abbey even made an attempt at staging *The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet* by G. B. Shaw, a play which had been banned in England for "blasphemy". The play was not a big success and Shaw did not become part of the theatrical movement, yet the performance was a sign of the refusal of English authority. In spite of Yeats' and Lady Gregory's non-involvement in everyday politics, the Abbey theatre had undoubtedly an important role in shaping Irish national identity, which eventually led to the Easter uprising in 1916 against the British, then to the war of independence, the declaration of the Irish Free State in 1921, the Irish Civil War between 1922 and 1923 and to the eventual victory of the IRA. The final result is well known: it was the division of the island into the Republic of Ireland, an independent state, and Northern Ireland, a province of the British state, still ravished by Catholic and Protestant conflicts.

Interestingly, Synge did not like naturalism (the French Zola) and in Ibsen he could only see the "social realist" and the humourless and joyless author of drawing-room pieces instead of the powerful dramatist of human passions and the creator of stage-symbolism. Ibsen was too didactic for him; in his Preface to *The Tinker's Wedding* Synge declared that

> The drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything. Analysts with their problems, and teachers with their systems, are soon as old-fashioned as the pharmacopoeia of Galen – look at Ibsen and the Germans – but the best plays of Ben Jonson and Molière can no more go out of fashion than the blackberries on the hedges. [170]

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[170] Quoted by Raymond Williams in *Drama form Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), p. 129.

Synge's characters desire a life of freedom, they want to do away with Authority and when they confront earthly reality and they are limited in their quest, they escape into a world of imagination, represented by the exceptionally poetic and genuinely Irish idiom the author creates for them, yet this idiom is even richer and – through its linguistic power – more "real" than the freedom they wished to attain. As David Krause observes:

> Their [the characters'] passionate and overleaping rhetoric provides a vicarious gratification of their impossible dreams, and therefore the very language Synge creates for them must be considered as an organic aspect of his tragicomic and tragic themes.[171]

Synge's characters get dissolved in their highly rhetorical, intriguing poetic language which still sounds astonishingly natural in their mouths: this is the language Synge learned on the Aran islands. Yet, surprisingly, he does not use metaphors or symbols but almost invariably similes: "Much of his language is parallel to the action" – Raymond Williams observes –, "the recording, separated poet; the folk-writer who is visiting the folk".[172] In Williams' analysis, Synge's language is rich but it is still curiously "external" to the action, whereas "the highest dramatic language is that which contains within itself the substance of the drama, which discovers and creates its emotional structure"[173].

It is also true that, curiously, in poetic disposition, Synge is closer to the tragic than to the comic one: *Riders to the Sea* (1904) and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910, unfinished) are lyrical tragedies and their respective heroines, Maurya and Deirdre, meet their tragic end with dignified and stoic calmness. The other four plays – *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903)*, The Well of Saints* (1905)*, The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and *The Tinker's Wedding* (1907) – are rather dark comedies or tragicomedies because in all of them the moment of early triumph is followed by defeat and frustration. Indeed, Synge is a great master of allowing his plays to pulsate between extremes: victory and defeat, ecstasy and sobriety, ridicule and respect, fiery similes and tender images, resulting in bitter resignation and sad compromise, which includes a deep sense of a genuine loss.

The Playboy of the Western World is about whining and self-pitying Christy Mahon – Mahoon is the name of the Devil in the Celtic-English tradition and Christy might be a (blasphemous) reference to Christ, perhaps the very name indicating that the human being is a mixture of evil and good, of the devilish and the divine. Yet Christy becomes a real hero for a brief period because as he explains bursting into Michael James' "shebeen" (an illegal public house), he has killed his tyrannical father with a "loy" (spade). Everybody – and especially Pegeen Mike, James's daughter – is deeply impressed and soon a quarrel breaks out between Pegeen and the Widow Quinn over the 'ownership' of Christy, complicated by the presence of Shawn Keogh (Pegeen's timid and highly religious fiancé). Knowing that the villagers of Mayo have put their trust in him, Christy becomes a real champion, winning the horse-race and successfully fighting Shawn, yet when his father, Old Mahon appears "risen from the dead", and Christy attempts to kill him – unsuccessfully –for the second time, the villagers – including Pegeen – all turn against him because they do not want to see parricide happening in their own back-yard and they want to dethrone the hero they created: there is a moment when they want to hang Christy. Ironically, it is the father who saves the son, taking him home, and Christy, regaining his rhetorical skills, will thank the villagers for turning him "a likely gaffer in the end of all". But the play ends with Pegeen lamenting not only over the loss of the "only hero of the Western World" but also over the loss of the vision of a whole community.

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[171] Krause's entry on Synge in *The Encyclopedia of World Drama*, eds. by John Gassner and Edward Quinn (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1975), p. 834.
[172] Raymond Williams, op. cit. p. 137.
[173] *ibid.*

The "western world" is of course not 'the rich and highly civilised part of Europe' but the remote, backward and very poor north-west coast of Ireland. And the "playboy" is only temporarily a 'manly womaniser'; he is rather a boy who plays: he plays the role the villagers assign to him, he plays the rebel against authority, the timid boy disciplined by his father but most of all he plays with his fantasy. Just like the villagers: until it is only in Christy's words that they are confronted with the horrible deed of parricide, they welcome and celebrate him; when it wishes to become reality, they disown Christy immediately; what made him glorious was not the deed but the *telling* of it. People want to achieve everything only in dreams, imagination and poetry and Christy's luck in the first half of the play is that he is a genuine and dramatic narrator, who can feed the fancy of the villagers with a daring story. Reality is too bloody, prosaic and dirty-muddy, there a 'spade is really a spade' and dramatic confrontation is too violent. In the knowledge of how Synge's play was received by his own people one would like to say that Synge's artistic genius dramatised, within the play, his audience's attitude to the play itself: when it is about dethroning the (English, religious, etc.) authorities (the "Father") in the imagination (in a story, in a tale), all is very fine but when it comes to confronting themselves and seeing their own image in the satirical mirror (when the play really 'strikes *home'*, and it provokes facing Irish reality) they want to hang the author immediately.

If we were to describe Synge's attitude to writing plays in one word, the most likely candidate seems to be *gusto*; in his preface to *The Playboy* he wrote that "In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple" and when one reads Synge's – for us by no means easy – English, following the 'logic' of a highly poetic Irish idiom, one is likely to be reminded of a big, juicy apple. In the Preface to *The Tinker's Wedding* we also read:

> We should not go to the theatre as we go to the chemist's or a dram-shop, but as we go to a dinner where the food we need is taken with pleasure and excitement. […] Of the things which nourish the imagination humour is one of the most needful and it is dangerous to limit or destroy it. [174]

Yet drama *is* serious; it is

> made serious – in the French sense of the word – not by degree in which it is taken up with problems that are serious in themselves, but by the degree in which it gives the nourishment, not very easy to define, on which our imagination live.[175]

Synge died at the age of thirty-eight suffering from Hodgkin's Decease but *The Playboy* had a formidable influence on subsequent Irish drama, especially on Sean O'Casey, Beckett and Brian Friel.

14.2 G. B. Shaw's *Saint Joan* (1924)

It is hard to give the precise genre of Shaw's *Saint Joan*, it is not a 'history play' – although it is fairly accurate in factual details, it is too cynical for a truthful 'historical reconstruction', and contains too many 'asides' for Shaw's own time (cf. the major topic, the 'discovery' of Protestantism and Nationalism by Warwick, talking with Cauchon); for a comedy, the burning of Joan is too sad and the Chaplain's conversion is too moving; for a 'modern' tragedy, the comic parts would not necessarily disturb us – after all, there is plenty of comedy in Shakespeare's tragedies, too, think of the Fool in *King Lear*, for instance – yet it is not quite clear for whom Joan's sacrifice is for. Although Shaw was haunted by the spirit of

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[174] Raymond Williams, op. cit., p. 129.
[175] *ibid*.

Shakespeare throughout his life and never missed the opportunity to point out Shakespeare's weaknesses and to convince his reader (and himself) that he, Shaw was the better playwright, the difference between a Shakespearean tragedy and Shaw's melodrama (this comes closest to the genre of *Saint Joan*, I think) can clearly be seen: Shakespeare is interested in the sacrifice itself and leaves it to his tragedy to redeem the Universe or not; Shaw – especially in the Epilogue of the play – desperately wants to show what the *effect* of this sacrifice is and takes great pains – both within the drama and in his self-important, didactic and intolerably long Preface to the drama – to make sure we understand what he wants to say. Shaw has a message, a clear view of history and wants to convince us that this is the *right* view. He, too, wishes to go *behind* things as Sheridan did – though Shaw does that in a truly 19th century vein –, trying to make us aware of the terrible delusions we all share. Shaw wants to unmask phenomena and to give as the '*real thing*'.

However, there are two points where both Sheridan and Shaw *almost* went beyond their own respective traditions. Sheridan does that in the picture-scene: Charles is selling the portraits of his ancestors except for the picture of his uncle, whom he sincerely loves – there Sheridan has at least the chance to put his own tradition on sale (as Shakespeare did with the figure of the Ghost in *Hamlet*); this scene shows – by being about portraits, works of art depicting people – a great metatheatrical interest in mimesis with respect to the 'past masters' one keeps in his attic. Unfortunately, the play does not exploit this possibility and the scene remains in a functional state, being another link in the well-made plot-chain.

Shaw's merit is to pick a *saint* and to try to reckon with the intrusion of the supernatural into the 'rational' and disillusioning mechanisms of history. He has a fat chance to upset his own self-assured and neat (pseudo-Hegelian) system: it could be shown that there are events which can simply not be accounted for within this system and, therefore, the system will not so much *explain* but 'only' *re-present*. There are some instances (the egg-episode right at the beginning, the change of the wind and even some moments of the trial) where Shaw's artistic talent gets the upper hand over his moralising-didactic ego, yet the outcome is rather the relatively flat and trivial conclusion that the world has never been and never will be ready to receive its saints, including, unfortunately, Shaw's conception of history and, thus, Shaw himself. This conception of history also results in a rather 'episodic plot' (the worst kind of plot according to Aristotle): characters serving as central figures in one scene will seldom come back in another one (the Archbishop is an exception but Warwick, for example, who has an eminent role from the middle of the play, is not introduced at the beginning of the play). The Epilogue serves as a 'final chapter' in a very picaresque novel-like plot (held together mostly by the figure of the central character, Joan), the duty of which is to tie up loose ends and to tell what 'has become of the others' in the course of time. Shaw would never give in to 'the miraculous' and, eventually, has to give a rational clarification of everything, yet his very topic indicates that he was not very far from contradicting his own principles and, thereby, become a really great artist. This way, the drama remains a very well-written and entertaining piece, the dream of all young actresses with some fine male roles. Joan is a descendant of the other independent women (Vivie in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Eliza in *Pygmalion* or Barbara in *Major Barbara*) who are always cleverer than – evil, or well-meaning but weak, or good-for-nothing – men. The *feminine* versus the *masculine*, one of the most important topics of Shaw is ironically underlined by the fact that Joan wears man's clothes and virtually has to deny her sex in order to become a saint.

14. 3. Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd

14.3.1.. Background and influences

When *Waiting for Godot* was first performed (in French, written in 1947-48, first published in book-form in 1951) on the 5th of January, 1953, in the little *Theatre de Babylone* in Paris, few thought that the theatre and the history of drama had reached a landmark. Of course, the oeuvre of Beckett (comprising excellent 'novels' as well) is not without predecessors: from Aristophanes through Shakespeare to Moliére and Swift, numerous comedies and tragedies sensed the fundamental absurdity of the human condition (e.g. please recall Gloucester's 'fall' from the 'cliff' of Dover). However, the content of the *homo absurdus* has gained a special significance in the past, roughly hundred years. Some of Beckett's immediate predecessors are Jarry (*Ubu Roi*, 1896); Andre Malraux, who, in 1926, wrote: 'at the centre of European man, dominating the great moments of his life, there lies an essential absurdity'; and especially Camus with his famous *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). Another important source of inspiration is Chekhovian comedy; Chekhov's last play, *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), ends with the monologue of the eighty-seven-year-old man-servant, Firs, left alone in the empty house:

> FIRS, (*goes to the door, tries the handle*) [please note the significance of the *room* in later plays of the absurd, the emphasis on no-way-out situations]: They've forgotten me... Never mind... I'll sit here a bit... ..(*Mumbles something indistinguishable*). Life has gone by as if I had never lived. (*Lies down*.) I'll lie down a while... There is no strength left in you, old fellow; nothing is left, nothing. Ah, you addlehead.

It is as if Beckett had borrowed this *nothing* from Chekhov, to start *Godot;* Estragon's 'Nothing to be done' is a highly ambiguous sentence. It may mean: 'everything is hopeless', yet it may also count as a warning to the audience: 'now we are going to perform/act out (the) nothing itself'. Among those who cam turn silence and calm into terror, Chekhov is undoubtedly the closest classical equivalent to Beckett. There are, however, significant differences between them. Chekhov's characters speak in order that they not have to hear themselves and since the lines still characterise their speakers (i.e. if you hear someone speak, after a while you consider it to be 'typical' of him or her), each character's *silence* will become his or her *special* silence, too: what a character leaves unsaid will have a life of its own and will point to his or her personal burden, torturing and cursing him or her individually. In Beckett the lines do not individuate their characters any further than the limits of the play, their interest is intrinsic. For example, about Lubov Andreyevna you can say: she simply cannot *imagine* that the cherry orchard has to go; a future in which there is no cherry orchard is unfathomable for her and her present is precisely identical with this futureless future. About her daughter, Anya you can say: she says she wants to study and go to Moscow but there is no Moscow and at present she would be unable to survive that knowledge (as Ibsen's characters cannot survive knowledge about themselves, either). About Beckett's characters you can only say that they are not characters any longer: they have no past or future, just their present, and thus their present does not, and cannot, even *deny* anything: there is *nothing* (nothing any longer, nothing left, nothing in particular, no Moscow, no orchard or even the *lack* of it to be denied) and thus – paradoxically – it is only *nothing* which cannot be denied. Beckett's people are closer to Medieval Everyman without the certainty of a

Heaven, they 'have the abstraction, and the intimacy, of figures and words and objects in a dream'[176]. Not that they would have the conventions of fantasy: rather they are so 'empty' that there is no *distance* between them and us any longer, they are *us* in a very special sense. They are us because their conventional, proper 'context' is so vague and open-ended that their words start to live a life of their own; since the drama of the play is precisely to find out who says these words, and who can mean them when and where, their only possible context becomes the theatre itself, thus the 'place' to find a foothold for them is precisely in our world, in our 'context', in our *selves*.

14.3.2. Waiting for Godot

Beckett's characters are often said to be saying *nothing*, but this is highly ambiguous, too: *to say nothing* may mean: (l) 'keep silent', (2) 'talk without sense' (3) 'express nothing'. This already points to the hidden *literality* of Beckett's language: Beckett is not with 'saying nothing', 'writing plays about nothing' in the sense of 'nonsense' or 'balderdash'. Beckett's fascination with language seems to do with the fact that language *still* means (damned) much, that we are unable *not* to mean what we are *given* to mean, that we *have to* mean what we say. Where does the compulsion *still* come from in the world which, after the Second World War, after so much suffering and humiliation, has turned absurd? Beckett's interest is not primarily in Estragon's and Vladimir's *expression* but rather in the fact that they *still* cannot keep silent, they *still* show a need to believe in something. Beckett wants to show what *still* comes forward under circumstances of utmost *suppression*. And what comes to the fore is the *literal* meaning of the words, or, we may say: it turns out that the *literal* meaning of an expression can strike us with the force of the *metaphorical*. When, for example, in Act I, Pozzo, who will go blind in Act II, says 'I don't like talking in a vacuum. Good. Let me see.', then the last sentence does not only mean 'so how shall I proceed?' but also: 'give me (literally) eyes, I want to see, and my later blindness is just another literalisation of my present (symbolic-metaphorical) blindness'. Or when Vladimir proposes : 'Let's wait and see what he [Godot] says' or 'Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand', then seeing, again, can also have the sense of physical seeing, and standing may not only mean 'position' but also the physical 'being on one's feet', which, precisely through the literal, visible fact, gains symbolic significance: standing gets associated with 'dignity', sitting with 'struggle' and lying with 'defeat'. Thus Beckett is very much occupied with the simple, ordinary, everyday motions we perform: the taking off a boot, a hat, eating (a carrot), etc., and by focusing on, and redirecting our vision to, the ordinary and the everyday, he helps us rediscover something which had scarcely been addressed in the theatre before him: he thematises our most obvious, simplest, most common gestures, which we seldom even notice because they are closer to us than our own hands, because they are so self-evident. When we see somebody staggering to his feet on Beckett's stage , we may say: so this is all that remained, and this is *nothing*. But we may also say: but don't I do that every day when I get out of bed in the morning? And how do I *actually* do it? And *why* do I do it? And don't I repeat that again and again, as the characters on stage do? And does not this repetition hide from my sight its 'technique', its significance, even its very *fact*? Beckett (re)-discovers and liberates a large area for the theatre, seldom even noticed before him: the 'actions' 'facts' (feelings, changes etc.) of our everyday life, actions and facts we never or seldom *reflect* on because we consider them to be the *prerequisites* of our reflection, because they are not meant to be for reflection in our lives. And Beckett's

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176 Stanley Cavell, 'Ending the Waiting Game' IN: Must We Mean What We Say?, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 131. My whole discussion of Chekhov versus Beckett owes a lot to this brilliant essay.

characters not only reflect on these 'trivial' incidents but primarily they *display* them, they make them bare, they bring them to the *open.* Beckett stages the very presuppositions of our existence. These presuppositions might be simple or even prosaic but without them we cannot *live*.

One of the sources of tension in Beckett's theatre is that these particular and (literally) down-to-earth movements are given universal significance through their common and trivial characteristics. The abstraction of the characters and the 'universalisation' of the (almost totally empty) stage is achieved through this channel, too. We are no longer in Paris, or London, or in Russia but 'in-the-world'; the whole World has really become a stage (as Shakespeare claimed it in *As You Like It* in a theatre called the Globe). This is why Beckett's characters cannot lave the stage: you can hardly leave the world, can you? Of course they thematise one possible way, suicide. But suicide, as one, single, radical act, presupposing decision and relying on a fundamentally *causal* relationship (as Vladimir is busy pointing that out: 'With all that follows') is not an adequate response to the *complex* absurdity of the world, in fact the single deed would deny the very thing it is trying to rebel against So the characters stay where they are ('they don't move') again and again.

However, we should also notice what remains ('what stays') from what is repressed but *still* erupts. Vladimir and Estragon undoubtedly come from the circus tradition: they are old clowns who make you laugh while they are weeping and bleeding inside. They are also from the music-hall tradition, where two characters, a famous pair, are standing in front of the curtain and they are telling jokes, exciting and even abusing the audience while, behind them, the stage is being rearranged for the next number – just in *Godot,* the *whole* play coincides (is identical) with the 'bridging of the gap, this temporary vacuum', and *nothing* follows (as if an orchestra were always tuning in, never starting to play): cf.:

ESTRAGON: It's awful.
VLADIMIR: Worse than the pantomime.
ESTRAGON: The circus.
VLADIMIR: The music-hall.
ESTRAGON: The circus.
or:
ESTRAGON: You know the story of the Englishman in the brothel?

Again, it is not true that there is no difference between them: Estragon is a poet, Vladimir is more of the philosopher-theologian, E. has dreams, V. cannot even stand hearing about them, V. has stinking breath, E. has stinking feet, V. remembers, E. forgets (which gives V. the opportunity to re-enact the first act to E. in Act II), V. is more in the protective role, E. needs looking after, he is the one who gets beaten up, etc., etc. This play, if it is acted out well, can be hilariously funny. Yet indeed there is a vacuum: waiting is not an *action* but a *state*. That there is no action (proper) is another source of tension in the play: Beckett dramatises the *initial* (primordial) tension that exists between stage and audience itself, as well as the fundamental inertia of the audience: in the helplessness and 'passivity' of Gogo and Didi, we may face the basic 'activity' (sitting, reticence etc.) of the auditorium-bound spectator (another thing we take for granted in the theatre). And if waiting is a state, then indeed it has no beginning and no end, as the play only possesses the 'natural' beginning of our entering the theatre and the 'natural' ending of our going home. Beckett has also managed to make the two (conventional) 'edges' of a performance, its beginning and its ending, become an integral part of the play itself.

Yet the most significant source of tension is Godot (him?her?it?) self. Beckett once remarked that if he had known who Godot was he would have put it into his play. However, at a highly successful performance, in front of 1400 convicts at the Saint Quentin Penitentiary on 19 November, 1957, the prisoners identified Godot easily: 'Godot is society', 'Godot is the outside world', etc. The French diminutive suffix *-ot* after the word *God* may indicate that in the 20th century the human being deserves only a small God. Or the name in the title may be a reference to Nietzsche's famous slogan 'Gott ist tot' ('God is dead') – if you repeat Nietzsche's sentence quickly, you may get, indeed, 'Godot'. But it does not matter who Godot is: both the characters and we want to understand precisely this question. One thing is certain: if the actors and the audience do not believe that *this* once, *this* night Godot may indeed appear, the whole play loses its force and makes no sense. Godot exists *in* the waiting, *in* the hope and in his/her/its absence itself, yet this absence makes no sense without the possibility of presence. Godot's coming and not coming must be given *equal* chances – this, I think, is the secret of the whole power of the play. There are, of course, lots of Biblical allusions in the play: the cross-roads might recall the cross, the tree (without and later with leaves) the tree of knowledge, Vladimir's talk about the two thieves may indicate that they *are*, 'in fact', the two thieves and what we learn about Godot from the Boy gives us the impression that He is a true Master whom Vladimir and Estragon do not regard to be a tyrant (as Pozzo, once even mixed temporarily up with Godot, is the pseudo-Godot). Lucky is lucky because he has a Master yet he is tied to him with a rope and he cannot and does not want to get rid of Pozzo, even when he would be able to. Vladimir and Estragon consider Godot as somebody whom one may serve voluntarily, who treats his servants more as partners than as subordinates. And, indeed, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, for example, considers our life on earth to be a period of waiting, a kind of vacuum until the Second Coming.

14.3.3. Krapp's Last Tape

Krapp's Last Tape (1958) also addresses the problem of *time* but more from the point of view of the *coherence* of the individual. There are in fact three Krapps: one who is listening to his tapes, one who is talking on the tape remembering another, younger Krapp. (ages: 69-39-29). Is one identical with all his previous egos? And what gives us the impression of this coherence? If time falls apart, the self falls apart, too, and vice versa. Yet how does the reproducibility of the human voice on tape relate to the coherence of the self and to the usability (and abuse) of the past? Yet the whole play takes place 'in the future': shall we say, then, that it is a 'warning' to the present? Has this 'warning' the same force as the leaves on the barren tree in the second act of *Godot*? Is our compulsion to know, to think and to reflect, our original sin? Is our very learning about ourselves the performance (compulsive performance) of this sin? What are we able to face and what do we suppress from our past? Why are we afraid of 'the light of the understanding and the fire'? Beckett, the Irish-French-English playwright, becoming the father not only of the absurd tradition (now also a classic one) but also of a the whole post-modern movement (the beginning of the Post-modern is often counted from the performance of *Godot*) and winner of the 1969 Noble-prize, seems to be implying: we cannot *know*. But we *are* waiting for Godot.

14. 4. Osborne, Pinter, Stoppard

14.4.1. Osborne

In April 1956, a new group, the English Stage Company took over the Royal Court Theatre to put on new plays in repertory. Just over a month the management had been installed, they presented their third play, *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne (1930-); the first night was on 8 May. The drama was not met with unanimous approval, yet all critics agreed that Osborne was a great promise. T. S. Worsley wrote in the *New Statesman* that he could hear 'the authentic new tone of the Nineteen-Fifties, desperate, savage and, at times, very funny'. Osborne undoubtedly wrote a play in which a recognisable idiom could be heard in a recognisable environment, an idiom already known outside of the theatre. Osborne's merit was to give voice to an intense feeling, which was a combination of frustration, anger, and prolonged *waiting* and it was this combination which had to be broken by a shout; a yell. His play – a typical fore-runner of the non-absurdist, critical, 'realistic' line of British drama from Shaw and O'Casey through Wesker and John Arden to Brenton and Hare – is ultimately a negation, a rebellion against everything established, against all institutions: Jimmy is against the Church, against Oxbridge, against posh, upper middle-class values, against all conformism, and even 'the mass-medium', the newspaper lands finally on the floor. Jimmy represents the so-called 'redbrick-rebellion' (the slowly-emerging non-private 'red-brick' universities contra Cambridge and Oxford) and the upcoming 'beat-generation' revolt, the latter primarily directed against Alison's father, the elderly Colonel from India:

> **JIMMY**: I hate to admit it, but I think I can understand how her Daddy [= Alison's father] must have felt when he came back from India, after all those years away. The old Edwardian brigade do make their brief little world look pretty tempting. All home-made cakes and croquet, bright ideas, bright uniforms. Always the same picture: high summer, the long days in the sun, slim volumes of verse, crisp linen, the smell of starch. What a romantic picture. Phoney too, of course.

Although Jimmy owns a sweet-stall, his life does not become any sweeter either from his rebellion, or from his education. And this is precisely the message: there is nothing 'better'; there is no alternative, there is nowhere to go – they still read the papers, they still drink tea, they still need the warmth of home, they still spend Sunday afternoon in the typical 'English way' yet they can no longer believe in any of these as values. Jimmy expresses, more than once, what it feels like living in the attic *above*, and still be *low,* still feel *down.* He is more than aware of his paradox:: he suffers from not being able to 'make it', to climb higher on the social ladder in one of the most hierarchical societies of Europe (to become a university professor, for example, an accepted way of getting higher since the 19th century), while he knows that 'making it' would equally be horrible. What remains for Jimmy is to become a great performer, a lay-preacher, and to challenge the worst side out of everyone. This way there is at least *something* going on, otherwise life is unbearably dull: an *aborted* affair from the start. There is great thirst for change yet what the play, also in its very structure, suggests is that there is only repetition, the 'eternal return': Alison is ironing at the beginning of Act One and Helena is doing the same at the opening of Act Three, and there is the reading of papers again, and shouting, cursing, philosophising. First Helena replaces Alison, then Alison, again, Helena (cf. replacement in a comic context: Helena - Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* with all its uncanny features, too.) *Look Back in Anger* is not the first step in the emergence of the working-class drama – as it was greeted for some time –

since the world for Jimmy is past remedy: it is rather the sickness of society which is embodied in and around him (please note the sick father he had to nurse), re-enacted in an enclosed space, which, like a cage, turns people inside out, turn them into monsters. The life of these people is too disorganised, ultimately, to start a real revolution, and the general state of sentiments matters more for Osborne than the social setting. Jimmy's merit is that he does not take advantage of 'sweet suffering', what we hear is disordered talking and shouting, a desperate search for a *voice*, *the* voice which could at least give an *analysis* of the situation. What we get is neither 'social realism', nor a report, nor a complete description – we rather hear personal cries in the dark in a convincing atmosphere, where tragedy has been degraded to somebody's accidental stepping in front of the bus, and to someone's personal miseries. In Osborne's treatment a sentimental drama turns bitter and hopeless or a bitter drama turns sentimental. The source of conflict is the wife - husband, girl-friend - man relationship: there is some fusion in the play of class-war and sex-war, since Alison comes from a so-called 'good' family. Or there is not even a fusion but simply displacement: perhaps sex-war is only a pseudo-struggle already because *everything* that has remained is in want of the quality of the *real*. But what would *real* mean here? This is precisely the question Jimmy cannot answer. He relapses, with Alison, into a childish game of bears and squirrels, without any signs of genuine intimacy. The game is rather an atonement for a lost childhood, spent – as mentioned above – in the presence of a dying old man, this man, his father, perhaps standing for 'merry old England', the Great (lost) Empire.. Jimmy's plight contains the acknowledgement that the world of the establishment can, at best be seduced (as Alison is seduced by Jimmy) or one may be seduced by this establishment (as Jimmy is seduced by Helena) yet it will always be the 'underdog' who will have to relate to the world since the world will not be interested in him.. Problematic and decaying fathers stand where lost children do: Alison's miscarriage indicates that no effort bears fruit, there is 'no promise of the future', the world can very well do without the 'angry generation', while they in fact cannot exist without the world and, at best, can only bark at it from a distance.

14.4.2. Pinter

Harold Pinter (1930-) rather opts for the theatre of the absurd as a medium instead of the stage-realism of Osborne, he is a disciple of Beckett's. What Osborne calls 'society' is 'nothingness' for Pinter. Pinter has a 'clinically' accurate ear for the absurdity of (English) everyday speech ('small-talk'), for its repetitiveness and ultimate incoherence (under the appearance of logic and coherence). Yet while Beckett is leading words back to their ordinary, literal meaning, Pinter rather exploits the gap which exits between the ordinary meaning and a more profound, 'existential' meaning. In *The Birthday Party* (1957) Pinter shows the uncanny ('unheimlich', 'un-homely') features of the ordinary by setting the scene in a boarding-house which is and is not a home, by giving Stanley a landlady (Meg) who is and is not a mother and by making the annual celebration of a kind of re-birth (the birthday) coincide with being totally paralysed and helpless (dead). Vladimir and Estragon have already lost their home, once and for all – Meg and Petey (the weak Father-figure) sound quite 'realistic' at the beginning of the play and it is not until the appearance of Goldberg and McCann that the atmosphere really turns frightening. Goldberg and McCann (reminiscent of the Jewish-Irish comedy-teams in the dance-hall tradition, as well as of the Catholic confessor and the Jewish Father), victimise Stanley because they are also the victims of certain stereotypes people have cast them into. At the same time, Pinter also presents, in the late 1950s, a parody of an already existing form of the theatre of the absurd: he puts farce and melodrama together to show the sometimes over-theatrical features of the idiom of the absurd itself. The interrogation-scene

displays that words are no shelter, either: Goldberg questions Stanley mostly on sex and property, while McCann on politics and religion. The play can be read as the bringing back of Stanley into the Anglo-Jewish society via the ritual of the *Bar-Mitzvah* (a birthday-ritual). But the play may also be taken as the questioning of England by oppressed minorities, where the interrogation becomes a symbol of victimisation by the victimised where the more accurate the experience is, the less articulate its expression becomes.

14.4.3. Stoppard

Tom Stoppard's *Rozencrantz an Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) may be read as a brilliant analysis of *Hamlet,* as a bold attempt at trying to show how much we are still able to understand from the 'original' tragedy, at asking how much tragedy our 20th century stage is able to bear. The result is an of course openly meta-theatrical play, interested in *Hamlet* as much as in itself. Stoppard is fascinated with the *moment* the coin stays in the air, before starting its journey back the ground, he is interested in how potentiality and uncertainty on the one hand and determinacy and nothingness on the other are related. A moment of suspense can be rich in expectation and the imaginary acquisition of *something,* while it can also be the mathematical zero-point, the timeless, non-extensive experience of *nothing*. R. and G. desperately try to act in a play which is also *theirs,* yet they neither know their precise roles (which is also characteristic of the 'original' play, of course), nor realise the value of anything since they no longer know the value of death (since they are already, as the title says, dead). The theatre cannot be escaped: death is possible only *within,* and not *outside* it.